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# PAKISTAN AND THE BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE

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## **China's Regional Engagement: Promoting Peace and Stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative**

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### **Abstract**

The "China development model" refers to the economic and political system China has implemented over the past few decades, which has resulted in significant economic growth and development in China. A combination of state-led development, export-oriented growth, and a focus on infrastructure development often characterizes the model. Under the China development model, the state plays a significant role in economic development. In this chapter, we will delve into the reasons behind China's involvement in promoting peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Additionally, we will explore the ways in which China is contributing to the political and economic stability of its western neighbor countries through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China is invested in bringing about positive change to the region and we will examine the various steps they are taking to achieve this goal.

### **Introduction**

In October of 1949, China gained independence and became known as the People's Republic of China. For the next three decades, from 1949 to 1980, its economy was considered one of the weakest in the world. However, following

various reforms in 1980, China's economy was redirected towards a new direction. Today, China is the world's second-largest economy. While many scholars attribute China's development to its economic model, known as the "China model," it is important to note that there are multiple models within this framework. Some scholars contest the idea that there is a single economic model behind China's growth, arguing that the country's development model was copied from Europe. Western capital and technologies were utilized in capital-intensive industries such as mining, steel production, shipbuilding, spinning, railway transportation, and postal telecommunications. Others argue that China has adopted a neoliberal model, exploiting its vast pool of cheap labor, attracting foreign investment, and accelerating its transition to a liberal economy. However, China recognizes the importance of modernization for development and has shifted towards modernization in all spheres of society, unlike European modernization.

The modernization of China is founded upon the principles of peaceful development." The core interests of China align with peaceful growth. China urges the world to work together to create a society with a shared future for humanity by promoting peace, development, collaboration, and mutual benefits. In 2013, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as the China Dream or the Chinese Development Model, a massive project, was launched by China that presented an alternative approach to development that significantly differed from the European model. Its significance extends to neighbouring countries, particularly Pakistan and Afghanistan, which have been grappling with security challenges for the past three decades. The stability and tranquillity of these countries are critical for regional cooperation and connectivity, making peace a top priority. A peaceful resolution in these countries could trigger political transition, transportation, and stability. Nonetheless, the current state of upheaval in these nations has thwarted efforts to establish peace and stability, despite the involvement of China and other local actors. CPEC and the West Asia Corridor are expected to link South Asia and West Asia, which could have significant potential for the BRI. Although the US and NATO members have endeavoured to maintain peace in Afghanistan, the Taliban has regained control of the country.

### **Historical Overview of China's Afghan Interests Since 2001**

In the past, China has not shown significant interest in Afghanistan. However, China has become increasingly invested in the state in recent years for several reasons. Firstly, Beijing is worried about the rise of terrorist organizations such as ETIM and ISKP, as they pose a security risk to China (Weitz, 2010). Secondly, China has economic interests in Afghanistan due to its vast natural

resources, including 1.6 billion barrels of crude oil, 16 trillion cubic feet of gas, and 240 million tons of copper. The total value of these resources is almost a trillion dollars (Gartenstein-Ross, Trombly, & Barr, 2014). Thirdly, while China did not support America's prolonged presence in Afghanistan, it also opposed a hasty withdrawal without restoring peace, fearing that it could trigger a civil war in the region (Weitz, 2010). Lastly, China is concerned about the illegal drug trade in Afghanistan. Since 2001, China has actively contributed to the nation's Afghanistan's economic growth and recovery by offering assistance and support in several sectors. Regarding economic growth, security, and peace, Kabul turns to China for assistance and support (Hamdard, 2022). China nevertheless maintained a low presence in Afghanistan (Le Mière, Li, & Inkster, 2011). Contributions, particularly to the nation's economic development, are notable. More significantly, Hamid Karzai made five trips to Beijing during his presidency, showing the significance of China for Afghanistan and the growing appreciation of bilateral ties between the two nations. The "Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations" was signed by the two nations in 2002, while the "Treaty of Bilateral Friendship and Cooperation" and the "Trade and Economy Cooperation" were inked in 2006. During Hamid Karzai's visit to China in 2010, of agreements were made that promised more collaboration in irrigation, mining, agriculture, infrastructure development, electricity generation, and resource exploration, as well as free access for some exports from Afghanistan to China (Paliwal, 2011).

Beginning in 2012, the two nations have worked diligently to strengthen their bonds of cooperation and collaboration (Yongbiao, 2018). In addition, they have provided mutual assistance in combating drug trafficking, organized crime, and terrorism. Their economic partnership has also flourished, with a focus on discovering natural resources, generating energy, constructing roads, revitalizing the agricultural sector, and advancing communications (Huasheng, 2012). Notably, Chinese telecom giants Huawei and ZTE converted Afghanistan's 200,000 analog phone lines to digital. As a means of battling the three forces of evil—terrorism, extremism, and separatism—China also provided security cooperation and training for Afghan officials in a variety of disciplines. China also provided technical training to locals in several fields and more than 800 different Afghan authorities with human resources training (Norling, 2008). Hamid Karzai, the president of Afghanistan, and Hu Jintao, the president of China, agreed to elevate their bilateral ties to that of a strategic partnership in 2012. To better tackle the "three forces" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism as well as transnational crimes like drug trafficking, President Hu Jintao urged the two sides to strengthen their security cooperation (Raipeha, 2013). They now have stronger bilateral ties, helping to further the nation's peace and prosperity. The Afghan government has consistently expressed

gratitude to China for its support and help in promoting peace and reconstruction.

