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Keywords: Geopolitics, Pakistan, United States, China, CPEC

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The Geopolitical Importance of Pakistan in Relations to the U.S and China



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Abstract

This research critically examines Pakistan's evolving geopolitical significance within its complex relationships with the United States and China. The study analyzes how Pakistan's unique strategic location, historical alliances, and contemporary economic and security interests position it as a key player in the regional and global power competition between these two influential countries. Employing a comprehensive literature review, the investigation synthesizes insights from academic articles, reports, and policy analyses to construct a nuanced understanding. The paper traces Pakistan's historical alliance with the U.S. during the Cold War and the War on Terror, noting changes post-U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. It highlights the growing partnership with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which boosts Pakistan's infrastructure while serving China's interests. The research discusses Pakistan's balancing act between both nations to address security concerns, especially regarding India, amid a changing global landscape, emphasizing the challenges and opportunities in maintaining this geopolitical balance.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Pakistan, United States, China, CPEC*

Introduction

Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, asserted that “Pakistan is the pivot of the world, placed on the frontier on which the future position of the world revolves” (Ghani, 2019). Pakistan has found itself in a strategically advantageous position due to geopolitics, which is the analysis of how geography affects international politics and relations. Found at the center of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan serves as a connector between the great powers and global economic trunks. Its geographical position, its ideological identity, as well as foreign policy decisions over the decades, have ensured that it is a serious geopolitical actor in the global context, specifically in the relations it holds with the United States and China (Dayal, 2025).

The evolution of Pakistani geopolitics will depend on the change in power and influence around the world. During the Cold War, Pakistan was an active state in the western world to contain the Soviet Union. It returned to prominence as a partner in the post 9/11 world with the inclusion in the US-led War on Terror. Concurrently with the rise of China as a major global player, Pakistan attempted to increase its economic, military, and diplomatic relationships with them, with mega-projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being one of the flagship projects of the China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Balis, 2025).

Withdrawal of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan has marked a substantial rise in the geopolitical significance of Pakistan. The U.S. and China are both seeking to offset the other in the region, and this means that Pakistan plays a very important role to both nations. The American pull-out has created room to other countries in



Afghanistan. The U.S. uses Pakistan to fight terrorism and to reduce the impact of China in the region. Furthermore, the U.S. is seeking to keep an eye on the nuclear strength of Pakistan so that the stability of the region can be guaranteed (Adil et al., 2023). To China, Pakistan is an important ally to gain access to the Middle East region especially as a member of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative in Asia. Moreover, China is working to offset the influence of India and U.S. through the assistance of Pakistan. China also would be able to collaborate with Pakistan to stop the entry of terrorism into its Xinjiang province (Iqbal et al., 2024). In its turn Pakistan requires the U.S. and China to oppose the influence of India in the region as well as to resolve its own problems. Pakistan can reconcile its relations with the two nations and at the same time use these relations to advance its interests. It will be interesting to see how Pakistan balances its diplomatic relations with these world powers.

In general, Pakistan is a case of the country with quite a specific geographical position, a well-developed military nuclear and economic background and international coverage as a result of which this country can obtain a rather significant role in global geopolitics. American and Chinese strategic interests in maintaining the relationship with Islamabad have different reasons and motivations (Hassan, 2022). As the global power balance continues to change and particularly the future of China and the rebalancing of US foreign policy in Pakistan, geopolitical interest will remain central to the evolving conflict and cooperation of the two dominant powers in the world.

Literature Review

The research paper "Assessing the Nature of Geopolitical and Geostrategic Summersaults in Pakistan-US Relations (2013-2023)" by Javeria Qadir, Dr. Abdul Basit Khan, and Nazia Parveen elaborated the complex relationship between Pakistan and the US over the past decade. Initially strengthened by the War on Terror, the partnership shifted to a transactional approach during the Trump administration, particularly following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. The authors point out that bilateral relationships have been dictated by mistrust and conflicting interests that continue to affect bilateral relationships particularly between India and China. Nonetheless, they also record some progress following regime beliefs in Pakistan in April 2022, which shows that political stability is the balance to regional stability. The paper also covers how the US-India relations led to Pakistan becoming more aligned with China using the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nevertheless, diplomatic talks on trade, investment and humanitarian relief still took place, especially after the 2022 floods in Pakistan. Authors conclude that redefinition of affiliation of the two countries should be based on long-term strategic needs of both countries in the framework of evolving regional and global relations (Qadir et al., 2025). The research gap is in terms of how the US should restore relationship with Pakistan especially after the relation that Pakistan is enjoying with China and the relationship between the US and India. The paper causes the concern though; it does not offer direct solutions on how mistrust and conflicting interest can be dealt with. More studies are required on practical policies to develop a stable US-Pakistan relationship outside counter-terrorism.

