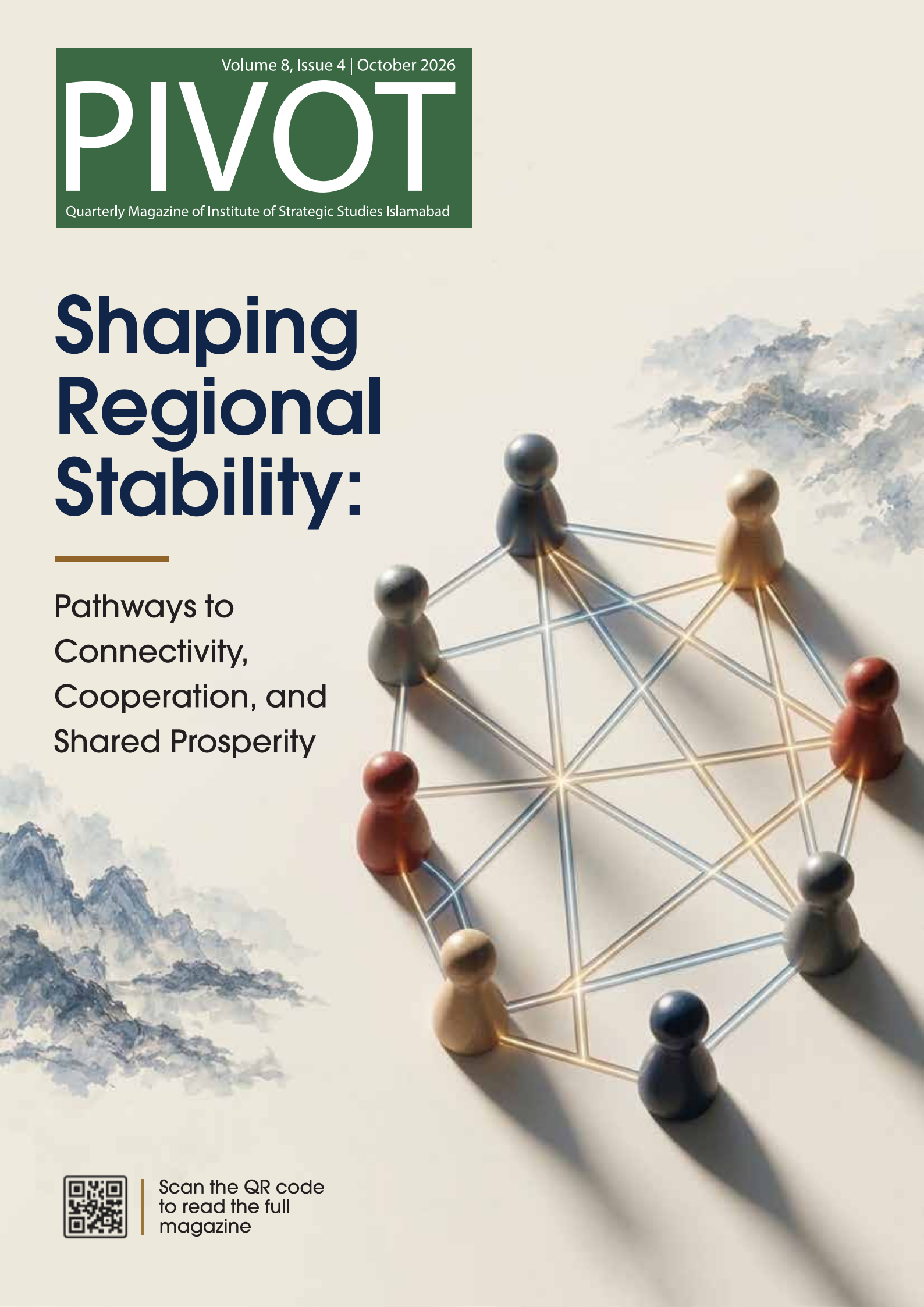
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PIVOT

Quarterly Magazine of Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad

Shaping Regional Stability:

Pathways to Connectivity, Cooperation, and Shared Prosperity



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Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad

Established in 1973, the Institute of Strategic Studies is an autonomous, non-profit research and analyses organization. It is devoted to provide an in-depth understanding and objective analyses of regional and global strategic issues, affecting international peace and security. The Institute also promotes a broad-based and informed public understanding of vital issues affecting Pakistan and the international community as a whole.



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To provide quality policy inputs through informed research, objective analyses and dialogue on global and regional issues affecting peace, security and development of Pakistan.

PURPOSE

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Strategic Perspectives Through Research and Dialogue

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- China-Pakistan Study Centre
- India Study Centre
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- Centre for Strategic Perspectives

Chief Editor's Note

Dr. Talat Shabbir



The contemporary order is undergoing transformation, shaped by geopolitical dynamics, opportunities, technological change, and patterns of connectivity. In this environment, regional stability depends not only on managing security challenges but also on developing mechanisms for greater economic cooperation, connectivity, and shared development. This issue of PIVOT examines pathways through which regional cooperation can contribute to a more stable and prosperous region.

Connectivity has emerged as an instrument of regional integration. Infrastructure, trade corridors, digital networks, energy cooperation, and maritime linkages can strengthen economic interdependence while facilitating the movement of goods, people, knowledge, and technology. Yet, connectivity can generate benefits only when supported by political confidence and institutional cooperation that accommodates the interests of participating states.

For Pakistan, regional connectivity presents an opportunity and a strategic imperative. Its geographic position places it at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and China, providing potential to contribute to regional trade and wider economic integration. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a flagship component of the Belt and Road Initiative, represents a dimension of this potential. Its emphasis on industrial cooperation, agriculture, technology, trade, and people-to-people linkages demonstrates how connectivity can progress from physical infrastructure towards economic and social integration alike.