One of the major foreign investors in Afghanistan is China. The nation contains many untapped sources of thorium, cobalt, lithium, gold, cobalt, iron, and gas. China expressed interest in foreign direct investment following the opening of these sites to foreign investors. China has invested in various initiatives crucial to the reconstruction of this country ravaged by war. Currently, Afghanistan has received investments from twelve Chinese companies. China made a 425-million-dollar investment in the nation, and the total contract value of the projects it signed is 1.221 billion dollars (Yongbiao, 2018).

### **Beijing's Approach to the Taliban Government**

In the years following the US withdrawal, China's stance on Afghanistan has mostly been influenced by its security and economic goals. Beijing has the potential to influence the situation in Afghanistan because the country is essentially sealed off from the rest of the world since the Taliban seized Kabul. China has maintained regular diplomatic connections with the new government in Kabul since the Taliban ousted the previous administration in August 2021. Like other Afghan neighbors, Beijing is cautiously in contact with the Taliban government without formally recognizing it. China has made various investment attempts in addition to allowing the Taliban to reopen the Afghanistan embassy in Beijing and restarting trade. China has collaborated with other nations to put pressure on the Taliban to implement reforms, such as the creation of an inclusive government and the defense of women's rights, particularly in the workplace and in education (Barrech, Chohan, & Naru, 2020).

China's principal worries in Afghanistan are political instability, bases for the ISKP and ETIM, power politics involving major nations, and insecurity. Through positive interaction with the Taliban, China hopes to ease these worries. Following the exit of the United States and NATO, China has maintained cordial ties with all significant Afghan stakeholders; as a result, her position in Afghan affairs is distinct. China is addressing the issues on both a bilateral and multinational level. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a prospective international forum where China might cooperate with other neighbours of Afghanistan (Singh Roy, 2010). China has taken a reasoned approach to forging connections with the new administration in the post-withdrawal period. It is prepared to cooperate with it as it is in the best position to allay its legitimate concerns and defend national and regional interests. If Chinese security concerns are adequately addressed, Kabul will draw Chinese foreign direct investment and export resources, and it will boost

transport services. Beijing benefits from the improved transport options and the abundant natural riches Afghanistan offers. As a result, both parties are ready to take advantage of the chances they have for one another.

### **Post-Withdrawal China's Interests in Afghanistan**

After a 20-year conflict, the US and NATO hastily withdrew their forces, leaving Kabul in an unsettling state and without any long-term resolution to the Afghan problem. The coalition's sole goal in signing the Doha Agreement with the Taliban was to save face following their defeat and provide a smooth exit strategy. Most of the billions of dollars spent by Washington to inflict death and ruin on the Afghan people went toward military expenses. Human rights activists paid little attention to reconstruction and rehabilitation. In addition to spending billions of dollars, Washington had to deal with the deaths of 2300 US soldiers and the injuries of 20,660 more (Jahanmal, 2018) without accomplishing any concrete objectives. The coalition led by the US had paid some attention to institution-building. As a result, the US-established system fell apart before the formal completion of the withdrawal, and the Taliban took control of Kabul in mid-August 2021. The fundamental cause was a lack of attention from the US and her allies to the establishment of strong government institutions and an army Afghanistan appears to have been invaded by the US and her allies in revenge for the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack, and they have remained there to further their geostrategic objectives there, particularly the containment of China. As a result, there was no genuine or clear aim behind this trip to promote national peace and stability. Due to its polarization and bias, the current US-led international system cannot respond to China's economic progress (Kaufman, 2010).

As a fast-rising economic power and the world's largest trader, China would never wish to disregard any potential security concern in her vicinity that could limit her commercial endeavors. China's GDP is currently 17 trillion dollars, its trade volume is 4 trillion dollars, and it has 4 trillion dollars in foreign exchange reserves (Callahan, 2016). China's interests in Afghanistan are geopolitical, economic, and security related.

### **Geopolitical Interests**

Power struggles, political upheaval, or other dangers to its neighbours cannot be tolerated by China. China is also better positioned to make a big contribution to restoring peace and stability in Afghanistan because Beijing and Kabul don't have a rivalry. Chinese authorities have been forced to adopt a more assertive and comprehensive stance towards Afghanistan because of the withdrawal of the US and its allies from the country. Beijing received and hosted a Taliban delegation in July 2021, after which it released a formal

statement affirming that China respects Afghanistan's ability to choose its path. This makes Beijing's viewpoint clear, contending that the victory of the Taliban reflected popular will. China began to expand its diplomatic ties with the Taliban even before they took power in Kabul.