Muhammad Irfan and Dr. Ahsan Raza in the article "Geopolitics and Economics: The Dynamics of Pak-US Relations (2001 to 2020)" discuss the developing relationship between the United States and Pakistan as the authors examine the relationship between the two countries over 20 years. After the events of 9/11, Pakistan took as a central partner in the War on Terror becoming a major beneficiary of U.S. aid, resulting in economic and structural dependence. The authors draw attention to the unbalanced trade relations, as Pakistani exports had limited access to the U.S. markets, and mention that U.S. assistance tended to affect the domestic policies of Pakistan. Another topic they address is the effect of the emergence of China where Pakistan is trying to find other regional partners and renegotiating economic relations. The paper concludes that Pakistan must shift towards the dependency relationship with the U.S. to reasonable trade and investment relationship to align its economic goals with the geopolitical facts of a multipolar world (Irfan & Riaz, 2025). The paper will also comment on the geopolitical interests of the United States in Pakistan other than the War on Terror, concerning regional stability and counter-terrorism. The geopolitical aspects of the Belt and Road Initiative by China concerning Pakistan positioning and its impact on the US-Pakistan relationship will also have to be delved into. In addition, the position of Pakistan, where US troops have abandoned Afghanistan, is also worthy of closer examination, especially its elevated relevance to the US.

The article “Geopolitical Paradigms of CPEC: An Overview” by Muhammad Rehan Akram et al., reviewed the geopolitical aspects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a project within the Belt and Road Initiative proposed by China. CPEC links the Gwadar Port in Pakistan with Xinjiang in China in a bid to boost the economic strength of Pakistan and to fight the weak aspect of China in the Malacca Strait. The project entails infrastructural development, energy solutions, and special economic areas that will bring development and an international connection to Pakistan. Nonetheless, its major strengths are challenges such as security threats to Baluchistan, political instability, and environmental issues. CPEC has also amplified the territorial concerns of India, especially of Gilgit-Baltistan, and fueled increased U.S.-India collaboration to overcome the influence of China. The paper proposes that these challenges will determine the success of CPEC in realizing the targeted benefits of the two countries as it seeks to overcome all challenges owing to a diverse geopolitical environment (Akram et al., 2025). The gap of research in the paper is that the authors failed to discuss the role of the US pullout of Afghanistan in changing the strategic value of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This change influences the geopolitical balance in the region, the formation of alliances and the significance of CPEC to China and Pakistan because the withdrawal of the US left a geopolitical vacuum and CPEC became the key to balancing the region and securing Russia as a partner to Pakistan.

The article by Tasawar Baig, Saadia Beg, and Asif Khan titled “The US-Pakistan Relations in Retrospect” explores the 70-year-old strategic friendship between the United States and Pakistan. The authors point out that this partnership has primarily focused on security. Nevertheless, as the dynamics of international politics change, like with the Belt and Road Initiative by China and the emergence of multilateralism, according to them both countries should redefine the basis of their relationship in a larger context. The Position of Pakistan is one of the most strategic positions to connect the central, south and west parts of Asia due to its strategic resources and location. The research cautions that the US can commit a foreign policy slip-up by ignoring Pakistan. A new collaboration must focus on growth, and solve social, economic, and ecological issues. The paper has further noted that the US is increasingly engaging in arrangements aimed at India as it tries to neutralize the impact of China, despite blaming the efforts of Pakistan in the war on terror. Still, despite the history of long-term relations, the distance between the US and Pakistan remains a long and difficult road towards trust (Baig et al., 2018). The article is of the opinion that far, the relationship between the US and Pakistan has received excessive emphasis on issues that relate to the security and the authors have not touched the imperative of an enlargement of such partnership to include economic, social, and environmental factors and still, the geopolitical pertinence of Pakistan in South Asia.

In the book; “Pakistan: The US, Geopolitics, and Grand Strategies”, the authors Julian Schofield and Usama Butt talk of the killing of Osama bin Laden that brought to the fore the strained relationship that existed between the US and governments of Pakistan. This book discusses the changing character of this relationship and investigates the role of Pakistan in the international order. Although other readings typically address the US-Pakistan relationship separately, a wider geopolitical context is provided in Pakistan: The US, Geopolitics, and Grand Strategies. It also examines the Pak-US relations after ten years of the war on terror, and the relations of Pakistan in region, that gives the reader a complete picture of the Pak interests. The input of scholars in Pakistan and the West ensures that this book is a must read by all individuals interested in knowing, or should know, this complex nation (Butt & Schofield, 2012). After the U.S. left Afghanistan, it is important to study the worsening relations between Pakistan and the Taliban, particularly with regard to cross-border terrorism by such groups as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Also, the long-term socio-economic consequences of the new refugee crisis on Pakistan should be analyzed, especially considering its policy of deporting illegally registered Afghans. Finally, it is important that an analysis be done on the way in which Pakistan is amending its foreign policy to accommodate the evolving security situations in the region, especially with the U.S and China.

Theoretical Framework

The crux of the study is the strategic positioning of Pakistan, the evolution and change of alliances throughout its existence as well as the combined role of both the economic and security factors in a changed world power structure. To gain a thorough understanding of such a complex web of relations, it is certainly worth having a framework that takes into account some of the most vital theories of International Relations, i.e., Geopolitics, Balance of Power Theory, Strategic Alliance Theory, Neorealism (Structural Realism), and Geoeconomics.

