

Pak-China Cooperation in Addressing Security Challenges to CPEC

Fahad Khan

M.Phil. Scholar, Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar.

faddkahn@gmail.com

Hussain Khan

M.Phil. Scholar, Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar.

hussainkhangcp@gmail.com

Rahmat Shah
(Corresponding Author)

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Pakistan Studies, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology, Peshawar.

rahmathy002@gmail.com

Abstract: *The CPEC under the Belt and Road Initiative represents a central element of the China-Pakistan partnership and plays a leading role in its strategy. This article studies several security challenges facing CPEC, including conflicts within Pakistan, disputes in the region and weak infrastructure. The corridor crosses parts of Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan that are often attacked by militants and those seeking independence. Moreover, tensions with India make the security situation more unpredictable and create additional threats that delay project works. The study looks at how Pakistan and China have worked together to address these security risks. It illustrates some of the ways nations worked together such as Pakistan developing its Special Security Division, exchanging intelligence information, developing technology in cybersecurity and cooperating diplomatically. Studies of major security incidents prove that the threat is changing and that nations are adapting quickly. The article looks at the difficulties that arise when trying to keep the community safe and seeking local support and outlines barriers to success. Moreover, the research suggests actions to improve international cooperation using advanced technology, improved institutions, increased community involvement and more regional talks. Findings from the research suggest that CPEC and its large-scale impact in the region can only be achieved through solid and multi-layered cooperation between Pakistan and China. The topics here include the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the main security issues, ability to cooperate between Pakistan and China, insurgency events, strains in relations and difficulties in securing infrastructure along the route.*

Keywords: CPEC, Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan, China, Pakistan, insurgency

Introduction

CPEC is regarded as a key part of China's BRI, indicating a new high level of bond between China and Pakistan. In 2015, China and Pakistan officially started CPEC to link Xinjiang to the port of Gwadar, support trade and change the regional and economic environment of South Asia. It is planned as a group of roads, railways, pipelines and industrial sites which would strengthen the economies and improve unity of both nations and neighboring countries. Nonetheless, many security challenges put off the successful completion of the CPEC projects and threaten its future.

Over the years, the relationship between Pakistan and China has enjoyed deep ties and support, referred to as "all-weather friendship" (Khan, 2017). Recently, the diplomatic and military cooperation between China and Pakistan has grown even stronger, becoming the main framework for their economic

partnership which is focused on the CPEC project (Rana, 2019). Besides boosting the economy, the corridor helps stabilize an unstable part of the world where neighboring countries compete. Besides, working together economically can be challenging since various threats exist, including acts of insurgency, fighting between groups and geopolitical struggles (Ishaque, 2019).

In Balochistan, Pakistan, separatist groups are threatening the projects associated with CPEC, since they believe the projects threaten their rights and economy (Malik, 2020). Baloch militants are known for attacking security personnel and construction sites in the region to prevent work, hoping to bring attention to what they stand for worldwide. Increased tension among ethnic groups, exclusion from political processes and income inequality in the region contribute to its unstable security. Furthermore, some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the former FATA have difficulties with groups who are against the corridor and foreigners supporting it (Jan, 2019).

In addition, the big geopolitical issues in South Asia, involving India especially, bring CPEC into the spotlight, as they consider it a threat since the corridor passes through disputed areas such as Gilgit-Baltistan and could influence the region's power (Khan, 2017). The situation is made more challenging when world powers and countries near China are concerned about its influence. They create difficulties in diplomacy and have real effects in security such as sneak attacks, source exposures, sabotage and threats related to cyber wars on projects and facilities developed under CPEC (Wang, 2021).

These various security issues have pushed Pakistan and China to set up efficient ways to protect CPEC. Through joint security, member countries work together by exchanging intelligence, planning. Pakistan's paramilitary and military forces are stationed in important places to help secure the safety of Chinese workers and their investments (Rana, 2019). China has boosted its diplomatic footprint and helped nations with technology for surveillance and fighting terrorism. Both countries understand that CPEC's success depends on keeping the area safe and secure.

CPEC, along with its benefits to both countries, can greatly change the entire region's development. Constructing this corridor ensures that China can import energy safely and conveniently, offers Pakistan advanced infrastructure and improves the country's access to world markets. If the corridor succeeds, it might encourage cooperation among nations from the three regions. Yet, for this potential to become true, security problems must be controlled through consistent and flexible teamwork (GoP, 2018).