At the same time, regional stability requires cooperation extending beyond bilateral frameworks. Greater engagement among neighboring countries can strengthen value chains, expand investment opportunities, and promote complementary economic capacities. Such cooperation must remain open, inclusive, and oriented towards development and prosperity.

This issue of PIVOT brings together perspectives on these regional dynamics. Collectively, the contributions underscore that peace and prosperity are closely interconnected. Regional stability is strengthened when states pursue dialogue, connectivity, economic cooperation, and shared development as pathways toward a more integrated and resilient region.

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Cultural Diplomacy and People-to-people Connectivity: Building The Foundations of Regional Peace



By Ambassador Naela Chohan

Regional peace and stability are often viewed through the lens of geopolitics, strategic competition, security arrangements, and economic partnerships. These dimensions undoubtedly matter, yet they represent only part of the equation. The other part lies in soft power, which is rooted in people-to-people connectivity and strengthened through cultural diplomacy.

Throughout my years in diplomacy, I have come to appreciate a simple yet enduring truth: governments may negotiate agreements, but it is people who ultimately sustain peace. Lasting peace and cooperation are not built solely through treaties or trade corridors; they are nurtured through mutual understanding, cultural appreciation, and the countless human connections that transcend political boundaries.

If we seek a peaceful, stable, and prosperous region, it is imperative to invest as seriously in cultural diplomacy and people-to-people connectivity as we do in economic and political cooperation.

The complexities and dynamics of the international system demand a broader understanding of diplomacy. Traditional state-to-state engagement remains essential, but diplomacy has evolved beyond formal negotiations. Public diplomacy, educational exchanges, artistic collaboration, and citizen engagement have become equally important in shaping international perceptions and building trust. In an era where misinformation, polarization, and geopolitical rivalry often dominate headlines, meaningful interaction between ordinary people serves as a powerful antidote to suspicion and misunderstanding. Students, artists, scholars, entrepreneurs, journalists, and civil society actors have become indispensable participants in cultural diplomacy. They play a pivotal role in building bridges between nations and creating goodwill, often reaching hearts where official diplomacy alone cannot.

Culture has always been one of the strongest bridges between civilizations. Across Asia and beyond, centuries of interaction have left us with shared traditions, artistic influences, languages, philosophies, and spiritual heritage.









Cultural Diplomacy and People-to-people Connectivity are not just compliments to traditional diplomacy - they are its soul



A good example in this context is Guru Rinpoche, who was born in Swat. Revered as the Second Buddha, he is deeply respected in Tibet, China, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. His role in the spread of Buddhism across East Asia, South Asia, and Central Asia created an enduring cultural and spiritual bond among our peoples. It was a connectivity that emanated from Gandhara and enveloped these regions.

Our rich traditions of poetry, calligraphy, music, architecture, handicrafts, cuisine, and hospitality embody a diversity that is both distinctive and deeply connected to the wider region. These are not merely elements of national identity; they are valuable instruments of soft power capable of fostering understanding and goodwill among nations. Cultural diplomacy, in my view, should therefore be regarded not as a ceremonial exercise but as a strategic national asset.

The historical connections between South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and East Asia illustrate that cultures have long travelled more freely than political borders. Trade routes carried not only goods but also ideas, literature, architecture, scientific knowledge, and artistic traditions that enriched societies across continents. These civilizational linkages continue to provide valuable foundations upon which contemporary regional cooperation can be strengthened.

Pakistan possesses remarkable cultural assets that deserve far greater international recognition. From the ancient civilizations of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa to the Gandhara heritage that reflects centuries of intellectual and artistic exchange, Pakistan represents a meeting point of civilizations.





At the same time, people-to-people connectivity must move beyond symbolic exchanges and become institutionalized. In the past, universities expanded academic partnerships, developed joint research initiatives, promoted faculty exchanges, and encouraged student mobility programmes that enabled young people to learn directly from one another. Today, however, due to a paucity of funds and shifting priorities, many of these practices are gradually withering away. Museums, galleries, and cultural institutions once collaborated on exhibitions celebrating shared heritage. Film festivals, literary forums, and music festivals have also become less frequent with each passing year. Likewise, artistic residencies create lasting professional networks that survive political fluctuations, as does tourism-particularly heritage, religious, and ecological tourism. These offer yet another powerful avenue for strengthening mutual appreciation and understanding while generating sustainable economic benefits.

Digital technology has further transformed the possibilities for cultural engagement. Virtual exhibitions, online educational platforms, collaborative research projects, and digital archives now allow ideas to cross borders with unprecedented speed.

Young people increasingly form friendships, exchange knowledge, and collaborate professionally through digital spaces that transcend geographical boundaries. Governments and institutions should harness these technologies to complement traditional diplomacy by creating inclusive platforms where dialogue and cooperation can flourish. Digital connectivity, when used responsibly, can become an important extension of people-to-people connectivity and cultural diplomacy.

Women have a particularly significant role to play in advancing cultural diplomacy. Throughout history, women have often served as custodians of cultural traditions, educators of future generations, artists, entrepreneurs, and community leaders. Their contributions to dialogue, peace building, and inter-cultural understanding deserve greater recognition and support. Increasing the participation of women in cultural diplomacy, academia, the arts, and cultural institutions not only promotes inclusivity but also enriches the quality of international engagement. Societies that empower women to participate fully in cultural exchange strengthen both their domestic resilience and their international partnerships.