These two theoretical perspectives will offer different tools of analysis on the motivation, behavior, and outcomes which may be observed in the relations between these state actors, and thus offer a solid scholarly foundation of the research.

This paper restates the strategic position of Pakistan as a crossroad of the South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East. This phenomenon of geography causes Pakistan to become the center of the world, and it becomes a necessary component in the interests of the United States and China. The analysis critiques the geographic determinism in the making of foreign policy decisions in Pakistan, its impact on its historical alliances, those made during the Cold War as well as those made during the War on Terror and its present contribution to some of its major projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In particular, CPEC uses the Pakistan site to avail to China a more direct and secure way to trade to Middle East and Africa to enlarge China energy security and its global operating power. One of the primary topics that can be regarded as a successful one assisted with the aid of the geopolitical analytical approach is a regional hegemony between the United States and China triggered by the territorial convenience of Pakistan. This is the school of thought as to why Pakistan attracts the eyes of the foreign powers and why Pakistan plays games to satisfy the national interests, taking advantage of its locale.

The Balance of Power Theory is one of the key concepts that make a part of the realism paradigm of international relations. It assumes that national security is boosted in the event that military resources have been distributed in such a way that no individual state has ample potency to subjugate all others. In an anarchic international system, the actors (states) are interested in ensuring that no one party achieves dominance, either by building coalitions (external balancing) or by expanding their military capabilities (internal balancing). The main task is to maintain stability to prevent potential aggressors and consequently, conflict is avoided. This theory claims that states are in the constant process of trying to change their power capacities and alliances in response to their perceived threats so as to maintain some relative balance in the international order. The study expounds on the efforts that Pakistan made to maintain the balance of its relationship with the United States and China and its strategic alliance with China to oppose the rise of India. Such relations are pure manifestations of the principles of the Balance of Power Theory. The foreign balancing of Pakistan is demonstrated in its historical partnership whereby it has partnered with the United States in the cold war against the Soviet Union and its enhanced relationship with China to counter the influence of India. The research paper underlines that the China-Pakistan alliance is seen as a counter-balancing of the role of India with a common strategic objective of balancing the Indian influence and countering the perceived security challenges. In addition, the interests of the United States in ensuring that Pakistan does not become dependent on the Chinese are significant in highlighting the intentions of the country to maintain the balance of powers within the region. The balance of power concept further supports the emergence of a multipolar world order that was a result of the China-Pakistan partnership whereby the various major powers make sure that no individual would attain dominance hence encouraging stability in the region and the world as a whole.

Strategic Alliance Theory theorizes the creation, maintenance and breaking of cooperative relations among states (or other actors) with the view to accomplishing similar goals, often in reaction to a similar threat or opportunity. These alliances can be military, economic or political in nature and are usually formed to strengthen security, gain economic gains or an increase in diplomatic power. The major aspects of this theory are mutual benefit- alliances are formed when the parties can see a common good more than costs; shared threat perception- external threats are frequently the drivers of an alliance; pooling of resources- alliances combine resources (military, economic, technological) to accomplish the task that would otherwise be impossible; and commitment and trust are important in ensuring the sustainability of an alliance. The paper gives several examples of strategic alliances of Pakistan. Its history of cooperation with the United States in the cold war and its modern-day cooperation with China (e.g., CPEC and military joint ventures) form some of the key examples. The paper brings to the fore the motivation of such alliances by security interests (countering India and countering terrorism), economic interests (CPEC benefiting Pakistan and giving China access to the Middle East), and diplomatic approval. These strategic dynamics are directly related to the investigation of the all-weather friendship between China and Pakistan, the efforts of the United States to counteract the influence of China, through providing alternatives to Pakistan.

Historical Background: Shifting Alliances and Strategic Relevance

The geographical location of Pakistan is important in international affairs, but there is also the historical situation of world power politics. Following M.K. Sumitro, the country adopted a Western stance after its independence in 1947, during the Cold War. In the 1950s, it joined the US-led security groupings, the SEATO and the CENTO, to search for military and economic aid to counterweight its regional rival, India (Raza, 2022). On their part, the U.S. appreciated the geographical location of Pakistan close to the Soviet Union and China, both perceived as being a great threat during the Cold War era.

The 1960 U-2 affair which saw an American spy plane brought down over Soviet airspace after it had flown off a base in Pakistan, has indicated that Pakistan had become such a focal point of American intelligence activities. Pakistan was later instrumental in brokering the historic reconciliation between the United States and China in the 1970s by holding clandestine diplomatic visits, most importantly involving the visit of Henry Kissinger to Beijing in 1971 (Amer, 2024). In the 1980s, another episode of Pakistan-US cooperation was witnessed in the course of the Soviet-Afghan War. Under the strong support of the US, Pakistan had become the platform to launch the Afghanistan resistance group of Mujahideen. Although this cemented the strategic alliance, this planted the seeds of insecurity in the long term in the region.