According to some analysts, China tends to regard the vacuum as an opportunity to seize both chances and challenges. Beijing wants to use Afghanistan as a regional link in the Belt and Road Initiative or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to earn economic benefits. Furthermore, since 2007, China has been trying to find a means to access Afghanistan's abundant mineral riches, which makes security and transportation infrastructure necessary. China is currently looking at the political situation in Afghanistan and how peace could benefit the nation because none of this is possible without a stable Afghanistan (Sakhi, 2022).

### **Engagement and Economic Interests**

Afghanistan's frail economy was heavily dependent on US aid and donations from the West before to the pullout. If the Taliban run Afghanistan and does not promote extremism and militancy, China becomes an important ally. The Taliban Favor Chinese investment since it will bring in the much-needed funds at this crucial time, even though China is trying to resuscitate economic plans in Afghanistan. Following the US withdrawal, billions of state assets were frozen, millions of dollars' worth of foreign help to the previous government was halted, and financial sanctions nearly pushed Iran and Afghanistan's economies to ruin. In this situation, the Taliban government is actively soliciting Chinese investment, trade links, and economic backing. The Taliban will welcome any investment, particularly if it is not accompanied by lectures on human rights, according to Ian Johnson, an expert with the Council on Foreign Relations, who saw. He asserts that China's objective is likely to be at least equally political as it is economic (Johnson, 2021).

Taliban spokesman Sohail Shaheen frequently requested Chinese investment in his press briefings following the fall of the Ashraf Ghani government. China has granted 278 commodities duty-free access to export as one of Afghanistan's top trading partners since 2006 (Bashardost, 2019). Bilateral trade has significantly increased in size. The value of bilateral commerce increased and hit \$523.45 million in 2021. Afghanistan was China's export market for 474 million dollars, and China was its import market for 49.53 million dollars (H. U. Khan, Dawar, & Khan, 2023). Beijing is dedicated to improving bilateral ties in several areas, including trade and the economy. To overcome the obstacles, China established an air corridor to encourage importing agricultural goods like pine nuts. Additionally, starting in 2022, China will allow 98% of Afghan imports into China to enter duty-free (Kumar,

2023). The Taliban administration wants to strengthen bilateral commercial relations during this important time as it attempts to rebuild the country's sanctions-damaged economy. Additionally, China's goods to Afghanistan are reasonably priced (Reeves, 2010). Beijing has always supported Kabul's participation in important projects, helping it to raise funds, increase local job opportunities, and expand its potential for economic growth. Afghanistan's socioeconomic development is essential for peace and security in the country and the region currently. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on economic growth, job creation, and business possibilities to put a stop to terrorism and militancy in the nation. The young people will be shielded from joining terrorist groups.

Exploring Afghanistan's mineral resources is one of China's primary objectives. The copper mine in Mes Aynak and the agreements for oil extraction in the provinces of Faryab and Sar-e-Pol represent China's main economic interests. The nation is rich in natural resources, much of which is undeveloped, including copper, iron, silver, lithium, chromite, diamonds, oil, and many others. The 30-year Aynak copper mining project, valued at 3.5 billion dollars and projected to have 3 trillion dollars' worth of copper reserves, is one of China's most significant investments aimed at stabilizing Afghanistan's economy (R. M. Khan, 2015), 4,000 direct jobs, 7,600 indirect jobs, and 62,500 induced jobs are anticipated to be produced (Iqbal, 2016) and once fully operationalized, it is anticipated to produce income equivalent to 45% of Afghanistan's overall budget (Bukhari, 2012) and the 25-year effort to explore gas and oil in the oil reserves of the Amu Darya River Basin. It is important to note that this was the first deal in Afghanistan's history that allowed any foreign nation to find petrol and oil there. This oil exploration contract was signed in 2011 by China National Petroleum Corporation. According to a report, these oil fields have oil reserves totaling roughly 87 million barrels. According to the contract, China will contribute \$400 million to this project and give the Afghan government 20% of its revenue as taxes, 15% as royalties, and 70% as income. This project is scheduled to cost Afghanistan 304.35 million dollars a year, or \$7 billion throughout the 25-year contract. It is anticipated to create 7,000 employees (Tahiri, 2017).

More recently, on January 5, 2022, the Taliban government and China agreed to work together to develop an oil field in the Sar-e Pul area and drill for oil in the Amu Darya basin. About \$150 million will be invested annually by China, and over the following three years, that sum will increase to 540 million dollars (Briefing, 2021). Since the Taliban took over in 2021, this partnership marks the first big energy extraction agreement with an outside company. The Taliban government and a Chinese state-owned company are in talks about the mining operations at the MesAynak copper mine. It would follow a 3.5



billion dollar, 30-year pact that the previous Afghan administration inked in 2008. All these objectives and activities would substantially impact the war-torn nation of Afghanistan's economic development. Despite security worries, Chinese investors are nonetheless drawn to Afghanistan's immense natural wealth. Therefore, China is a more advantageous partner to work with as the Taliban avidly wants foreign investment and aid to support the nation's weak economy. Investment in the nation is now uncertain following the Taliban's capture of Kabul, but if a stable administration is established, local and global investments will continue.

