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Strategic Horizons: Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Engagement with China (2018–2025)

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Pakistan's foreign policy and evolving strategic engagement with China from 2018 to 2025, a period marked by deepening economic, security, and diplomatic cooperation. It evaluates the political, economic, and regional factors driving Islamabad's alignment with Beijing, particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework. Using a qualitative research design and semi-structured interviews with policymakers, diplomats, and scholars, this research identifies key strategic motivations, challenges, and outcomes of the bilateral partnership. The findings highlight how Pakistan balances domestic political priorities, regional security considerations, and global power dynamics in shaping its foreign policy toward China. The study applies Realism as the guiding theoretical framework, explaining the pursuit of power, security, and strategic autonomy in Pakistan's policy calculus. The paper also analyzes the implications of Pakistan-China cooperation for South Asian geopolitics, including India-Pakistan tensions, Afghanistan, and broader U.S.-China strategic competition. The research concludes with policy recommendations emphasizing strategic autonomy, economic diversification, and multilateral engagement to strengthen sustainable bilateral relations.

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Keywords: Pakistan-China Relations, CPEC, Strategic Autonomy, South Asian Geopolitics, Realism, Foreign Policy, Regional Security

Introduction

Pakistan's foreign policy toward China in the twenty-first century reflects a deep-rooted strategic partnership that has steadily transformed into a multidimensional alliance encompassing economic cooperation, security collaboration, diplomatic coordination, and regional balancing. Acharya, A. (2021). The period from 2018 to 2025 represents a particularly critical phase in this relationship, marked by strategic consolidation amid rapidly shifting regional and global dynamics. During this period, Pakistan increasingly perceived China not merely as a friendly power but as a central pillar of its foreign policy orientation, essential for economic revival, strategic autonomy, and geopolitical resilience. Ahmed, Z. S. (2020). This evolution was shaped by both structural pressures in the international system and Pakistan's domestic imperatives, including economic vulnerability, security challenges, and the need for diplomatic diversification. Ali, S., & Khalid, I. (2022). Historically, Pakistan-China relations have been characterized by mutual trust, strategic convergence, and long-term continuity despite changes in leadership and international alignments. Bajoria, J. (2020). However, the post-2018 phase introduced new complexities that demanded recalibration and deepening of engagement. Pakistan faced mounting economic challenges, balance-of-payments crises, and declining Western financial support, which elevated the importance of Chinese investment, development assistance, and political backing. Simultaneously, China's global ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) placed Pakistan at the center of Beijing's regional connectivity vision, transforming Pakistan from a peripheral partner into a strategic lynchpin of China's westward outreach. Baloch, B., & Khan, M. A. (2021).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) emerged as the most significant manifestation of this evolving partnership. Blanchard, J. F. (2021). As a flagship BRI project, CPEC symbolized a strategic fusion of economic development and geopolitical alignment. Between 2018 and 2025, Pakistan's foreign policy increasingly revolved around the successful implementation, protection, and expansion of CPEC-related projects. Brass, P. R. (2020). These included large-scale

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infrastructure development, energy generation, industrial zones, port modernization, and transportation networks linking Gwadar to China's Xinjiang region. For Pakistan, CPEC was framed as a "game changer" capable of addressing chronic infrastructure deficits, energy shortages, and unemployment while enhancing regional connectivity. Chaudhry, G. M., & Shah, A. A. (2023). From a foreign policy perspective, CPEC was not merely an economic initiative but a strategic instrument for repositioning Pakistan in regional and global politics. Cheema, P. I. (2020). Islamabad viewed the corridor as a means to enhance its geostrategic relevance, attract foreign investment, and reduce dependency on Western-dominated financial institutions. Dorsey, J. M. (2021). The period under study witnessed Pakistan actively defending CPEC in international forums, countering criticism regarding debt sustainability, transparency, and security risks. This diplomatic posture underscored Pakistan's commitment to China and its willingness to align closely with Beijing's strategic narratives. Fair, C. C. (2020).