After the 9/11 attacks, the US again resorted to Pakistan as one of the closest allies and partners in its War on Terror. Although there have been episodes of poor relations, because of trust deficit, drone operations, and differences in regional interests Pakistan could never be ignored because of its geographical, military, and regional clout within Afghanistan. In tandem with the latter, the Pakistani connection with China was strengthened greatly. China always perceived Pakistan as a strategic partner and balanced point against India in South Asia. They cooperate in the field of nuclear technology, defense, and most recently in the form of massive infrastructure development as part of CPEC. This reallocation to China has enabled Pakistan to tap into a variety of strategic alliances different from its pre-existing reliance on Western donations and relationships (Khalid, 2021).

Pakistan's Geopolitical Importance for the US

Pakistan holds significant geopolitical importance for the United States for several reasons.

Strategic Location

The strategic location of Pakistan is considered important that enables the United States to reach the resource-rich Middle East and Central Asia. Pakistan is a traditional partner of the U.S. mostly in the Cold War as it aided to counter Soviet influence (I. Ali & Anwar, 2023). As an example, when the Soviet overcame Afghanistan in 1979, U.S. foreign policy got boosted when Pakistan helped the Mujahideen fight against the Soviet invasion. Military and economic assistance provided by the U.S. to Pakistan to aid its endeavors to contain the Soviet Union was also involved in this partnership (Imran et al., 2022). Furthermore, the geographical location of Pakistan has provided key accessibility to landlocked Central Asian Republics, which have energy reserves (Javaid et al., 2024).

Moreover, Pakistan has played very critical roles in the international war on terrorism, particularly given the fact that it shares its border with Afghanistan. Stability in the region is directly related to stability in Pakistan. In addition, Iran is a neighbor to the country and also rather a U.S. factor of concern. Gwadar port development makes it crucial to the strategic value of Pakistan as it has a Gulf States entry point and association with the Indian Ocean (Sattar et al., 2023).

Counterterrorism Cooperation

Pakistan post-September 11, 2001 Since the beginning of the 21st century, the United States has come to rely heavily on Pakistan to help in counterterror activities due to the attacks of 11th of September, 2001. This changed the geopolitical situation. Following the independence of Pakistan in the year 1947, they wanted security support against the dangers posed by India, whereas the U.S. wanted to hold back the spread of Soviet domination. The result of this common interest was a strategic alliance and mutual defense agreements. In 1954 and 1955, respectively, Pakistan was a member of Southeast Asia When Local--Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central When Local--Baghdad Pact Central When Local--CENTO (Keynough,

2016). Pakistan had been an American ally during the Soviet-Afghan War (1979-1988) aiding the Afghan Mujahideen to fight the Soviet Union (Kovalkov, 2022). September 11 changed the relationship between Pakistan and U.S. and Pakistan emerged as a frontline partner to U.S. under President Pervez Musharraf. Even with such collaboration, there always existed a feeling that Pakistan was playing a two-sided game as she was collaborating against some of the terrorist groups but at the same time-maintained connections with others (R. Khan, 2012). In the process, Pakistan was now the refuge of terrorist groups like Al-Qaeda in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This state of affairs turned out to be a source of dispute between the two countries. Meanwhile, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) also caused attacks to the civilians and military and turned out to be a domestic threat to Pakistan (Gunaratna & Nielsen, 2008). The appearance of the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISIS-K) group in Afghanistan also affected Pakistan. Such groups posed new challenges, which demanded combined efforts by the U.S and Pakistan.

There was also an anti-America outburst that was caused by U.S. drone attacks in tribal regions of Pakistan that was perceived as an invasion of U.S. sovereignty. Moreover, the emergence and later assassination of Osama bin Laden by the U.S during Operation Neptune Spear in Abbottabad in 2011 increased U.S distrust in Pakistan as a counterterrorism ally (Adil et al., 2023). Between 2002 and 2010, the US gave Pakistan \$4.78 billion in the form of Economic Support Fund (ESF) and Foreign Military Financing (PBS NewsHour Classroom, 2023).

The U.S Government Accountability Office has issued a comprehensive report on the financial assistance and reimbursement paid to Pakistan by the United States between fiscal years 2002 -10. Here are the details:

Table 1

Financial aid and repayments by United States to Pakistan from 2002 to 2010

Fiscal Year	Assistance (USD)	Reimbursements (USD)
2002	1.060 billion	1.169 billion
2003	517 million	1.247 billion
2004	417 million	705 million
2005	735 million	964 million
2006	1.080 billion	862 million
2007	936.447 million	732 million
2008	963 million	901 million
2009	2.192 billion	865 million
2010	2.655 billion	1.499 billion

Source: U.S Government Accountability Office GAO report number GAO-11-786R

Maintaining a Stance on China and Russia

China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) links Asia, Africa and Europe. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is not only improving energy transportation of Pakistan but also boosting its economy that also includes the construction of Gwadar Port. CPEC grants China a shorter and more secure route to Middle East and Africa in transporting oil and energy hence founding CPEC a legend of the Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC is an unprecedented game changer in China and Pakistan, which will open opportunities to both nations to enhance their economies and transportation structures. Also, China is collaborating with Pakistan in the area of defense, technology and arms supply, which assists Pakistan to balance its relationship with its rival, India. China is always on the international level, funding Pakistan when it can counter the U.S influence.