To help the Afghan people survive the harsh winter of 2021, China sent 250 million Yuan in food, medicine, winter clothing, and other supplies to Afghanistan (Aria, Tayeb, & Zazai, 2023). China has also given an Afghan family impacted by the recent earthquake \$8 million in humanitarian relief. China is willing to contribute to projects boosting regional infrastructure and connectivity. During the meeting on Afghanistan held in Tashkent on July 26, 2022, Yue Xiaoyong, China's special representative for Afghanistan, declared that China will finance the construction of a transnational railway crossing through Afghanistan. It is intended to connect Uzbekistan to the seaports of Pakistan (Shibasaki, Tanabe, & Kato, 2021). China sees Afghanistan as a link between South and Central Asia.

Beijing worries about the dangers of being unnecessarily involved in Afghanistan, which is viewed as a "strategic trap" and the "graveyard of empires." Afghanistan's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative is particularly significant, including its linkages to the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). New economic obligations must, however, come after a period of stability. If the country's security and political climate were favorable, China would undoubtedly play a significant investment role. In other words, Beijing will proceed cautiously before becoming completely involved in the Afghan situation. While making sure that its issues are taken care of, China will gradually and methodically fill the void and fulfil the Taliban's wants and desires.

### **Security Interests**

China has four security concerns in Afghanistan: first, it must ensure the security of its border; second, the Taliban must expel Uyghur militant groups operating in Afghanistan; and third, it must safeguard its current investment (Murtazashvili, 2022). Afghanistan is home to several anti-China militant groups that have directly threatened China's national security and unification. ETIM and ISKP are China's main security threats. The security prospects of other regional states, one of which is China, a country that is right next to Afghanistan, have been cast in doubt due to the growth of the ISKP, also

known as ISK, in Afghanistan, particularly after the withdrawal of the United States of America and the Taliban's takeover (Kapur, 2022). When analyzing China's predicaments, the actual circumstances paint a clear picture of the potential risks to China as a state and to its interests in the nearby foreign countries. The combination of the ETIM and ISKP represents a significant advancement in this regard. The United Nations has designated ETIM as a terrorist group with its headquarters in the Xinjiang area of north-eastern China. Combining forces with ISKP will not only give this Muslim organization asylum in Afghanistan, posing security risks for China, but it may also make China one of ISKP's targets considering the Uyghur Muslim uprising there. It's important to note that the Taliban allowed Uyghur organizations to operate on Afghan land during their first administration, which lasted from 1996 to 2001, and they continue to have a sizable haven presence there.

The attack on Kunduz, which was carried out by an ethnic Uyghur in 2021 and for which ISKP claimed responsibility, is a crucial fact that supports this viewpoint (Soliev, 2021). The Belt and Road Initiative was criticized by ISKP in September 2022, calling it the work of "red atheists whose hands are soaked with the blood of innocent Uyghur Muslims" (H. U. Khan et al., 2023). The ISKP's objectives against China are revealed in this alarming statement, which also urges its supporters to use force against China. In the September 2022 issue of Voice of Khorasan Magazine, ISKP describes China as an "Imperialist" and expresses scepticism about relations between Beijing and Kabul (H. U. Khan et al., 2023). The ISKP's threats to China's interests outside of China, particularly Chinese investments, are another implication. For instance, the Afghan security situation, which ISKP contests, is a condition of China's involvement in the MesAynak and Amu Darya Oil Projects and many other projects (H. U. Khan et al., 2023).

Taliban refuses to extradite the numerous multinational Jahidi groups operating throughout the nation, instead choosing to adopt clandestine measures to stifle or end their extraterritorial activity. Evidence suggests that the Afghan Taliban transferred Uyghur terrorists from China's border province of Badakhshan to assuage Beijing's security concerns (Clarke, 2016). ETIM is likewise trying to balance its hostility towards China and the Taliban hosts.

### **The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), also known as One Belt One Road (OBOR), is a worldwide infrastructure development strategy proposed by the Chinese government in 2013. The initiative aims to promote economic development and connectivity among countries in Asia, Europe, Africa, and other regions through the construction of physical infrastructure, such as ports,

roads, railways, and energy pipelines, as well as digital infrastructure, such as telecommunications networks. The Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road are the two main components of the BRI. The "Belt" refers to a network of land routes connecting China with Central Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, and the "Road" is a network of sea routes connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, Africa, and Europe. The BRI will be the largest infrastructure project in history, requiring trillions of investments over the next decades. While some nations have welcomed the project with enthusiasm, others have voiced worries about its possible effects on the environment, society, economy, and geopolitical ramifications.