It looks at different security threats that CPEC deals with and studies the ways in which Pakistan and China have worked together to solve them. It considers the key factors affecting security cooperation and how they influence the overall course of the project. The paper evaluates different security incidents and responses in order to find what works and what needs to be improved. Lastly, the study suggests increasing cooperation between Pakistan and China by enhancing technological advancements, sharing crucial intelligence and strengthening community involvement for the benefit of CPEC.

What CPEC entails

The CPEC project aims to improve the joining of China and Pakistan, touching off a wider influence on the region's economic growth. Called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it was set up in 2015 by China as a leading part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to link Xinjiang in China to Gwadar port in Pakistan by roads, railways, pipelines and special zones (Government of Pakistan, 2018). This corridor is expected to cover almost 3,000 kilometers and will provide better ways for the movement of goods, energy and people and encourage integration between South and Central Asia (Rana, 2019).

CPEC aims to give China a direct link to the Arabian Sea, making it less dependent on the South China Sea and the Strait of Malacca for its maritime trade. China uses the route to reduce travel time for its energy shipments from the Middle East and increases its stature by being present in Pakistan's coast. Through CPEC, Pakistan hopes to enhance its infrastructure, supply more energy and boost economy

as a result of foreign investment and new job opportunities (United Nations Development Programme, 2018).

It is built with various essential parts. The country's transportation network consists of roads and railways that connect various regions in Pakistan and between Pakistan and China. In Pakistan, CPEC focuses on coal-based, hydroelectric and renewable energy facilities to ease the country's regular electricity problems. Ideally, SEZs will support industrial expansion and promote manufacturing for export which can help with sharing technology and enhancing skills (VOA, 2022).

The large-scale nature of CPEC has drawn attention from across the world, encouraging countries in the region to collaborate more. It can improve Pakistan's economy by integrating areas like Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan with both national and global commercial activities. Furthermore, CPEC is anticipated to help these regions by improving education, healthcare and building community development initiatives (Rana, 2019).

However, problems such as financial issues, administrative setbacks and above all, safety concerns have delayed many CPEC projects (Hussain & Zhang, 2021). Since the corridor passes through delicate and unstable parts of Pakistan, it requires special safety measures to secure all necessary investments and the team members (Nawaz, 2018). Steps taken by the Pakistani government include assigning protective forces and forming linkages with Chinese officials to safely implement the CPEC project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 2019).

Ultimately, the CPEC project is about Pakistan and China joining forces to boost the region's economy and shape its political situation. It can only become transformative when it addresses both development and security issues (Z. Rana, 2019). It explains why CPEC is so important and directs readers to the details on its security and cooperation which support its growth.

CPEC Faces Security Challenges

There are many security issues in the area of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), making it difficult for the project to be implemented successfully. They are caused by domestic conflicts, tension in the region and the important infrastructure itself being at risk. It is necessary to recognize these security issues to design strong cooperation between Pakistan and China to secure CPEC investments and people.

Militant and separatist groups active in Pakistani Balochistan are among the biggest dangers that CPEC faces within the country. For Baloch nationalists in the province, the corridor is seen as a tool that promotes exploitation and causes a change in the area's population, threatening their cultural and political standing. They have carried out bombings, attacks and sabotage against the CPEC, its staff and Chinese workers. Because of the insurgency, projects have fallen behind schedule and become more expensive because of the additional costs for security (News, 2025).

Apart from Balochistan, there have been reports of occasional violence in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and some areas in Gilgit-Baltistan. CPEC is seen by factions like those in the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) as an increase in foreign influence and interference. Being close to Afghanistan and the instability there leads to more difficulties and risks in these regions (Jan, 2022).

The political relationships between countries in South Asia also contribute to this region's challenges. CPEC is located in places disputed by India, for example in Gilgit-Baltistan, that India still sees as part of Jammu and Kashmir. India believes that the corridor will help China gain more power and influence in the region (Khan, 2017). Because of this rivalry, there is more diplomatic tension, an increase in proxy conflicts and cyberattacks working against the project. Other countries in the area and around the globe also notice the China-Pakistan alliance because it appears to alter the balance of power in South Asia (Wang 2019).