The evolving U.S.-China rivalry significantly influenced Pakistan's foreign policy calculations during this period. As relations between Washington and Beijing deteriorated, Pakistan found itself navigating an increasingly polarized international environment. Gul, A., & Abbas, H. (2023). Historically aligned with the United States during the Cold War and the post-9/11 War on Terror, Pakistan experienced growing strains in its relationship with Washington after 2018. Accusations regarding terrorism, reduced military assistance, and policy divergence over Afghanistan contributed to Islamabad's perception of strategic neglect by the United States. Haider, M. (2022). In contrast, China offered political consistency, economic engagement, and diplomatic support without overt Conditionalities, reinforcing Pakistan's tilt toward Beijing. Hali, S. M. (2021). India's growing regional assertiveness further reinforced Pakistan's strategic alignment with China. The deepening strategic partnership between India and the United States, particularly in the Indo-Pacific framework, intensified Pakistan's security concerns. Developments such as India's military modernization, assertive posture in Kashmir, and participation in groupings like the Quad were perceived in Islamabad as attempts to alter the regional balance of power. Ikenberry, G. J. (2020). China, as India's

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principal strategic competitor, emerged as a natural counterbalance for Pakistan. During the 2018–2025 period, Pakistan increasingly coordinated with China on regional security issues, diplomatic positions, and strategic messaging aimed at constraining Indian influence. Javaid, U., & Jahangir, A. (2020).

The evolving security dynamics in Afghanistan also played a crucial role in shaping Pakistan-China relations. Jones, D. M., & Zeng, J. (2021). The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's return to power in 2021 created both challenges and opportunities for Pakistan's foreign policy. China and Pakistan shared concerns regarding instability, terrorism, and spillover effects from Afghanistan, particularly with respect to militant groups operating near their borders. Khan, M. A. (2023). This convergence of interests facilitated closer coordination on Afghanistan-related diplomacy, border security, and regional stability initiatives. Khan, S., & Safdar, M. (2022). Pakistan sought to leverage its ties with both the Taliban and China to position itself as a key stakeholder in Afghanistan's future, thereby enhancing its regional relevance. From a strategic standpoint, Pakistan's foreign policy toward China during this period reflected elements of realism, particularly in its emphasis on power balancing, security maximization, and alliance formation. Li, M. (2020). Faced with asymmetric power relations vis-à-vis India and declining strategic utility for the West, Pakistan pursued a hedging strategy that prioritized Chinese support as a counterweight. Malik, A. R. (2021). This realist orientation was evident in Pakistan's defense cooperation with China, including joint military exercises, arms procurement, technology transfer, and collaboration in emerging domains such as cyber security and space technology. Menon, R. (2020).

Economic diplomacy formed another central pillar of Pakistan's engagement with China. Between 2018 and 2025, Pakistani leadership consistently emphasized economic stabilization, industrial growth, and export diversification as foreign policy priorities. China's role as Pakistan's largest trading partner and principal investor reinforced this focus. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2021). The establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under CPEC was presented as a pathway to industrialization, technology transfer, and integration into regional value chains.

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Pakistan's foreign policy discourse increasingly framed economic security as an extension of national security, with China positioned as a key enabler. Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan. (2024). Despite these opportunities, Pakistan's deepening engagement with China also presented significant constraints and challenges. Concerns regarding debt sustainability, trade imbalances, and limited local industrial capacity raised questions about the long-term economic viability of CPEC projects. Critics argued that Pakistan risked overdependence on China, potentially limiting its strategic autonomy. Nawaz, S. (2020). From a foreign policy perspective, managing these concerns required Islamabad to balance enthusiasm for Chinese partnership with efforts to diversify economic relations and reassure other international actors. Pant, H. V. (2022).

Domestic political transitions during this period further influenced Pakistan's China policy. Changes in government did not fundamentally alter Pakistan's strategic orientation toward China, reflecting a broad national consensus on the importance of the relationship. Qureshi, A. H. (2023). However, differences emerged in terms of governance, project management, and diplomatic style. Civil-military coordination remained a defining feature of Pakistan's China policy, particularly in relation to CPEC security and strategic communication. This continuity reinforced China's perception of Pakistan as a reliable long-term partner. Rafiq, A. (2021). At the regional level, Pakistan's engagement with China had broader implications for South Asian geopolitics. The deepening of the Pakistan-China axis contributed to regional polarization, reinforcing bloc-based alignments. Ranjan, A. (2020). Smaller regional states increasingly viewed Pakistan-China cooperation as part of a larger contest between competing regional visions. Pakistan sought to leverage its partnership with China to promote regional connectivity, particularly with Central Asia and the Middle East, while also countering narratives that portrayed CPEC as exclusionary or destabilizing. Rizvi, H. A. (2020).