### **The Prospect of Afghan-China Economic Relationship**

Afghanistan has a few viable business prospects, regardless of who the government is. We quickly cover each one here: The BRI's (Belt and Road Initiative) inclusion of Afghanistan. From East Asia through the Middle East, Africa, and Europe, BRI is essentially an infrastructural project. By signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with China, 142 nations had joined the BRI as of 2021 (Nedopil, 2022). Afghanistan was not included in the BRI's initial mapping because of the presidential election turmoil in 2013–2014; nonetheless, the two nations signed an MoU in 2016, and Afghanistan took part in the first BRI summit in China. If completely implemented, this will significantly improve Afghanistan's economic situation. Afghanistan might join the BRI via of several channels: Initially, via the Five Nations Railway Corridor (FNRC), a Tajikistani project started in 2014. The 2100-kilometer railway travels from China through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran before arriving in Iran. The distance between the provinces of Kunduz, Balkh, Jawzjan, Faryab, Badghis, and Herat in Afghanistan is over a thousand kilometers. The technical and economic survey for creating the international railway project was around 50% complete, the Afghanistan National Railway Authority (Routray & Haldar, 2018). With Iran's financial assistance, only 34% of the 225-kilometer railway line connecting Herat in Afghanistan to Khaf in Iran was finished in 2020. The project has not advanced further and is currently at a standstill. The first FNRC cargo train from Nantong, Jiangsu Province, China, landed in Hairatan Port as a test run with 84 containers on board. 2019 saw the departure from Hairatan port of a goods train carrying 41 containers and 1100 tons of talc for China (Starr & Kuchins, 2010).

Second, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers viable connections between countries. This project was the BRI's flagship, with estimated disbursements of approximately \$50 billion. Afghanistan may be connected to CPEC through five practical routes. In Rahimi and Hassani, these routes are fully reviewed (Taye & Ahmed, 2021). The Digital Silk Road,

another Chinese investment project that is currently inactive, offers a third option. Initially, China, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and the Kyrgyz Republic signed the Silk Road Optical Fibre Cable System and Strategic Cooperation. From Wakhan Corridor to Faizabad city, the 480 km fiber optic project runs entirely within Afghan territory. The cost was predicted to be between \$50 and \$70 million, and the Chinese were expected to finance it over four years.

### **Taliban and Chinese Dynamics**

The political climate in Afghanistan will determine the likelihood of future commercial ties between Afghanistan and China. With the Taliban back in control after the government's collapse in August 2021, Afghanistan entered a new chapter. Since 2013, the Taliban and the Chinese have had cordial relations, to put it mildly. The Taliban team in Doha was invited to Beijing, where they were offered rides on the bullet train between Beijing and Shanghai (Latifi, 2021). In 2014, the Taliban and Pakistani officials met to discuss the peace process after the Chinese special envoy to Afghanistan reportedly travelled to Pakistan to meet with Afghan Taliban representatives (Wong & Mashal, 2015). An envoy from Afghanistan and Taliban leaders met in China in 2015 to discuss the potential for formal Afghan peace talks. A high-level Taliban delegation then travelled to China in 2016 to discuss the Afghan peace process and counterterrorism issues (Seerat, 2015). In addition, after the Taliban carried out an attack in Kabul in September 2019 (Katzman & Thomas, 2017), The organization and the United States suspended their negotiations. China requested Taliban representatives to attend a two-day intra-Afghan conference in Beijing to fill the void (Thomas, 2018), but the gathering was postponed due to COVID-19 problems.

The Taliban declared that they would not permit any military to use Afghan soil as a base for assaults against China. They also hoped that China would contribute more to Afghanistan's economic growth and rehabilitation (Airan & Rahimi, 2022). Even though China has not officially recognized the Taliban government, it has donated \$31 million worth of food, winter supplies, vaccines, and medications as a gesture of goodwill. The Taliban referred to China as their "most important partner" and said that it offered them "an extraordinary opportunity" since it was willing to invest in and restore their nation (Berman, Downey, Dakhama, Day, & Chu, 2018). Does this display of affection amount to any substantial economic prospect?

Some data suggests that China has not always made successful investment decisions in the past. When Chinese investors consider investing in the mining sector, they tend to give the political environment a high level of importance. A stable political environment offers more assurance for a guaranteed investment return because mining investments demand long-term

commitment (Xia, Jiang, Yang, & Wang, 2021). It's possible that Chinese businesses aren't yet prepared to invest in Afghanistan as much as the Taliban had hoped.

The absence of a cautious, wait-and-see approach on China's part in its interaction with the Taliban may be due to other underlying issues. These options include dealing with the Taliban directly or through an intermediary (such as Pakistan). There may be concerns regarding the impact of Pakistani involvement and the benefits it could offer. Direct interaction with an ideologically driven party with a track record of erratic foreign policy entails unknown hazards. For instance, the hardliners have been highly vocal over the Chinese government's detention and imprisonment of Muslim Uyghurs, while certain members of the Taliban leadership have remained silent. According to a UNSC report 2021, the organization has several hundred members and is still operating in Afghanistan's Badakhshan, Faryab, Kabul, and Nuristan regions. The organization, which predominantly supports Al-Qaida, wants to create a Uighur state in China's Xinjiang region. Additionally, according to a UNSC report on Afghanistan's security report in 2021, 8,000 to 10,000 jihadist fighters from Pakistan, Central Asia, the Russian North Caucasus, and western China's Xinjiang region flooded Afghanistan months before American forces withdrew. The Faryab, Sar-e Pol, and Jawzjan Provinces are currently the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) headquarters. Afghanistan's northern areas are home to several populations with Central Asian ancestry. The stability of their relationship with the Taliban is now a concern for the Chinese.