My own diplomatic journey has reinforced this conviction. During my postings abroad, I discovered that some of the most meaningful conversations took place not across negotiating tables but in galleries, universities, cultural centres, and community gatherings. As both a diplomat and an artist, I have witnessed how creative expression opens doors that politics sometimes cannot. A painting, a poem, a musical performance, or an exhibition often communicates shared emotions and experiences more effectively than carefully crafted diplomatic statements. One stroke of a brush speaks louder than a thousand words. Art speaks a universal language that transcends nationality, ethnicity, and ideology. It reminds us that beneath our political identities, we remain connected by our common humanity.

I therefore decided to further develop my artistic abilities as a means of strengthening soft power, complementing my skills in formal diplomacy. As a woman Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, I was often asked questions about women's rights in Islam. Through art, I embarked on a

journey of cultural diplomacy, highlighting issues affecting women-from the plight of Kashmiri women to social challenges such as domestic violence in Muslim societies. My art touched hearts. It promoted a better understanding of the suffering of Kashmiri women through paintings such as Silent Screams and Ethnic Genocide, while works like Betrayal of Love conveyed the universal nature of domestic violence. I sought to demonstrate that women's issues are inherently universal, even though they may differ in intensity, magnitude, levels of education, economic empowerment, and cultural traditions. My message was strong and clear. That is why one of my paintings, Encaged, is on permanent display at United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Headquarters in Paris.

It is my belief that the challenges confronting the world in general, and our region in particular-from conflict and climate change to economic uncertainty and social fragmentation-cannot be addressed through political agreements alone. Sustainable peace requires trust, and trust develops gradually through repeated human interaction. When students study together, artists collaborate, scholars exchange ideas, entrepreneurs build partnerships, and families welcome visitors from neighboring countries, they create bonds that remain resilient even during periods of political tension. These human connections reduce prejudice, encourage empathy, and establish constituencies for peace that extend beyond governments and beyond regions.

As policymakers continue to envision new corridors of trade, energy, and infrastructure, we must remember that the most enduring corridors are those that connect minds and hearts. Roads, railways, and ports may facilitate commerce, but cultural diplomacy builds confidence, mutual respect, and a shared sense of purpose. Without these intangible foundations, physical connectivity alone cannot guarantee lasting regional stability.

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) are important platforms for enhancing connectivity. They not only contribute to economic development but also strengthen cultural bonds among nations.

The future of our region depends not only on the strength of our economies or the sophistication of our diplomatic institutions, but also on our willingness to rediscover the values that have long connected our peoples. By investing in cultural diplomacy and expanding opportunities for meaningful people-to-people engagement, we strengthen the social fabric upon which peace, cooperation, and shared prosperity ultimately rest. In this sense, culture is not an accessory to diplomacy-it is one of its most enduring and indispensable pillars.



Ambassador Naela Chohan

Former Special Secretary, Foreign Affairs; Former High Commissioner Of Pakistan To Australia; Former Ambassador Of Pakistan To Argentina.





Revitalizing the China - Pakistan - Afghanistan Trilateral:

Towards a Regional Approach to Afghanistan

By Dr. Amina Khan

August 15, 2026, marked five years since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan and established the 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan' (IEA) as the country's de facto, though still not de jure, governing authority. Over the past five years, the Taliban's system of governance has evolved into what can be characterized as authoritarian, yet selectively pragmatic. With the exception of limited armed resistance in parts of northern Afghanistan, which has yet to gain momentum, the Taliban have consolidated their control, maintaining relative stability - adopting measures aimed at addressing corruption, strengthening the economy and expanding diplomatic and economic engagement with neighbouring and regional states. Russia's formal recognition of the IEA, making it the first country to do so, represents a notable development in the Taliban's efforts to strengthen regional legitimacy and integration. The prohibition of poppy cultivation and focus on infrastructure remains significant domestic policy measures.

Despite these developments, the Taliban's rule remain under considerable scrutiny and criticism, particularly given their failure to fulfil commitments under the Doha Agreement-commitments the Taliban themselves had agreed to uphold. Hence grave concerns persist over the absence of a constitutional framework, restrictions on women and girls, broader human rights issues, limited political inclusivity, and pivotal questions surrounding counterterrorism commitments. These discrepancies between the Taliban's stated policies and their implementation continue to raise serious questions regarding their willingness and capacity to translate assurances into sustained action, placing the future stability of

Afghanistan and the wider region at serious risk. More importantly, Afghanistan's challenges increasingly transcend its borders.

The transnational nature of Afghanistan's trajectory (terrorism, refugee movements, narcotics trafficking, weak economic integration, and inadequate trade and transit connectivity) have direct implications for Pakistan, China, Iran, Central Asia and the wider region, and therefore cannot be viewed exclusively through a bilateral lens. Rather, they require a broader regional approach that recognizes their cross-border security, political, and economic implications.

While strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain indispensable, and bilateral engagement should remain central, the transnational nature of the challenges necessitates a broader regional response. In this context, the China–Pakistan–Afghanistan (CPA) trilateral mechanism is a useful starting point and deserves renewed attention. Established in 2017, the mechanism already provides an institutional foundation for political dialogue, security cooperation, reconciliation and economic connectivity. Yet its potential remains considerably underutilized. Revitalizing the trilateral could provide an important avenue for addressing regional concerns, including Pakistan's legitimate security concerns, while simultaneously promoting Afghan economic integration and advancing China's interests in regional stability and connectivity

The Trilateral Mechanism: An Existing Platform

The China–Pakistan–Afghanistan (CPA) trilateral process formally began in May 2017, initially focusing on practical cooperation in areas including infrastructure, energy, agriculture, education, health, human-resource development and regional economic integration. It was subsequently elevated to the foreign-ministerial level in December 2017, when China hosted the first China– Afghanistan – Pakistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue.