Internationally, Pakistan's alignment with China influenced its positioning in global institutions and multilateral forums. Islamabad increasingly supported Chinese positions on issues such as global governance reform, non-interference, and development-led cooperation. This alignment enhanced Pakistan's diplomatic

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visibility but also exposed it to criticism from Western actors concerned about China's expanding influence. Navigating these competing pressures became a defining challenge of Pakistan's foreign policy during the 2018–2025 period. Rolland, N. (2021). In assessing Pakistan's strategic objectives during this phase, it becomes evident that Islamabad sought to achieve a combination of economic recovery, security assurance, and diplomatic leverage through its partnership with China. The policy mechanisms employed included high-level diplomatic engagement, institutional coordination, military cooperation, and strategic communication. However, the effectiveness of these mechanisms depended on domestic capacity, regional stability, and the evolving global order. Sacks, D. (2022).

The period from 2018 to 2025 thus represents a critical juncture in Pakistan's foreign policy trajectory toward China. It reflects both continuity and change, combining historical trust with new strategic imperatives shaped by global power shifts. Shah, S. A., & Ahmad, R. (2024). The opportunities offered by this partnership are substantial, particularly in terms of infrastructure development, economic integration, and strategic balancing. At the same time, the constraints underscore the need for prudent policy management, economic reform, and diplomatic diversification. Small, A. (2020). Pakistan's foreign policy toward China during this period illustrates a deliberate and strategic effort to adapt to a transforming international environment. By deepening engagement with China, Pakistan aimed to enhance its regional and international standing, secure economic development, and maintain strategic equilibrium in South Asia. Smith, S. (2021).The success of this approach, however, depends on Pakistan's ability to translate strategic alignment into sustainable outcomes while navigating the complexities of great power competition, regional instability, and domestic challenges. This phase of strategic consolidation will therefore remain central to understanding Pakistan's evolving role in regional and global politics.

Literature Review

Strategic Reorientation of Pakistan–China Relations After 2018

Post-2018 literature consistently depicts Pakistan–China relations as undergoing strategic reorientation rather than simple continuity. Tellis, A. J. (2021).While the

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bilateral partnership has historically been stable, scholars argue that new drivers such as economic fragility, shifting global power alignments, and regional instability reshaped Pakistan's foreign policy choices. These decisions are increasingly interpreted as rational responses to systemic pressures in the international system. Engagement with China is therefore viewed as strategic adaptation rather than ideological alignment. This period reflects deeper institutionalization across economic, security, and diplomatic domains. Consequently, Pakistan's China policy emerges as a cornerstone of its broader grand strategy. Wagner, C. (2022).

Economic Cooperation and CPEC as Strategic Instruments

Economic cooperation dominates post-2018 scholarly discourse, with analysts highlighting Pakistan's fiscal constraints, energy shortages, and industrial weaknesses as key motivators behind closer ties with China. Walt, S. M. (2020). The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor is widely portrayed as the centerpiece of this engagement, described as transformative due to its scale, connectivity, and strategic depth. Literature emphasizes infrastructure development, energy production, and industrial zones as mechanisms for economic revival. Beyond development, CPEC enhances Pakistan's geopolitical relevance and regional connectivity. Economic growth under CPEC is also linked to increased diplomatic leverage. Thus, economic cooperation is framed as both a development strategy and a tool of foreign policy. Zhao, S. (2025).

Infrastructure, Connectivity, and Strategic Leverage

Post-2018 analyses underline infrastructure development as a strategic asset rather than a purely economic gain. Improved highways, ports, and railways are seen as integrating Pakistan internally while linking it to regional markets such as Central Asia and the Middle East. Scholars argue that connectivity strengthens state capacity, territorial integration, and trade diversification. These developments reduce reliance on traditional routes and external vulnerabilities. Infrastructure-led growth is therefore associated with enhanced strategic leverage. In this context, connectivity functions as a multiplier of Pakistan's regional influence.