The Soviet Union happened to be an ally of India during the Cold War, and Pakistan was allied with U.S. Russia has been vying to impact on the affairs of South Asia in the recent years, necessitating interaction with Pakistan. Russia wants to find new markets where its energy and defense exports can be sold, whereas Pakistan requires energy, and it is possible to cooperate between the two (Chaliha, 2022). Under this new dynamic, Pakistan can be less overdependent on its more traditional allies, the U.S and China. The two nations have an interest in applying counter-terrorism and ensuring stability in the region. Russia proposes a multipolar world order and wants to oppose the U.S. dominance and have an even-handed international system. To this end,

Russia has established an essential strategic alliance with India, which dictates that Pakistan should deeply straddle its ties with other countries, more so with those that are adjoined to India and in such a way that they do not present a danger to Pakistan. This dynamic case poses a challenge to the U.S in meeting its objectives in the region.

Russia and Pakistan are now collaborating in most projects. The North-South Gas Pipeline or Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline is an important energy project meant to transfer foreign liquefied natural gas (LNG) imported into Karachi to many parts of Pakistan and particularly in the Punjab province, which have shortages in energy. Russia and Pakistan first agreed to this project in 2015 (Dilawar, 2025). The pipeline that is poised to be between 1,100 and 1,200 kilometers long will be very important in ensuring the energy security of Pakistan as other parts of the country will be increasing in energy demand and the domestic reserves of natural gas will be dwindling (Pakistan- Russia Collaboration on Gas Pipeline Project, 2022). Nevertheless, various delays have befallen the project since the time it was initiated mainly because of intricate factors leading to the design structure, financing procedure, and effects of U.S. sanctions against the Russian parties involved. With these obstacles, Russia and Pakistan officials have once again committed to working past these hurdles and make sure the project is completed successfully (Ahmadani, 2025). The framework of the project has been revised multiple times, to circumvent international sanctions, and expounds on the complexity behind these enormous energy agreements in geopolitical terms. According to the Pakistani estimates, the project is anticipated to cost approximately 2.25 billion, which is estimated in 2021 currency calculated after inflation (Bhatti & Naz, 2023).

The other major point in bilateral cooperation between Russia and Pakistan is the new steel mill proposed in Karachi. This project is a continuation of a historic alliance in that the earlier Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) was built using Soviet aid in 1970s. History Pakistan Steel Mills was a symbol of national self-sufficiency, but recently, it shut down in 2015 because of years of financial mismanagement and political interventions. Both countries are focused on the revitalization of this project, and by the summer of 2025, Russia wants to conclude an agreement with Pakistan. The proposed site (Karachi) has already been inspected by Russian technical experts and the current discussions aim at establishing how the new steel mill will operate (Dilawar, 2025). The project has been considered as a major stride in the Pakistan-Russia collaboration to revive a key industrial resource of Pakistan. Although the amount of investment they will be making in this project has not been publicly announced, both parties are working towards win-win contracts and agreements.

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In addition to the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline, Russia and Pakistan are considering expanding their cooperation in the oil and gas industry. This covers direct oil supplies and possible joint ventures on exploration and production. Russia has given Pakistan interests in its oil and gas-fields in Nigeria to help Pakistan to obtain the energy supplies and relieve some strain in its foreign exchange reserves. Russian state-owned gas company Gazprom has offered a venture with the Pakistan-based Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) in the international exploration. The stake purchase option has also been shown by Pakistan in already developed fields, which is aimed at taking the risk off, which then is comparable to a successful case of joint venture relating to a UAE state-owned company (Bhutta, 2025). Besides energy and oil, Russia and Pakistan are also increasing their partnership in other areas such as transportation and industry. There is massive development on improving connectivity between the two countries. Issues of linking Pakistan, Uzbekistan and Russia by railway have been discussed. One of the major advances is the scheduled opening of a pilot cargo train between Pakistan and Russia in August 2025, which would enhance trade and make it simpler to transport goods in the countries and throughout the region itself. The focus of cooperation in such areas as industry, agriculture, and transportation is also a priority of both countries. As a form of an agricultural exchange, Russia has shown a desire to export machine, fertilizers, oil, and gas and certain agricultural products to Pakistan (Xinhua, 2025).

The US fears the presence of China and Russia in the region. To deal with this it must have prospective engagement with Pakistan, since it is in this region in terms of its geographical position to both Afghanistan and Iran. There is the economic gain of Pakistan through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which enhances its connection with China. The U.S. would also respond by giving Pakistan other options to CPEC, including heavy investments in its infrastructure, large-scale defense and assistance in developing healthcare, educational, and civil society initiatives. Such initiatives would enable the Pakistan's to lessen their dependence on China and equalize their affairs with both countries, China and the United States. Through enhancement of good governance and bolstering of internal strength of Pakistan, the U.S. can reduce the

reliance of Pakistan on other countries. This would help the U.S. cause in curbing the influence of China and Russia and would also help develop a strategic alliance between the U.S. and Pakistan.

