

## The ties that bind

Editorial

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The nature of the relationship between China and Pakistan is swiftly evolving, all the quicker since the announcement of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It is increasingly apparent that the country is pivoting in the direction of China, a geopolitical move not dissimilar to that underway by the US — the pivot towards the Pacific. For Pakistan, it is a move driven by the necessity of developing economic partnerships that transcend the transactional oil-driven relationships that have traditionally dominated thinking in the Foreign Office. For China, ever long-sighted, it is similar but with the added dimension of feeding positivity into its restive southwestern regions via enhanced trade and the — hopefully — resulting prosperity.

This is planning on the grandest of scales, and all the elements of the CPEC are going to be achieved at different times, some before others, and the political road is not going to be easy. To keep the process moving, diplomatic activity must shift into a higher gear, hence the to-and-fro between senior figures in both sides of the compact in the last year. Most recently, this has taken the shape of a visit by the vice chairman of China's Central Military Commission, the first at this level for 11 years. General Fan Changlong was here to discuss matters of mutual interest with the prime minister, as well as Chief of the Army Staff General Raheel Sharif, and he lauded the efforts of the Pakistan Army in the fight against militants.

Looking beyond the self-congratulatory platitudes, this is the 'nuts and bolts work' that will underpin the success or otherwise of the entire CPEC project. Visits such as that by General Fan offer the opportunity for course correction where necessary as well as providing a reminder to Pakistan (and its less than malleable politicians) as to who is bankrolling the exercise. A pivot to the east by Pakistan and an engagement with players beyond the Gulf region is essential if national aspirations are to be realised, but it is going to be neither painless nor easy, and for some, carry a political price they are going to find hard to pay.

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