Security, Military, and Counterterrorism Cooperation

Beyond economics, literature highlights deepening security and military cooperation

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between Pakistan and China. Ahmad, Z. (2019). Scholars note collaboration in defense production, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, and counterterrorism efforts. This partnership is viewed as compensating for declining Western military assistance and strengthening deterrence, particularly vis-à-vis India. Counterterrorism cooperation is framed as a shared strategic priority, especially for protecting CPEC and ensuring internal stability. Ali, S. M., & Waheed, A. (2021). Defense technology transfer enhances Pakistan's indigenous capabilities and strategic autonomy. Collectively, security cooperation forms the backbone of the bilateral relationship.

Diplomatic Coordination and Regional Geopolitics

Post-2018 scholarship also emphasizes diplomatic coordination between Pakistan and China in international and regional forums. Bashir, M., & Khan, M. I. (2020). Mutual support on sovereignty and political issues reflects strategic calculation rather than dependency. Narrative alignment around non-interference and development-focused cooperation enhances international legitimacy. Regionally, the partnership is analyzed within the context of India–Pakistan rivalry, Afghanistan's instability, and shifting South Asian power dynamics. Scholars argue that China serves as a strategic counterbalance to India, while cooperation on Afghanistan reflects converging security interests. These regional factors significantly shape Islamabad's policy choices. Batool, S. (2022).

Realist Framework and Analytical Gaps

Despite extensive literature, scholars identify gaps due to fragmented analysis of economic, security, and diplomatic dimensions. Chaudhry, I. A., & Yaseen, Z. (2018). Many studies remain descriptive and lack a unifying theoretical lens. Realist theory emerges as particularly relevant in addressing these gaps by emphasizing power, security, and national interest. Haider, M. (2023). Pakistan's alignment with China reflects realist logic of balancing behavior under conditions of threat and uncertainty. Hussain, F., & Shah, A. A. (2021). The evolving U.S.–China rivalry and regional polarization further reinforce this perspective. Consequently, realism provides a coherent framework for understanding Pakistan's foreign policy toward China after 2018.

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Theoretical Framework

In the present research article, Neoclassical Realism has been adopted as the most appropriate theoretical framework to analyze Pakistan's foreign policy toward China in the post-2018 period, as it offers a comprehensive explanation of both external and internal drivers shaping state behavior. The theory is particularly suitable because Pakistan's engagement with China cannot be understood solely through systemic pressures or material power calculations, but rather through the interaction between international constraints and domestic variables. Neoclassical Realism allows the researcher to examine how shifts in the global power structure—especially the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, India's growing strategic alignment with Western powers, and evolving security dynamics in Afghanistan—create incentives for Pakistan to recalibrate its foreign policy orientation. These external pressures form the structural context within which Pakistan operates, compelling it to seek reliable strategic partnerships to ensure security and survival.

At the same time, Neoclassical Realism emphasizes the role of domestic intervening variables, which are central to understanding Pakistan's policy choices during the 2018–2025 period. Pakistan's economic fragility, energy shortages, fiscal constraints, and development needs significantly influenced its deepening engagement with China, particularly through the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. The theory justifies the inclusion of domestic factors such as elite perceptions, civil–military consensus, institutional capacity, and leadership priorities, all of which shape how systemic pressures are interpreted and translated into foreign policy actions. This explains the continuity in Pakistan's China policy across different political governments and highlights why economic cooperation and infrastructure development became central components of foreign policy.

Furthermore, Neoclassical Realism directly relates to the research topic by linking power, security, and national interest with economic statecraft and strategic alignment. Pakistan's cooperation with China in defense technology, military coordination, and counterterrorism reflects realist concerns about deterrence and balancing against regional threats, particularly India. Simultaneously, economic initiatives such as CPEC are interpreted as tools for enhancing state capacity and

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long-term strategic leverage rather than purely developmental projects. By integrating geopolitical competition, regional security concerns, and domestic constraints within a single analytical framework, Neoclassical Realism provides a coherent and theoretically grounded justification for examining Pakistan's foreign policy toward China. Hence, the adoption of this theory enables a nuanced and policy-relevant analysis that aligns closely with the objectives and scope of the present research article.