Nuclear Deterrence and Stability

Pakistan also turned into a nuclear power in 1998, and this event considerably altered the South Asian strategic situation. In the first place, the United States was interested in making sure that India and Pakistan could not develop nuclear capabilities (Haegeland & Tarapore, 2022). But after the nuclear tests conducted by Pakistan during May 1998, the U.S began to focus on the dangers and threats of the nuclear competitors in the region. Focus has since been on non-proliferation, strategic stability and making sure that nuclear technology does not spread. Pakistan has maintained that its nuclear program is important in its security issues and that is the reason it implemented the first-use policy unlike its Indian nuclear policy that has adopted a no-first-use policy. In the quest to defend its sovereignty and integrity, Pakistan seeks to prevent a conventional form of aggression by its neighbor (Shafi & Taj, 2023).

The implementation of Nasr (Hatf-9) missile caused a significant alarm to the international community about the nuclear strength and stability of the region of Pakistan (Noor, 2023). Moreover, the Shaheen III missile which has a range of 2,750 kilometers can strike any part of India including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Tasleem, 2016). Though certain experts indicate that there is a possibility that the Shaheen III might target other nations, including Israel, Pakistani officials believe that the nuclear program is exclusively aimed at deterring India (Amin, 2024). The U.S government has sanctioned four Pakistani organizations that have been engaged in building ballistic missiles that the country sees as part of a developing nuclear threat (Ashtakala, 2025). The possibility of the participation of Chinese actors in the production of ballistic missiles has been brought into question as a means of raising concerns over the influence of China in its relationships of power in the region. Pakistani officials state that having nuclear capabilities is a source of stability in the region, and they can be used against the Indian threats (Dar & Janbaz, 2024).

Of great concern to the U.S. is that nuclear knowledge, equipment, or even weapons can be transferred in South Asia to other countries or non-state groups although India and Pakistan gave pledges that they would not do so. One of the critical aspects of the U.S. non-proliferation policy is the stability of Pakistan. Confidence building measures attempted by the U.S. to involve Pakistan, including capping tests of the ballistic missiles have not been very successful. This indicates a lack of alignment between non-proliferation U.S. interests and Pakistan security interests, and a more comprehensive strategy to combat the cause of conflict in the region is needed (Bacon, 2023).

Pakistan's Geopolitical Importance for the China: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the largest infrastructure project and investment initiative in the history initiated in 2013 by President Xi Jinping. BRI is an initiative to provide an Asian-African-European land-sea connection system (Chiebuka et al., 2025). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a multi-billion-dollar project, is one of the significant features of the BRI that will include a system of roads, railways, pipelines and industrial sectors. CPEC connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Xinjiang province of China to Kashgar (Ghaffar and Khan, 2024). CPEC is also contributing significantly to enhancing the geopolitical standing of Pakistan to China on a number of grounds.

- A Strategic alternative to the Strait of Malacca: This is because it is an alternative to Strait of Malacca, which is a strategic choice. This is a route China depends on as a source of significant energy and approximately 80 percent of its exports transit through the strait. However, it is a weakness that can be bridged by any confrontation, the so-called Malacca Dilemma of China (Raadani et al., 2019). In order to contain this menace, China has emerged with CPEC being another efficient bypass methodology so as to ensure that it narrows down and wins its energy delivery pipelines to the Middle East. Gwadar Port is yet another key component of this scheme and it is strategically located at the entrance to Strait of Hormuz. This port leads to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean directly to China (Sattar et al., 2023). In total, this strategy will reduce the Chinese dependence upon the Strait of Malacca and the South China

Sea and increase its energy security and the opportunities deepen its opportunities to operate on the international level.

- **Regional and economic development:** CPEC forms a very important component of the overall Chinese strategy of enhancing its economic and political influence. The route also enables traffic and linkage between China, the Middle East and Africa and as such new markets to Chinese goods and investments are made possible. By providing an infrastructure boost in Pakistan, China offers its companies the chance not only to secure their own, but also to guarantee some forms of interdependence in the economy that brings Pakistan under its sphere of influence. It results in increased economic involvement, and China can persuade regional politics to act in their favor to their advantage (Khan et al., 2023).
- **Western Development and Internal Stability:** CPEC is affixed to the Chinese domestic policy of westernization of the nation, in particular the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. The country is endowed with resources and has been facing ethnic strife and economic disparities (Naz and Parveen, 2022). By linking Xinjiang to the Gwadar Port, CPEC would not only boost the development of the region, but it would increase stability as well. The initiative is supposed to generate employment and stimulate growth, addressing some of the issues behind instabilities.

CPEC Geopolitics and Geoeconomic importance for Pakistan

For Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) symbolizes a crucial chance to tackle some of its most urgent economic and security issues.