Three broad areas emerged as the principal pillars of the mechanism: political mutual trust and reconciliation; development cooperation and connectivity; and security cooperation and counterterrorism.

Significantly, improving Pakistan– Afghanistan relations was incorporated into the mechanism's objectives, with China offering to facilitate dialogue between the two sides.

The trilateral survived Afghanistan's political transition in August 2021 and remains one of the few institutional platforms through which Islamabad and Kabul can engage with China playing a facilitating role. The fifth Foreign Ministers' Dialogue, held in Islamabad in May 2023, was particularly significant as it revived the mechanism following the Taliban takeover. The sixth was subsequently held in Kabul on 20 August 2025. There has been no formal Foreign Ministers' Dialogue since then. An informal trilateral meeting involving Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, and Afghanistan's Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi was nevertheless held in Beijing in May 2025, where improving Pakistan–Afghanistan relations, diplomatic engagement and regional connectivity were discussed.

Revitalize the Trilateral

For Pakistan, the most immediate concern remains the continued presence and activities of militant organizations operating from Afghan territory, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Border management, refugee pressures and disruptions to bilateral trade further complicate the relationship. For China, Afghanistan's instability has implications for its security interests, particularly concerns related to terrorism, Xinjiang and the security of its broader western periphery, as well as the viability of its regional

connectivity and investment projects. For Afghanistan, prolonged economic isolation, limited international investment and inadequate connectivity remain significant obstacles to sustainable economic development.

This is particularly important given the changing nature of the regional security environment. Militancy is increasingly characterized by an interconnected transnational ecosystem in which organizations with different ideological orientations can nevertheless share tactics, recruitment methods, propaganda techniques, financing networks and operational expertise. Developments in one theatre can consequently produce security effects elsewhere.

The implication is clear: terrorism and militancy can no longer be addressed exclusively through national or bilateral approaches. Pakistan and Afghanistan have a shared interest in ensuring that neither country's territory is used against the other, while China has a direct interest in preventing terrorism and instability from undermining its security and regional connectivity projects. A trilateral framework can provide the institutional space to develop a coordinated response.

Addressing Security

Any meaningful revitalization of the trilateral must place security at its core, but should not allow security to become its sole purpose.

Pakistan's concerns regarding terrorism emanating from Afghan territory are legitimate and cannot be separated from the broader question of regional stability. The continued presence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan remains a major source of concern, while questions surrounding the Taliban's approach towards groups such as the TTP continue to undermine confidence between Kabul and Islamabad. China, similarly, remains concerned about the presence of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the potential for instability in Afghanistan to affect its own security interests.

The Taliban must recognize that responsible regional engagement requires credible and verifiable assurances that Afghan territory will not be used against neighbouring states. If the Taliban seek greater acceptance as a responsible member of the international community, adherence to this principle will be essential.

At the same time, the issue should not be framed exclusively as a Pakistan–Afghanistan dispute. The trilateral can provide a mechanism for addressing it as a shared regional security challenge. Regular intelligence exchanges, enhanced border-security cooperation, counterterrorism coordination and counter-financing measures could be developed within the framework. Such cooperation should be reciprocal and should address the security concerns of all three countries.

From Security to Connectivity

Revitalizing the trilateral, however, should not produce another exclusively counterterrorism-oriented mechanism. The long-term sustainability of regional stability requires an economic dimension.

Afghanistan's geography makes its economic future intrinsically dependent upon its neighbours. Pakistan provides one of Afghanistan's most direct routes to international markets and the Arabian Sea, while connectivity with Central and South Asia offers the potential to transform Afghanistan from a landlocked state into a regional transit hub.

Major initiatives such as the Trans-Afghan railway, TAPI and CPEC, including discussions regarding the extension of CPEC-related connectivity towards Afghanistan, can contribute to this objective. Yet none can reach their full potential in an environment characterized by persistent political tensions and insecurity.

Trade and security must therefore be viewed as mutually reinforcing rather than competing priorities. Afghanistan requires trade and transit connectivity for economic stability, while Pakistan requires a secure

western border. Greater economic interdependence can consequently create incentives for political stability, while improved security can facilitate trade and investment.



China's economic weight and its relationships with both Pakistan and Afghanistan place it in a particularly useful position to facilitate this process. Chinese investment in commercially viable sectors in Afghanistan—including mining, agriculture, energy and logistics—could provide additional opportunities, provided adequate security and regulatory conditions are established.

From Trilateralism to a Broader Regional Architecture

The CPA mechanism should not, however, become an exclusive arrangement. Afghanistan's challenges cannot be resolved by three countries alone. The trilateral should instead serve as a nucleus for wider regional engagement, gradually involving Iran, the Central Asian states and other relevant regional actors.

Such an approach would address a potential weakness of the existing mechanism: the perception that it represents an exclusive China–Pakistan arrangement. A broader regional framework would make the process more inclusive and reduce the risk of Afghanistan becoming an arena for competing geopolitical blocs.

The objective should not be to create yet another regional forum. Rather, the existing trilateral should be used as a practical vehicle for addressing security, connectivity, trade and development. China, given its relationships across the region, can provide the necessary impetus for gradually broadening the framework.

Making the Trilateral Effective

For the mechanism to move beyond political declarations, several steps are necessary;

- The China–Pakistan–Afghanistan Foreign Ministers' Dialogue should be revitalized and institutionalized. Regular meetings should take place irrespective of the immediate political climate rather than being convened only in response to crises.
- A permanent working-level mechanism should be established, with dedicated working groups on security, connectivity, trade and development to monitor progress and prepare practical initiatives.
- A phased connectivity agenda should be adopted, beginning with achievable initiatives such as customs cooperation, border infrastructure, road connectivity, logistics and trade facilitation.
- Security and development should be linked. Counterterrorism cooperation should be accompanied by economic initiatives, particularly in border regions, so that improved security produces visible economic benefits.