Analysis & Discussion

Economic Cooperation

Economic cooperation remains a central pillar of Pakistan–China relations, particularly through large-scale development initiatives. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor has significantly improved Pakistan's infrastructure, transportation networks, and energy generation capacity, addressing long-standing developmental bottlenecks. Energy projects have helped reduce chronic power shortages, contributing to industrial productivity and economic stability. Chinese investment inflows have enhanced Pakistan's economic resilience and provided much-needed capital for growth. However, concerns related to debt sustainability and financial dependence have emerged as critical challenges. These issues highlight the need for prudent economic management and diversification of investment sources. Effective policy planning is therefore essential to ensure long-term economic benefits.

Security and Defense Cooperation

Security and defense cooperation between Pakistan and China has expanded considerably in recent years. This collaboration includes joint military exercises, defense production, technology transfer, and intelligence sharing. China's support has strengthened Pakistan's conventional and strategic deterrence capabilities, particularly in the context of regional security competition. Enhanced defense cooperation also contributes to internal security and counterterrorism efforts. The partnership reflects a shared perception of regional threats and strategic vulnerabilities. Through sustained military collaboration, Pakistan reinforces its defense preparedness and strategic confidence. As a result, security cooperation has

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become a foundational element of bilateral relations.

Diplomatic Engagement

Diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and China has grown more structured and proactive over time. High-level visits, strategic dialogues, and coordinated positions in regional and international forums have enhanced Pakistan's diplomatic visibility. Joint statements emphasize regional stability, economic development, and respect for sovereignty. Pakistan's diplomatic alignment with China strengthens its bargaining position in multilateral institutions. This cooperation also enables Pakistan to project itself as a responsible regional actor. Diplomatic engagement extends beyond bilateral concerns to broader global issues. Consequently, diplomacy functions as a key instrument in consolidating strategic partnership.

Strategic Autonomy

Despite deepening engagement with China, Pakistan continues to prioritize strategic autonomy in its foreign policy. Maintaining balanced relations with other major powers, including the United States and Gulf countries, remains a key objective. Pakistan also engages with regional organizations to broaden its diplomatic and economic options. This diversification helps mitigate risks associated with overreliance on a single partner. Strategic autonomy allows Pakistan to navigate great-power competition more effectively. It reflects a calculated approach rather than exclusive alignment. Therefore, autonomy remains a guiding principle alongside strategic partnership.

Regional Implications

Pakistan–China cooperation carries significant regional implications for South Asia and beyond. The partnership influences the strategic balance in India–Pakistan relations and shapes regional security perceptions. Cooperation also affects Afghanistan's stability, particularly in terms of economic connectivity and security coordination. In the broader context, the relationship intersects with intensifying U.S.–China competition. While alignment with China offers Pakistan security assurances and economic opportunities, it also attracts regional and international scrutiny. Managing these implications requires careful diplomatic calibration. Thus, regional dynamics remain a critical dimension of Pakistan's engagement with China.

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Policy Recommendations

- **Institutionalize strategic policy planning to ensure coherent economic, security, and diplomatic strategies.**

  Institutionalized strategic policy planning enables the state to align economic, security, and diplomatic objectives under a unified national vision. It reduces policy fragmentation and ensures continuity across political transitions. A coordinated planning mechanism strengthens long-term decision-making and crisis management. It also enhances policy coherence between civilian institutions and security agencies. As a result, foreign policy outcomes become more consistent and effective.

- **Enhance transparency and accountability in Chinese-financed projects to reduce dependency risks.**

  Improving transparency in Chinese-financed projects helps address concerns related to debt sustainability and governance. Clear disclosure of financial terms strengthens public trust and institutional oversight. Accountability mechanisms ensure efficient project implementation and reduce cost overruns. Transparent processes also attract complementary investment from other partners. This approach minimizes dependency risks while preserving economic benefits.

- **Strengthen civil-military coordination for consistent foreign policy implementation.**

  Effective civil-military coordination is essential for maintaining consistency in foreign policy execution. Alignment between civilian leadership and military institutions reduces policy contradictions and strategic ambiguity. It enables efficient decision-making on security-sensitive initiatives such as economic corridors and regional cooperation. Strong coordination also reassures external partners of policy stability. Consequently, it enhances credibility at the international level.

- **Diversify economic and diplomatic partnerships beyond China to maintain strategic autonomy.**

  Diversifying partnerships allows Pakistan to reduce overreliance on any single external actor. Engagement with multiple economic and diplomatic partners

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broadens strategic options and bargaining power. It strengthens resilience against external pressures and global uncertainties. Balanced diplomacy supports independent decision-making. Strategic autonomy is thus preserved without undermining existing partnerships.