- **Economic Growth and Infrastructure Enhancement:** Low level of foreign direct investment, enduring energy crisis, and bad infrastructure have been some of the challenges facing Pakistan historically. CPEC tries to overcome these issues by bringing billions of investments to the country, upgrading the infrastructure in transportation and energy sectors and setting up special economic zones to stimulate industrial development. This project is projected to create jobs, lead to economic growth, and improve the living standard in Pakistan in general (Khan et al., 2023).
- **Better Regional Accessibility:** CPEC has the potential to make Pakistan a hub of trade and transit, and can connect South Asia, central Asia and Middle East. This would not only improve the economy of Pakistan, but also its strategic value. Pakistan can strengthen political and economic ties with its neighbors by acting as a sea route to landlocked Central Asian countries.
- **Strengthening the All-Weather Friendship:** The friendship between China and Pakistan has been called an all-weather friendship, but CPEC strengthens it, creating the next stage of economic dependence, (Javid & Ali, 2024). In the case of Pakistan, China is a reliable partner that can provide necessary economic and diplomatic support. This is particularly important bearing in mind that Pakistan has often had a complex relationship with the United States and the fact that it continues to be at war with India.

Defense and Strategic Partnership

The strategic relationship between China and Pakistan is the core issue of the South Asian and Indo-Pacific geopolitics. The alliance is typified by the extent of intersection in the economic, military, and geopolitical sectors, and the most salient thing about it is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The CPEC is one of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects in China meant to transform the Pakistani economic space and considerably increase the Chinese strategic presence and influence.

CPEC is an economic model that entails Special Economic Zones (SEZs), transport, and energy plans to transform Pakistan to a regional economic center (Zahoor et al., 2024). With China, the investments secure major trade routes and energy sources as well as spread its economic power throughout the region. Besides this, the corridor will help China to access the Middle East and African markets, thereby increasing its global economic connectivity. Military cooperation between China and Pakistan is among the most important features of the strategic collaboration between those countries as both are interested in the stabilization of the area and approval of the balance between India and U.S. It also involves supplying military equipment in full, joint military training, exchange of intelligence, and strategic consultations (Noonari et al., 2022). China is the leading provider of military equipment in Pakistan that offers high-tech weapons that highly benefit in the defense of Pakistan. The key joint operations include the co-production of the JF-17 combat Scotland, the ideal example of technological transfer and achieving independence in the Pakistani defense. This military assistance to

Pakistan is necessary to ensure that it has a strategic equilibrium with India, its larger regional rival (Khan and Bukhari, 2024). Maritime collaboration is another major feature of their defense cooperation. The presence of the two countries in the strategically significant region is enhanced by the usual naval operations and the intensification of the partnership in the Indian Ocean. Gwadar Port dual-use has the potential to increase presence by offering logistician support and potential operating bases to both Chinese and Pakistani navies on extremely vital maritime paths (Javid and Ali, 2023). The China Pakistan strategic alliance has extended its hand to diplomatic support on sensitive matters relating to security. Pakistan votes often on the side of China on the issues concerning Xinjiang, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, and China is with Pakistan on the question of Kashmir (Biberman et al., 2023).

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) serves as an important multilateral framework that concerted China and Pakistan to further their shared strategic objectives. The SCO accession has allowed Pakistan to interact and cooperate with other regional powerhouses, such as China and Russia and it also gives China an opportunity to expand its scope of influence in Eurasia and challenge the western dominance (Yaqoob & Qureshi, 2025). Such interaction helps in the shift of the power relationship in the world towards a multipolar system. Its broader impact on the region can be seen through the potential of CPEC to spread to Afghanistan and its association with Iran. The involvement of Iran in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) exemplified in Iran-Pakistan-China Gas Pipeline projects stands out as a pragmatic approach to resolving regional concerns to strengthen economic relations and stability (Yildirimcakar, 2023).

The strategic relationship between Pakistan and China is largely noticeable in the defense arena, their imports of arms and military assistance among others. In the period of 2019-2023, China was the biggest importer of arms to Pakistan (Ali, 2024). Between the years 2020 and 2024, the country of China exported arms valued at 5.28 billion to Pakistan, which comprises 63 percent of the total arms exports (Wong, 2025). Besides, China sold weapons to Pakistan valued at \$2 billion, since 2015, according to SIPRI (Arthur, 2025). In history, in the 1965 war, China supplied Pakistan with a total of 250 million worth of military materials (Rossi, 2025). The military equipment that China marketed to Pakistan between 1978 and 2008 amounted to \$7 billion (Gul et al., 2022). This close ties record is added by the fact that by June 2025, the defense budget of this country is anticipated to grow to the level of \$9 billion, which will coincide with a military agreement with China (Daftari, 2025).