- Commercially viable Chinese investment in Afghanistan should be encouraged, particularly in mining, agriculture, energy and logistics, subject to appropriate security and regulatory safeguards.
- Lastly, Pakistan should pursue the trilateral as a regional mechanism rather than as an instrument of bilateral pressure on Afghanistan. Islamabad's security concerns must remain central, but they can be addressed more effectively when embedded within a broader agenda of regional trade, connectivity and economic interdependence.

Afghanistan's challenges have increasingly acquired a regional character, making a regional response not merely desirable but necessary. The China–Pakistan–Afghanistan trilateral provides a ready-made institutional foundation for such an approach, but its potential remains underdeveloped.

Revitalizing the mechanism would serve the interests of all three countries. For Pakistan, it would provide an additional avenue to address terrorism, border management and strained relations with Kabul beyond the recurring cycle of bilateral crisis management. For Afghanistan, it would provide greater opportunities for regional economic integration, trade and connectivity while reducing its economic isolation. For China, it would contribute to regional stability, protect its security interests and support its broader connectivity objectives. China is uniquely positioned to reinvigorate the process because of its economic weight, diplomatic relationships and strategic interests in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Its role, however, should not be that of a traditional security guarantor. Rather, China can act as a regional facilitator, helping link security, development and connectivity.

Ultimately, the objective should be to transform the China–Pakistan–Afghanistan trilateral from a periodic dialogue mechanism into the nucleus of a broader regional framework. Such a framework should recognize that security cannot be achieved without development, and that economic integration cannot be sustained without security. A revitalized trilateral, embedded within a wider regional architecture, could therefore provide an important pathway towards improving Pakistan–Afghanistan relations, addressing shared security concerns and unlocking the wider potential of Central–South Asian connectivity.



Dr. Amina Khan
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An Assessment of Pakistan's role in the US/Israel-Iran War

By Dr. Kamil Tarhan



Mediation has traditionally been undertaken by neutral states seeking to facilitate dialogue and reduce tensions between conflicting parties. Against this backdrop, Pakistan's diplomatic engagement during the U.S./Israel–Iran conflict attracted considerable regional and international attention. Despite facing domestic political challenges and persistent security concerns along its western border, Pakistan emerged as an active diplomatic actor, supporting efforts aimed at de-escalation and dialogue. Its constructive engagement in one of the most consequential regional crises in recent years has drawn significant attention from policymakers and analysts alike.

> *"Dialogue remains the most sustainable path to regional peace"*

From the outset, Pakistan adopted a policy of principled neutrality, consistently calling for restraint and emphasizing dialogue and diplomacy as the preferred means of resolving the conflict. This approach reflected the broader orientation of Pakistan's foreign policy as well as its vital national interests. Sharing a nearly 900-kilometre border with Iran, Pakistan has a direct stake in regional peace and stability and would inevitably be among the countries most affected by any prolonged escalation. These geopolitical realities reinforced Islamabad's efforts to maintain balanced relations with all concerned parties while encouraging diplomatic engagement to prevent a wider regional conflict.

Pakistan's diplomatic space was further shaped by its foreign policy and bilateral relations in recent years. Its longstanding engagement with the United States, improving relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states, and historically close ties with Iran provided Islamabad with a degree of diplomatic flexibility, while also requiring it to carefully balance competing regional interests. Pakistan's deep cultural, religious, and historical links with Iran, together with its sizeable Shia population, have contributed to mutual understanding between the two neighbours. Equally important, Pakistan's independent foreign policy and the absence of foreign military bases on its territory have helped reinforce its credibility as a trusted interlocutor, creating space for constructive diplomatic engagement during the crisis.

From an international relations perspective, Pakistan's approach reflects an effort to pursue a policy of strategic hedging through active diplomacy. While prioritizing its national interests and security during the crisis, Islamabad maintained a balanced and cautious approach towards all major stakeholders. This strategy provided Pakistan with greater diplomatic flexibility and enabled it to facilitate dialogue by drawing on its close ties with China, constructive relations with regional partners, and engagement with the United States. In doing so, Pakistan strengthened its international profile as a responsible regional actor while enhancing its strategic relevance in the eyes of both major powers and neighbouring states.

> *"A more connected region is a more peaceful region."*

Pakistan's diplomatic engagement during the conflict produced several notable outcomes. From the early stages of the crisis, Islamabad served as an important channel of communication between Tehran and Washington. These efforts contributed to the announcement of a two-week ceasefire on 8 April 2026, reflecting the value of sustained diplomatic engagement in creating space for dialogue. Prime Minister



Shehbaz Sharif's statement welcoming the ceasefire and urging all parties to pursue diplomacy underscored Pakistan's consistent support for peaceful conflict resolution. Islamabad also hosted negotiations aimed at ending the conflict, commonly referred to as the Islamabad Talks. Although these talks did not produce a comprehensive settlement, they nevertheless demonstrated Pakistan's willingness to facilitate dialogue and provide a diplomatic platform for engagement.

Pakistan's contribution to regional security can be viewed from several perspectives. First, its diplomatic efforts helped support broader international initiatives aimed at preventing further escalation, including the risks of disruption to maritime trade and global energy supplies through the Strait of Hormuz. Even though the ceasefire proved temporary, it created an important opportunity for diplomacy at a critical stage of the conflict. Second, Pakistan's engagement demonstrated that regional middle powers can make meaningful contributions to conflict management alongside traditional international mediators. In this respect, Islamabad's diplomatic efforts highlighted the growing role of regional actors in promoting dialogue and supporting regional stability.