Apart from security risks from groups and countries, infrastructure built under CPEC is also at risk from actions by saboteurs and hackers. Because there are so many roads, pipelines and important energy facilities, it is necessary to guard them against any attacks that could lead to disruptions or property damage. Since many infrastructure and communication systems are managed online, cybersecurity is now more crucial than ever. Pakistan and China are aware of these dangers and have developed technology to identify and prevent computer attacks (Firstpost, 2025).

It is difficult to ensure security because CPEC is a large and inclusive project. Because of the place's difficulty and harshness, protecting and monitoring the entire area becomes a problem and is very costly. Security forces and intelligence must be deployed widely and coordinated to ensure the protection of many Chinese workers and engineers. In addition, local populations have often protested due to their dissatisfaction with how the economy impacts them and the environment (Rana, 2019).

Pakistan's response to these problems was to launch the Special Security Division (SSD) which guards and secures the CPEC system and its workers. The SSD works together with the Pakistan Army and Chinese security agencies to ensure overall security in the region. Several defenses such as sharing information and responding rapidly, have been improved to prevent and deal with threats. Chinese officials also provide protection for their compatriots and investments, showing the strong level of collaboration between the countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 2019).

Such steps have not eliminated all the challenges encountered. When the government's stability is threatened and when human rights issues erupt, it complicates security work and sometimes causes problems with local communities. While strict security is important, Chinese authorities must maintain good relationships with local groups for CPEC to operate for years to come.

To sum up, CPEC encounters various significant security issues, from issues with insurgents, fierce international competition, to unstable infrastructure. To face these threats, we must work together by using military efforts, develop new innovative technologies, cooperate with our intelligence agencies and engage with the community. Considering the changing situation, it is necessary for Pakistan and China to continue working together to safeguard the economic corridor and reach its full potential.

The Partnership Between China and Pakistan for Security

The main focus of their collaboration is creating joint security systems, making it easier for them to address threats on the corridor. Pakistan has created the Special Security Division (SSD) to closely monitor and protect important infrastructure, workers and Chinese citizens involved in CPEC work. The SSD consists of groups of armed forces that are placed in important regions such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where most resistance activities by insurgents occur. The specialized force collaborates with the Pakistan Army, using their skills and knowledge to ensure safety for development projects (AP News, 2024).

China has returned the favor by sending guards to keep Chinese staff and resources in Pakistan safe. Being close to the action makes it easier for China to protect its investments or rather, China's engagement on the ground demonstrates its strong dedication to the safety of its investments (published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, in 2019). Moreover, higher authorities from both countries regularly have discussions to ensure their policies are in sync, to share intelligence and to plan their actions together. The protection of the corridor is highlighted in important agreements between the United States and Mexico (Wang 2019).

The exchange of intelligence plays a vital role in the relationship between Pakistan and China. If CPEC officials receive on-time updates on threats, they can take action against militants and groups not supporting CPEC. Canada and the United States continue to cooperate regarding cybersecurity in protecting the digital infrastructure and networks that serve the corridor. Cooperation in this way is needed now more than ever, as the main threats are becoming more complex (Tribune, 2021).

Both countries have cooperated in diplomatic efforts to challenge the negative and threatening views directed at CPEC. China tries to demonstrate that the project benefits South Asian countries and aims at cooperating with them one by one in security matters to calm regional uncertainties. In addition, Pakistan works with local people and groups to encourage acceptance of security efforts. A socio-political approach helps to address the problems causing people to join insurgency groups, in addition to actions taken by hard security forces.

Sharing technology between China and Pakistan has improved security under CPEC. Both countries are using drones, satellite monitoring and improved communication to keep a close watch along the corridor. The introduction of these tools helps with monitoring distant and tough places and allows for swift handling of incidents. Additionally, China has provided Pakistan with guidance, skills and tools in curbing terrorism which helped stabilize unstable zones in the country (Rana, 2019).

While the cooperation works well, there are still issues to address. Having different goals and approaches often causes disagreements and regular talks are needed to bring both parties into agreement. Organizing the construction of an infrastructure corridor in challenging terrain is a big challenge. Providing security to infrastructure and thousands of Chinese people living in other countries requires continual attention and readiness (Khan, 2017).