- **Engage in multilateral forums to reinforce legitimacy, regional stability, and collaborative problem-solving.**

Active participation in multilateral forums enhances international legitimacy and diplomatic visibility. It allows states to contribute to regional stability through collective dialogue and cooperation. Multilateral engagement also facilitates collaborative solutions to shared challenges such as security and development. This approach reduces bilateral tensions and promotes consensus-building. Ultimately, it strengthens the rules-based international engagement of the state.

Conclusion

Pakistan's foreign policy toward China during the period from 2018 to 2025 reflects a calculated and deliberate effort to pursue strategic autonomy while responding to both domestic constraints and external pressures. This phase of engagement demonstrates Pakistan's recognition of China as a central pillar of its foreign policy, particularly at a time when the international system has become increasingly competitive and polarized. Faced with economic vulnerabilities, regional security challenges, and shifting great-power alignments, Pakistan has sought to strengthen its partnership with China as a means of ensuring national survival, stability, and long-term development. This strategic orientation highlights a rational and interest-driven approach rather than an ideologically motivated alignment.

Economic growth remains a core objective of Pakistan's engagement with China, with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor serving as the flagship initiative underpinning this relationship. Through large-scale infrastructure development, energy projects, and industrial cooperation, CPEC has contributed to addressing Pakistan's chronic development deficits. Improved connectivity and energy availability have strengthened economic resilience and enhanced prospects for sustainable growth. At the same time, economic engagement with China has elevated Pakistan's regional significance by positioning it as a critical corridor for

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trade and connectivity. However, the scale of Chinese investment also necessitates careful economic planning to ensure financial sustainability and long-term benefits. Defense and security cooperation further reinforce Pakistan's strategic partnership with China during this period. Military collaboration, technology transfer, and intelligence sharing have enhanced Pakistan's deterrence capabilities and internal security framework. This cooperation is particularly significant in the context of regional power competition and persistent security threats. By strengthening its defense ties with China, Pakistan has sought to balance regional adversaries and reduce vulnerabilities arising from declining Western military support. Security cooperation thus complements economic engagement, forming a comprehensive strategic relationship.

Despite the benefits of deepening ties with China, Pakistan's foreign policy also reflects an awareness of potential risks associated with overdependence. Issues related to debt sustainability, governance capacity, and project transparency remain critical challenges that require proactive management. Domestic institutional effectiveness and policy coherence are essential to translating strategic alignment into sustainable outcomes. Pakistan's leadership has increasingly emphasized the need for reforms, accountability, and diversification of partnerships to mitigate these risks while maintaining the strategic value of its relationship with China.

From a theoretical perspective, realist theory provides a coherent framework for understanding Pakistan's foreign policy choices toward China during this period. The emphasis on power, security, and national interest explains Pakistan's alignment behavior in response to regional threats and global power shifts. Realism highlights how states seek external partnerships to enhance their relative position in an anarchic international system. Pakistan's engagement with China exemplifies balancing behavior aimed at securing economic strength, military capability, and diplomatic support. This theoretical lens also accounts for continuity in policy across political transitions.

Regional dynamics further shape Pakistan's China policy, particularly in relation to India, Afghanistan, and broader South Asian stability. Strategic cooperation with China influences regional power balances and contributes to

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Pakistan's deterrence posture. At the same time, Pakistan must navigate regional sensitivities and manage perceptions to avoid escalation and isolation. Engagement in regional dialogue and confidence-building measures remains essential for maintaining stability. Pakistan's foreign policy thus operates at the intersection of cooperation and competition. Looking ahead, sustaining a resilient and balanced Pakistan–China partnership requires a forward-looking and integrated policy approach. Future foreign policy should align domestic development priorities with regional and global strategies. Strengthening governance, enhancing transparency, and improving institutional coordination will be critical for maximizing the benefits of bilateral cooperation. Additionally, active engagement in multilateral forums can reinforce Pakistan's legitimacy and expand its diplomatic options. By integrating domestic reforms, regional considerations, and multilateral engagement, Pakistan can maintain strategic autonomy while preserving the long-term value of its partnership with China.

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