Despite these diplomatic efforts, the inability of the Islamabad Talks to produce a comprehensive agreement, the repeated violations of the ceasefire, the heightened tensions surrounding the Strait of Hormuz, and the postponement of planned high-level engagements underscored the fragility of mediation during periods of intense geopolitical confrontation. These developments also highlighted the structural limitations faced by middle powers when attempting to mediate conflicts driven by the strategic interests of major powers. While Pakistan was able to facilitate dialogue and encourage diplomatic engagement, it lacked the leverage to resolve the core issues underlying the conflict, including disputes over Iran's nuclear programme and broader regional security dynamics.

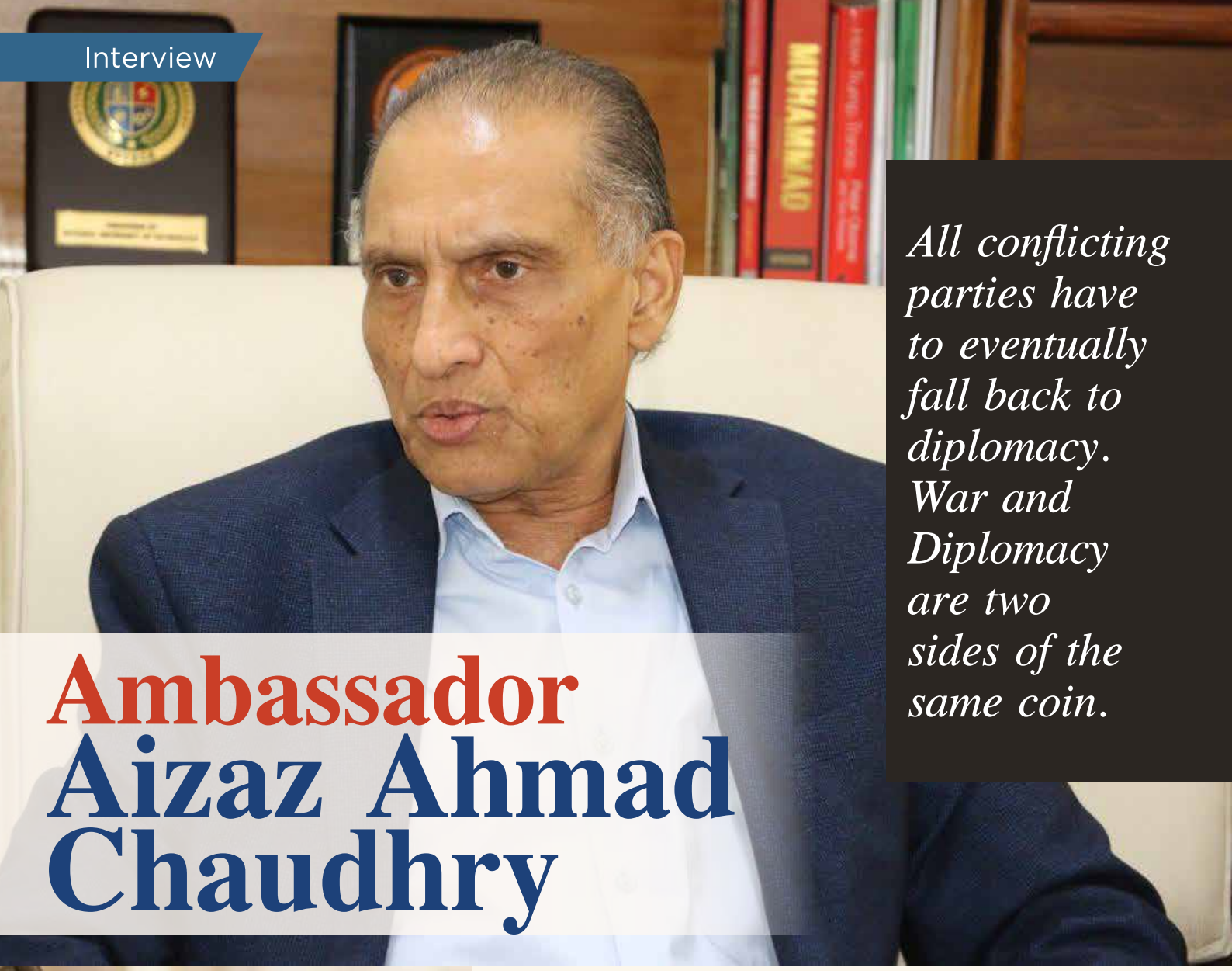
Nevertheless, Pakistan's diplomatic engagement should not be viewed solely through the lens of immediate outcomes. Its



experience demonstrates that effective diplomacy is not measured only by the achievement of a final settlement, but also by the ability to sustain dialogue, reduce tensions, and create opportunities for peaceful engagement. By pursuing a balanced foreign policy and leveraging its constructive relations with regional and international stakeholders, Pakistan reinforced its credentials as a responsible regional actor committed to peace and stability. More broadly, its diplomatic efforts illustrate the growing role of middle powers in an increasingly multipolar international order, where conflict resolution is becoming more inclusive and no longer rests exclusively with traditional global powers. Although mediation alone cannot overcome deeply rooted strategic rivalries, Pakistan's experience underscores the importance of sustained diplomatic engagement, regional cooperation, and dialogue in addressing complex security challenges.