### **The Flagship Project: China Pakistan Economic Corridor**

The CPEC, a component of one belt, one road, contains features of shared prosperity and benefits, as well as complementary interests, teamwork, and collaboration. It is a widespread transportation route and cooperative industrial and commercial route between China and Pakistan, with the potential for inter- and intra-personal interaction and sources of cultural diffusion and exchange. CPEC also has the potential to grow politically, socially, and economically, bringing stability, prosperity, and security to the region (Jadoon, Khan, Khan, & Chi, 2017).

The CPEC stretches from the majority-Muslim province of Xinjiang Uygur in China to nearly all of Pakistan. Kashgar, Atushi, Tumshuq, Shule, Shufu, Akto, Tashkurgan Tajik, Gilgit, Peshawar, Dera Ismail Khan, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Quetta, Sukkur, Hyderabad, Karachi, and Gwadar are the principal regions through which CPEC travels. The CPEC will also have five functional zones, three tunnels, two axes, and one belt.

### ***Peace, Prosperity, and Conflict Resolutions through CPEC***

In a very limited sense, peace is described as the lack of reaction to wrongdoing and cruelty (Philpott, 2015). It may also be viewed as the total absence of war, which merely falls under the negative definition of peace. However, peace is founded on advancing society's political, social, and economic structures as well as the abolition of injustice and breaches of human rights (Ali, 2015). More specifically, peace concentrated on the liberal, postmodern, and modern definition of democracy, which is related to the deconstruction of the parochial society, snatching powers from one body, and sharing with the rest of the community, where popular democracy is witnessed. Where there is a prohibition on the abuse of authority and no exploitation of the individual (Ahmar, 2018). Gandhi and Bacha Khan's nonviolent philosophies are a component of positive peace in which there is no breaking of the law, no demanding of rights outside the reach of the law, and no use of force in demonstrations or strikes. Therefore, there is a potential for conflicts, violations, and war in this method. Violent demands for justice fall under the category of unproductive peace. Cooperation, communal action, comprises of the mutual consent against abusive and parochial power and compels those activities which are committed against them, was how Jonathan Schell helpfully characterized the dilemma of non-violence (Barash, 1991). Briefly said the think tanks are searching for easy ways to encourage collaboration, consensus, mediation, resolutions, and more efficient ways to settle conflicts and disagreements and transform the factors that lead to war into those that lead to peace. However, the word has multiple heads and tails and no clear end, but it is quite expressive.

Conflict exists despite the possibility of perpetual peace because of the world community's anarchy. Conflicts are caused by disagreements, unreasonable demands, denial, and counterclaims. Because war and conflict have higher costs, the international community has been increasingly interested in conflict prevention, mediation, management, and settlement. Numerous techniques are employed for dispute resolution, including good offices, arbitration, inquiries, negotiations, problem-solving sessions, second-track diplomacy, rapprochement, and judicial resolution (Butt & Butt, 2015). Conflict resolution, however, necessitates unequivocal assurance from all parties.

### ***The Role of CPEC in Promoting Regional Integration, Economic Growth, and Peace***

Conflict and violence are less likely in societies with political, social, and economic interconnectedness. Free trade and economic interdependence, according to liberal thinkers, promote peace and reduce the threat of militancy. The Economic Opportunity Cost Hypothesis looks at the idea that as nations become more interdependent economically, peace will eventually break out.

The threat of war will lessen (Chang & Khan, 2019). Economically fragile states, in contrast to economically shattered states, are typically strengthened in hostilities with one another. Therefore, the benefits of trade globalization are what reduce international conflict. Neo-Functionalism, a philosophy that examined the norms and ideals of European integration, emphasized the idea that cooperation and harmonization in one sector pave the way for it in other sectors (Cheema, 2020). When there is an increase in societal harmony because of the further extension of the chain of integration. Afghanistan, Iran, India, Pakistan, China, and other central Asian governments can regionally integrate through CPEC, much like European states do. The CPEC has the potential to foster unity, cooperation, and economic progress among the member governments in the region. The CPEC offers the chance for free commerce, economic dependency, transportation, and regional integration through functional collaboration in accordance with following Neo-functionalism's standards.