The strong defense partnership between Pakistan and China enhances the strategic locations of the two nations. With Central Asian balance maintained by the military support of China, and the two countries increasing their influence on the Indian Ocean together thanks to their joint naval operations. The alliance promotes the development of multipolar politics threatening the legitimacy of the established one-dimensional power and providing a substitute to the Western-dominated structures. Nonetheless, the partnership can be effective in this case as long as it can surmount challenges such as debt sustainability, security and local dissatisfaction. These complexities will define whether the strategic partnership is viable and successful in the long-term depending on how both countries handle them. As the geopolitics of the region and the entire world changes, China-Pakistan association is noteworthy in future geopolitics, it has been a subject of incessant scholarly and policy interest.

The China-Pakistan Axis: A Counterweight to India

This relationship between China and Pakistan is basically grounded on the shared strategic agenda, which is the balancing of the power of India in the region and the security threats perceived. The reality of the historical struggle and geopolitical fact behind this alliance has developed into a strong military alliance which brings a major two-pronged threat to India. The vision of India as a common enemy is decades old. The 1962 Sino-Indian war one incident that brought China and Pakistan closer to one another in terms of strategic relationships. This bond took another step forward by the fact that Pakistan still had a continued territorial dispute with India, specifically with Kashmir. The 1963 border agreement which transferred land under India in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) to China was a sign that the two would be allied, and an example that the two would work together to take down India in future (Pant and Rawat, 2025).

China provides military assistance to Pakistan which is a main aspect of this alliance. The assistance goes beyond the supply of weapons to include co-production, collaborative research and development (R&D), and mass modernization (Ishaq et al., 2024). China brought in 81 percent of the overall arms imports to Pakistan

since the year 2020 to 2024, comprising approximately 63 percent of the arms export to Pakistan. This consists of contemporary military equipment such as the JF-17 and the JF-10 multi-role fighter aircraft, compatible defense supply chains, network-based communications and other surface-to-air missiles (HQ-9/P, LY-80, FM-90) which are constituents of the integrated air defense of Pakistan. To enhance its naval capabilities, China has deployed C-802 anti-ships cruise missiles plus Type 039A air-independent propulsion attack submarines that are set to counter the Indian dominance of the Arabian Sea (Pant and Rawat, 2025).

The US item: The Great Power Competition Game

The United States also presents a cultural complication to the geopolitical situation of South Asia as it has a huge presence whose interests and policies often overlap and even conflict with other interests and policies of both China, India as well as Pakistan. The China US rivalry has now been a significant aspect of the world geopolitics and consequently, Pakistan found itself in a difficult position as it tries to balance the two super powers. US-Pakistan Relationship has been a complex and transactional relationship where also strategic priorities have been varied especially in the domains of counter-terrorism activities and regional stability.

The role of Pakistan has been conditional to the United States. I will give the example of the termination of the war in Afghanistan, which significantly diminished the role of Pakistan in the American foreign policy. The Biden administration has silently conducted business with Pakistan and has minimal efforts (Hathaway, 2022). Nevertheless, the possibility of another Trump emergence seems to have prompted an outreach profile, including negotiation of trade and crucial resources, indicating a transactional policy of focusing on crisis management and resource priorities in the short run (Shabbir et al., 2022). The US policymakers are however cautious with the close relations that Pakistan shares with China, and its persistence in militant groups. The US-China rivalry has a big impact on China-Pakistan alliance. With the United States viewing China as its main strategic opponent more, the United States aims to enhance alliances and relationships in the Indo-Pacific area, and India is becoming a key link in the process (Zhu, 2022). This poses a challenge to Pakistan that has always turned to the US and even China to receive different types of assistance.

This is the mode of strategic balancing used by Pakistan in its relationship with the two superpowers. At a time when its relationship with China is ever growing, especially in military and economic fronts, Pakistan has also shown some readiness to engage with US. Another example of this complex relationship was evident in a recent event when Pakistani military facilities used the Chinese fighter jet aircraft whilst Pakistani diplomats praised the US. This apparently conflicting action, coupled with the accolade offered by the US CENTCOM Chief Gen. Michael Kurilla to Pakistan as a phenomenal partner has triggered concerns in both New Delhi and Beijing (Press Trust of India, [2025](#)).

Conclusion

Geopolitical importance of Pakistan is basically linked with strategic location being a crossroad of South Asia and Central Asia along with Middle East. This stand qualifies it as a crucial player in the political planning as well as the decision-making process of both the United States and China. Its history has been marked by the uphill and downhill of alliances and being a strong U.S. ally during the Cold War and the War on Terror to the development of more and more economic and military links with China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). To the United States, Pakistan continues to be a key counterterrorism partner and a leading force towards achieving stability in Afghanistan. It can also be used to watch over security in the region especially the nuclear capability of Pakistan. To Pakistan, China offers a key access to the Arabian sea through the land that can minimize its dependence on the Malacca Strait which can be leveraged effectively as a check to the increasing influence of India.

Pakistan posts a complicated diplomatic environment at the end of the day that it balances between these two conflicting international allies. The way it is able to utilize these relationships towards its economic and security ambitions and survive the tensions associated with them will define how it will figure into this changed world order. This is attributed to the fact that the dynamic relationship between Washington and Beijing and Islamabad is set to remain large in the geopolitics of the region and the world at large.

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