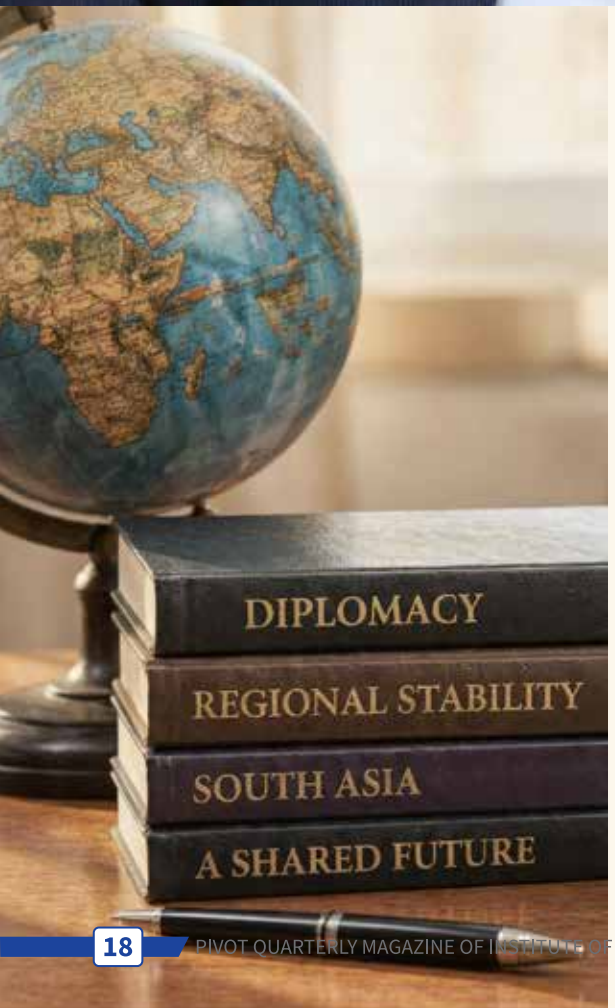


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Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry

All conflicting parties have to eventually fall back to diplomacy. War and Diplomacy are two sides of the same coin.



1 Having served Pakistan as Ambassador in some of the world's most important capitals, what has been your biggest lesson in promoting regional stability through diplomacy?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

Diplomacy is central to international relations, be it a conflictual relationship or cordial, multilateral or bilateral, or a situation of fratricidal war or durable peace. All conflicting parties have to eventually fall back to diplomacy. War and Diplomacy are two sides of the same coin. It has been my experience that most countries falter by not according diplomacy a chance or give up too soon. Take for instance, Pakistan-India relations, where diplomacy has been given a rather short leash. Had the two countries pressed on with diplomacy, and not been distracted by one incident or the other, South Asia could have been a different place today.

2 As Pakistan's former Foreign Secretary, what do you consider your most significant contribution to advancing Pakistan's foreign policy and regional diplomacy?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

The top priority for a diplomat is to win friendships for Pakistan wherever he or she serves. At least that is what I had sought to do wherever I was posted. As Ambassador of Pakistan to the Netherlands, I conducted an experiment in public diplomacy in cooperation with Pakistani-Dutch community and launched several initiatives that are continuing to date. Likewise, as Ambassador to the United States, I engaged with multiple centres of power, including the White House, State Department, Congress, think tanks, academia, media, and Pakistani merican community to put across Pakistani narratives. I have learned that besides reporting, every diplomat must spend at least fifty percent of his or her time in the field, looking for ways to promote Pakistan's national interests.



Building bridges through people, ideas and partnerships.

3 One of the most important events during your tenure was Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lahore. How do you see that diplomatic initiative today?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

The process had started nearly six months earlier. The then Prime Minister of Pakistan took the initiative on the sidelines of the SCO Summit in Ufa, Russia, and reached out to India. Our prime minister made a tactical concession at that time in order to achieve the larger objective of engaging India in a comprehensive peace process. I have described this process in detail in my book Diplomatic Footprints, including how, within six months, Prime Minister Modi himself came to Pakistan, his Foreign Minister also visited Pakistan, and we relaunched the Composite Dialogue under a new name-the Bilateral Comprehensive Dialogue. That was a rare but important display of how tactical concessions can earn larger, strategic benefits for peace and stability of the region. Unfortunately, on that occasion too, India lost its patience too soon. Terrorist incidents can happen anywhere and at any time, but immediately blaming Pakistan was not a prudent approach by Indian policy makers. Overall, the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Pakistan in 2015 was an opportunity lost because both countries could have stitched together a durable peace process.

4 During your tenure as Director General of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), how did you see think tanks contributing to Pakistan's foreign policy and its vision of regional connectivity and shared prosperity?



Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

In normal life, there is always a gap between perceptions and reality. The role of think tanks is twofold: first, to work on the narratives that the State of Pakistan has forged; and second, to explore new options, think out of box, and present alternatives to policymakers.

At ISSI, we worked to build strong linkages not only with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but also with other relevant ministries and departments. We identified themes of strategic significance for Pakistan and developed a framework to guide research on those issues while proposing innovative, out-of-the-box policy options.

That approach worked well. Even today, all five centres at ISSI continue to make an important contribution by validating Pakistan's policy narratives while also suggesting ways and means to expand the country's foreign policy options.

5 China has emerged as Pakistan's closest strategic partner. How do you see Pakistan-China cooperation evolving beyond CPEC over the next decade?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

Pakistan and China have enjoyed cordial political relations ever since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951. However, the economic dimension of the relationship gained real momentum only after the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015.

Today, the relationship is truly multifaceted. It encompasses political, economic, and increasingly defense cooperation as was witnessed during the 2025 Indo-Pak military confrontation.

The Pakistan-China relationship has acquired a broader regional dimension as well, contributing significantly to strategic stability in South Asia. Had Pakistan and China not been strategic partners, India's regional ambitions to act as a regional hegemon would have had far greater implications for peace and stability of South Asia.

In that sense, the Pakistan-China partnership has served as an important element of strategic stability for the region.