Due to militancy, conflicts, overpopulation, slow growth, lack of education, and the weapons race among states, South Asia is the world region most adversely affected. In addition to creating a security challenge, terrorism in the region (particularly in Afghanistan and Pakistan) exacerbated the dispute between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, which has long disrupted the region's economic system. Through geopolitics and geonomics, CPEC provided the best chance to end disputes and establish peace. Because of the functional cooperation based on shared interests and needs, this corridor can potentially foster regional integration and economic interdependence in the area (Chen & Naughton, 2017). Through economic trade, economic liberalization, free policies, and open membership, the CPEC network linked regional and extra regional extra-regional nations to expand trade and commerce on a global level and meet requirements and interests (Council, 2019). Across the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, CPEC travels across Asia before entering Europe (Laursen, 2008). The China-Pakistan-Iran-India-Afghanistan-Central-Asia-West Asia Corridor (CPEC), which is a part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has the potential to link China, Pakistan, Iran, India, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and West Asia. Additionally, there may be connections between India and other Central Asian nations. After crossing through Asia, CPEC penetrates Europe via the "One Belt, One Road" idea (Haq & Farooq, 2016).

### ***Peace through Security in the Region***

The issues of terrorism, militancy, Kashmir wars, crimes like piracy, human trafficking, and issues surrounding the Indian Ocean have caused tremendous anxiety throughout the region regarding international trade and commerce, the

collapse of the economy, and security threats. One of Pakistan and China's main priorities is to respond to these devastating challenges because they are also having a significant impact on Pakistan's security and economy. To promote peace and stability in the region and protect the CPEC from insecurity, China and Pakistan launched a collaborative effort for the fortification of their marine security (E. Hussain, 2019).

To maintain peace and security in the area, China and Pakistan worked together on security to increase the security of the CPEC and preserve regional peace. On a shared security plan for the area, the states have come to an understanding. As a serious concern in the area, terrorism in Pakistan and China's Xinjiang region poses a grave danger to regional peace (F. Hussain & Hussain, 2017). To safeguard the CPEC and Western regions, China raised enhanced security measures with Pakistan. As a result of the CPEC project, China and Pakistan are now in a position of greater security as both nations expand their military and naval activities and work closely together to combat maritime piracy (S. Hussain & Khan, 2017). The United States and India have close goals in the Indian Ocean to curb China's presence in the region. This is known as a power dominance game. To preserve South Asia from US-Indian supremacy, Sino-Pak has a close maritime agenda (Javed & Ismail, 2021). China and Pakistan are battling to turn Gwadar Port into a naval base shortly to establish a balance of power in the region.

The CPEC serves as the basis for China, Pakistan, and Russia's shared security and is considered a superpower triangle. A secret meeting between the head of Russia and Pakistan's high officials occurred on the deep-sea route Gwadar after China and Pakistan urged Russia to join. The meeting's key agenda items included enhancing their military and defense ties, sharing intelligence data, and demonstrating an interest in working together. Additionally, trade was discussed, and Russian authorities were made aware of the business potential associated with CPEC (Irshad, 2015). According to Global Times, China's top English-language news outlet, Russia's involvement in the CPEC will strengthen the security system and stop the international community, particularly India, from interfering needlessly and fretting about hazards to the project (Javaid, 2016). Russian participation in CPEC will thus increase the threats from the US and India while simultaneously signaling a break with India and the formation of an alliance with Pakistan and China.

In addition to using CPEC as a substitute for the South China Sea, China also imported oil from OPEC nations, including Iran, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia. China travels a long way to import oil; it travels through the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz and enters the Arabian Sea. After traveling through the Indian and Pacific oceans, the oil ships then pass through the Strait of Malacca and enter



the South China Sea, where they eventually arrive in Honking. There is no other route available hence this one goes via the South China Sea. However, there are numerous issues because the South China Sea is home to several wealthy and resourceful islands, including Paracel Island, Spiritless Island, and Scarborough Shoal Island. States like Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan want to control this region (Jeong, 2017). China claimed ownership of the Nine Dash Line, but other nations disagreed. Therefore, UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea) divided the Nine Dash Line into numerous states to solve the problems and reject China's claim to the South China Sea. Additionally, China has a very lengthy route through the South China Sea. Therefore, CPEC is very beneficial for China's trade and keeps the country safe from all issues that arise in the South China Sea. CPEC is far closer than the South China Sea, and it will also help China develop the western half of the country, where only 6% of the population currently resides.

To eradicate extremism, radicalization, and terrorism, social, political, and economic stability is crucial. Terrorism, militancy, and insecurity are all fueled by poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. Unfortunately, Pakistan suffers from a lack of tolerance, a lack of democracy, unemployment, bad living conditions, and poverty. As a result, there is militancy, extremism, terrorism, and radicalization. The result of the factors mentioned above is the terrorist organizations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) (now a part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), as well as the insurgency in Baluchistan. The eradication of extremism, radicalization, and terrorism depends on social, political, and economic stability. The root causes of terrorism, militancy, and insecurity are poverty, unemployment, and illiteracy. Sadly, Pakistan suffers from poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, a lack of tolerance, a lack of democracy, and bad living conditions, which has led to militancy, extremism, terrorism, and radicalization. The result of the causes is the insurgency in Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which are now part of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Marwat & Khan, 2016).