Also, it is important to continue gaining local support. Insensitive use of security forces and the military may push locals further away from the government. They acknowledge that including community programs in their plans helps to reduce the threat and earn the trust of local communities. Measures like creating jobs for local communities, working on basic infrastructure and ensuring social welfare are added to improve CPEC's work environment (Wang, 2019).

All in all, Pakistani and Chinese security collaboration on CPEC takes different forms such as coordinated military activities, intelligence sharing, work done by politicians, growth in technology and strategies for society and politics. Because both nations consider the corridor important, they have made significant efforts to overcome the many security problems it encounters. Consolidating and building on our cooperation will be important with the expected growth and additional interest that CPEC receives.

Reviewing Events Involving Security Incidents and the Response

The presence of many security incidents since the start of CPEC points to the unstable nature of the project's operating environment. They point out the many threats and also explain how Pak-China cooperation has developed to deal with these issues. Here, we will look at some important attacks and describe the security efforts that were put in place to deal with the risks.

In April 2017, a convoy bringing Chinese engineers to Gwadar was attacked by armed militants. There were casualties in the attack which underlined that Chinese workers on CPEC projects in Balochistan were vulnerable (The Express Tribune, 2021). The accident drew attention from around the world about safety risks in the corridor and as a result, Pakistan and China made efforts to fortify the area's security. So, Pakistan assigned more Special Security Division personnel and improved security monitoring near Gwadar and other site locations (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 2019).

In May 2018, insurgents attacked a bus with Chinese workers approaching Panjgur in Balochistan. After the attack, several people were injured and Baloch separatist groups claimed responsibility for the attack because they oppose the corridor. The continued attacks on Chinese nationals exposed a clear need for an approach that enabled police to react, operate through intelligence and reach out to the community all at once to decrease friction about CPEC among residents.

In today's world, cyber threats are causing just as many concerns as physical threats. In 2019, it was reported that cyberattacks were carried out to disrupt CPEC's infrastructure and networks. Power grid and data management systems matching in importance to the project were targeted by such cyber-

attacks, proving that the threat is not limited to regular combat activities. Consequently, Pakistan and China have brought together groups of officials who continuously work on detecting and dealing with cyber-attacks (Wang, 2019).

Based on these attacks, the government and security agencies in Pakistan are making improvements to handle future situations. An illustration is the establishment of the SSD after it became vital to have a team in place to monitor and secure CPEC projects around the clock. Local police, the military and Chinese security work alongside the SSD to provide a strong defense. Spatial deployment is often said to have decreased the rate of successful attacks and given Chinese investors and workers peace of mind.

Pakistan and China have also created platforms where they exchange intelligence information. Thanks to these platforms, relevant information is shared fast, helping to handle possible issues and avoid future attacks. Drones and images captured from satellites are being used to closely watch sensitive spots and find any suspicious actions in advance.

Campaigns have been developed that aim to tackle some of the main factors behind insecurity. Local development, education and employment projects were introduced by both governments in areas affected by insurgents. These steps are taken to discourage militant groups and ensure a safe environment for CPEC.

Notwithstanding these actions, there are still some obstacles. There are still random occurrences of attacks which proves that the threats remain present. At the same time, how Pakistan and China address these challenges proves they are devoted to completing this project and underlines how essential it is for both nations to work closely.

Problems and boundaries when working together

Though Pakistan and China are joining forces well for the success of CPEC, some issues and difficulties still affect how they work together. Such problems are caused by factors such as politics, operations and culture and they need solutions more advanced than just traditional approaches from the military.

There are moments when different political priorities between the countries result in tension. Although both are committed to CPEC, the way they secure it is not exactly the same. Due to its domestic situation, Pakistan has to consider security issues while focusing on human rights for Balochistan and other regions that are politically unstable. China prefers strict security measures and protects its economy vigilantly, meaning they sometimes use different approaches and strategies in handling local concerns (Khan, 2017).

It is challenging for people and equipment to travel and work in the difficult and hilly areas where CPEC passes through. As the corridor runs through mountainous and remote areas with lacking infrastructure, it is challenging to watch it closely and react promptly (Rana, 2019). It takes a lot of planning and effort to guard highways, railways, pipelines and various energy operations which may result in some delays in dealing with security matters.

The region also experiences challenges due to the impact of local unrest and economic concerns. Dense security measures might work well, but could negatively impact local people if effective communication and other support are lacking (Wang, 2019). Believing they are neglected and get no aid from development efforts, local people may begin movements that threaten security. Getting the right balance between security in the business sector and reaching out to the community is difficult for governments.

Although sharing information and intelligence has improved, it is now still slowed down by paperwork and lack of trust among agencies. Security data's sensitivity makes it necessary to keep it private, limiting both information sharing and the speed at which that information is distributed. Swift exchange of intelligence across departments is a difficult situation that keeps coming up.

Geopolitical issues in the world can also make it tough for countries to get along. The conflict

surrounding India and Afghanistan more often creates additional issues in the security setup. Other foreign parties could use local issues and unrest to interrupt CPEC, creating problems that the two countries cannot fully address (Khan, 2017). To overcome these world political problems, one must act wisely with both diplomacy and security.

Lastly, security operations can be less effective due to technology and resource issues. Neither country has stopped paying for or updating its surveillance and counterterrorism technology, but these advances must be made repeatedly under tough circumstances (Li & Wang, 2019). Getting the right skills into these positions is difficult and very resource-demanding.

Overall, China and Pakistan cooperate well on CPEC security, although they have to constantly adapt and use various strategies to overcome many challenges. To secure the corridor for a long time, political sensitivities must be considered, cooperation among agencies should get better, greater community support is needed and external geopolitical pressures should be handled well.

Expectations for the Future and Recommendations

In order to address the security issues linked to CPEC, Pakistan and China should refine their existing arrangements and think of creative ways to address new dangers. To sustain and secure the success of CPEC, cooperation should remain strong and flexible.

There is some good news on the horizon with the increase in sharing intelligence and responses to events across international partners. Since cybersecurity threats are getting more advanced, Pakistan and China should ensure to use modern technologies and collaborate more on this subject. Making sure CPEC has dedicated cyber defense teams should help reduce the likelihood of digital attacks.

Communities should be encouraged to further boost their engagement efforts. Strategies that improve social, economic and employment situations can deal with causing factors of violence and unrest. Ensuring that local communities in Balochistan trust the Chinese government is key to supporting the development of CPEC.

Creating joint agreements and task forces makes it simpler for two countries' security agencies to cooperate. Meeting regularly at a high level and training together will increase both parties' understanding and improve the way work is carried out (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, China, 2019). By using this method, both nations agree on what they need to focus on in the area of security.

Greater cooperation among neighboring countries could contribute to further securing CPEC. By encouraging trust between South Asian countries, we can decrease the political pressures that indirectly play a role in the corridor (Wang, 2019). It is useful for states to participate in multilateral antiterrorism and land border management along with their own security collaborations.

In short, CPEC security will improve if we rely on advancements in technology, focus on local people, ensure institutions are strong and collaborate with neighboring regions. Following these suggestions will help both Pakistan and China in protecting CPEC and also work towards greater peace and progress in the area.

Conclusion

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) reflects the strong partnership between the two nations and could transform the economies and political situations in the region. Nevertheless, the corridor will only achieve success if security challenges facing its infrastructure, employees and main goals are well managed. These issues come from within a country, from conflicts in the area and from the challenges of big projects.

Pakistan and China are working together to deal with these security issues. By using security frameworks together, sharing information, sending their armies together and working on technology, both countries are proving they are committed to guarding the projects of CPEC. By setting up the

Special Security Division in Pakistan and providing on-site security in China, both countries have demonstrated how strong this cooperation is.

Yet, there are still issues in keeping security firms under control and ensuring the community's necessary involvement and progress. The situation is further complicated by political issues, practical difficulties and influences from outside countries. Tackling these difficulties involves always adapting, improving state institutions and increasing efforts in diplomacy.

In order to sustain the corridor's security, we should adapt technology, be more involved in local areas, shape effective partnerships and encourage communication across the region. Improving these strategies will help stabilize the environment needed for CPEC to make a difference.

All in all, ensuring the safety of CPEC is vital for the region and involves continuous, cooperative and varied efforts by all countries. Thankfully, the long-standing friendship with China helps Pakistan and China both overcome these hurdles and protect the corridor's future in attracting more development and ties among nations.

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