### ***CPEC and Regional Conflict Resolution***

Any political impasse, whether bilateral or international, may give rise to dangers on a local and regional level if it cannot be resolved. As a result, Pakistan's and South Asia's political histories are rife with political difficulties, whether they have to do with the Kashmir dispute, terrorism, ethnicity, wars, or other matters. These are very serious mistakes South Asian countries have made that prevent collaboration and peace in the region. Conflicts between Pakistan and India have frequently been sparked by the Kashmir dispute (Hadi, Batool, & Mustafa, 2018), The ongoing dispute, coupled with the Uri Attack,

India's pursuit of "surgical strikes," allegations of terrorism and counterterrorism, as well as the political and geostrategic interests in Afghanistan, including the recent terrorist attack at Pulwama, serve as the main catalysts for the conflicts between the two nations. These factors significantly impede collaboration and peace in South Asia. Furthermore, Pakistan's participation in the conflict with the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in 1979 bolstered the ISI (Inter Service Intelligence) and CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) in defeating the Soviets, which, in turn, hindered the development of a positive relationship between Pakistan and Russia. As for Pak-Afghan relations, historical fluctuations have seen both countries accusing each other of supporting insurgents and meddling in internal affairs, thus posing primary challenges in South and Central Asia that obstruct bilateral and multilateral interactions, as well as collaboration among the regional states. Being a landlocked nation, Afghanistan's ambition to join the CPEC is encouraging for Kabul because it would make it easier for Afghanistan to access the global market. Dr. Omer Zakhilwal, the ambassador of Afghanistan to Pakistan, stated in an interview with Dawn that the CPEC is a significant undertaking relevant to Pakistan and Afghanistan. He emphasized that anything that benefits Pakistan will also benefit the entire region (Ranjan, 2015). Furthermore, he expressed Afghanistan's keen interest in CPEC, highlighting its relevance to Afghanistan in multiple ways (Saud, 2018). The Afghan representative also emphasized that joining CPEC would aid Afghanistan in recovering from the long-term damage caused by the war on terrorism. Therefore, Afghanistan's involvement in CPEC presents a significant opportunity for growth and prosperity. Engaging in regional politics and the economy will not only help Afghanistan achieve peace but also ease tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Given that CPEC is an economic corridor that fosters economic interdependence, mutual interest in the project's success will deter conflict. Moreover, CPEC will reduce Afghanistan's dependence on India, which is advantageous for Pakistan. Consequently, this will eventually lead to the resolution of border disputes between Pakistan and India, as well as between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

The "China development model" refers to the economic and political system China has implemented over the past few decades, which has resulted in significant economic growth and development in China. While China's economic and political system may have some positive effects on neighboring countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, it is important to note that the extent to which it can bring peace and stability is not entirely clear.

China has been investing heavily in infrastructure projects in Pakistan and Afghanistan, which could potentially bring economic development and stability to these countries. For example, China is investing billions of dollars in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a network of roads, railways, and pipelines connecting China's western province of Xinjiang to the Pakistani port of Gwadar. This project could potentially boost Pakistan's economy and create jobs, leading to greater stability in the region.

Similarly, China has also been investing in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan, such as constructing a railway line connecting Afghanistan to China. These projects could bring economic development and stability to Afghanistan, which has been struggling with conflict and instability for decades.

However, it is important to note that while such investments may positively affect these countries' economic development, they may not necessarily bring about peace and stability. Political instability, corruption, and ongoing conflict can all hinder the positive effects of economic development. Additionally, the involvement of external powers such as China in the political affairs of these countries could potentially exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts.

In summary, while China's economic and political system may have some positive effects on neighboring countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, the extent to which it can bring peace and stability to these countries is not entirely clear. The success of such investments will depend on various factors, including the political climate, the effectiveness of governance, and ongoing conflicts in the region.

China's investment in infrastructure projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the construction of a railway line connecting Afghanistan to China is part of its broader foreign policy strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI aims to connect China with countries across Asia, Europe, and Africa through infrastructure development and investment.

In the case of Pakistan, the CPEC is expected to create thousands of jobs and bring economic development to some of Pakistan's most underdeveloped regions. The project includes the construction of highways, railways, and pipelines and the development of Gwadar port. Gwadar is strategically located near the Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant portion of the world's oil supply passes, giving it the potential to become a major trading hub. However, there are concerns about the impact of the CPEC on Pakistan's sovereignty, given that the project is largely funded and controlled by China.

Similarly, China's investment in infrastructure projects in Afghanistan could bring about economic development and stability. The proposed railway line connecting Afghanistan to China would pass through some of Afghanistan's most unstable regions, which could help to promote economic development and stability in these areas. However, the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan and the presence of various armed groups could pose significant challenges to the success of such projects.

It is also worth noting that China's involvement in the political affairs of these countries could potentially exacerbate existing tensions and conflicts. In the case of Pakistan, China's close relationship with Pakistan has been a source of tension with India, Pakistan's neighbor, and long-time rival. Similarly, China's involvement in Afghanistan could create tension with other regional powers, such as the United States and Russia.

Overall, while China's investment in infrastructure projects in Pakistan and Afghanistan could potentially bring about economic development and stability, there are also risks and challenges associated with such investments. The success of these projects will depend on various factors, including the political climate, the effectiveness of governance, and ongoing conflicts in the region.

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