6 CPEC is widely regarded as a transformative initiative. In your view, what should be Pakistan's next priority to fully realize its economic and strategic potential?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is indeed a transformative initiative, which if utilized optimally, has contributed significantly to the economic development of not just Pakistan but the entire region. One key area of the Corridor is infrastructure. The road network developed with China's support has substantially improved connectivity across the country and laid a strong foundation for future economic growth.



There is always room for further progress. Alongside the impressive road infrastructure, greater emphasis on the railway network, particularly the ML-1 project, would further enhance CPEC's long-term impact. Rail transportation is generally more economical and efficient, and its modernization would complement the gains already achieved through road connectivity.

The second major area is energy. Pakistan once faced considerable load-shedding, and Chinese investment in the energy sector played an important role in overcoming that challenge. Going forward, greater focus could be placed on strengthening the transmission infrastructure. Since Pakistan is now producing surplus energy through Independent Power Producers (IPPs), expanding transmission lines would enable us to utilize this capacity more effectively and maximize the benefits of earlier investments.





The greatest long-term potential lies in Gwadar. Important progress has already been made, but there remains tremendous scope for further development. Strengthening Gwadar's connectivity with the rest of Balochistan and ensuring that local communities continue to benefit directly from the ongoing projects will further reinforce the success of CPEC.

When we visited Gwadar, it was quite evident that this port had the potential to become a sound connectivity hub for the entire region. However, it ought to be used more optimally. In the recent US-Iran war, some transshipment diverted to Gwadar, which lies outside the Strait of Hormuz, and is ideal in handling shipping being a deep sea port. At the same time, it would be important to ensure that the local residents as well as the people of Balochistan enjoy the fruits of economic activity around the port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. If we want to make the fullest strategic use of this historic opportunity, the first beneficiaries of every CPEC project should be the people of the area where projects are situated, and from there the benefits should continue to expand across the country.

7 The theme of this issue is 'Shaping Regional Stability: Pathways to Connectivity, Cooperation, and Shared Prosperity.' Do you believe economic connectivity can become a stronger foundation for lasting peace than traditional security approaches?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:



Economic connectivity creates opportunities. To fully benefit from those opportunities, however, certain prerequisites must be fulfilled. These include ease of doing business, establishing Special Economic Zones in a manner that attracts industries from China and elsewhere, and ensuring continuity of economic policies. These are the basic requirements for realizing the full potential of connectivity corridors. Without them, the benefits could remain elusive.

Many people believe that Pakistan's role in mediation during the recent conflict in West Asia has created new opportunities. Those opportunities, however, can only be utilized if Pakistan puts its own economic house in place to attract investments.

Across the country, there is a growing recognition that we should focus on continuity of economic policies and improving the ease of doing business, so that not only foreign investors but also domestic investors choose to invest in Pakistan rather than elsewhere.

That should be the foremost priority if we want to maximize the opportunities offered by regional connectivity corridors.

8 China has consistently supported Pakistan on key regional and international issues. How do you assess China's role in advancing Pakistan's diplomatic and strategic interests?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

China is a strategic partner, and Pakistan's relationship with China has served to check the hegemonic tendencies of India in South Asia. At the broader international level, China's support for Pakistan at multilateral forums has advanced Pakistan's diplomatic and strategic interests in a significant way. Likewise, Pakistan has also extended full support to the core interests of China in sync with our close partnership.

At the same time, Pakistan has had sustained periods of engagement with the United States, which currently seems to be in competition with China. However, it is important to note that the Pakistan-China relationship and the Pakistan-United States relationship are not zero-sum. Pakistan has learned to maintain proportionality in these two relationships. I deliberately avoid using the word balance because it can be misleading, implying that the two relationships are equal. No two bilateral relationships are identical; each has its own value and significance.

There are areas in which the Pakistan-United States relationship can continue to flourish, just as there are areas where Pakistan can derive immense benefit from its partnership with China.

We are living in an era where cooperation and competition coexist. China and India may have strategic differences, yet China remains one of India's largest trading partners. Likewise, the United States and China compete strategically while maintaining extensive economic and commercial ties.

The lesson for Pakistan is that while China will remain our strategic partner, this partnership should enable us to broaden our engagement and develop stronger relationships with other countries as well.

9 The 21st century is increasingly regarded as the 'Asian Century.' How do you envision Pakistan contributing to the emerging Asian order?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

There are major strategic shifts taking place globally, particularly in Asia. I have written about this in an article published in Daily Dawn titled Strategic Shifts, which I would recommend reading.



The essence of the argument is that when the United States pivoted towards Asia, it believed it could contain the rise of China by bringing together India, Japan, and Australia through the Quad and the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

However, in 2015, President Vladimir Putin proposed the concept of Greater Eurasian Cooperation, and the Chinese leadership built upon that idea by developing northern connectivity corridors, including the Trans-Siberian Corridor, the Middle Corridor, and the Southern Corridor. China is also exploring connectivity through the Arctic Ocean, which is increasingly becoming navigable and a much shorter alternative to the Pacific and Indian Oceans. China is beginning to recognize the strategic vulnerabilities associated with choke points such as Bab-el-Mandeb, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Malacca Strait. Diversifying connectivity options, supported by growing China-Russia cooperation, is therefore a logical strategic choice. This represents a major strategic shift for global commerce.

Because Pakistan is closely connected with China, these emerging corridors can also create opportunities for Pakistan, provided we ensure that our economy is ready to benefit from these developments. Critically, connectivity alone is not enough; Pakistan must have competitive goods and services to take advantage of these new routes.

The United States has also begun adjusting to these evolving realities. Indo-Pacific Command has been renamed as Pacific Command. India's role is now increasingly viewed through an economic and commercial lens, rather than at the strategic plane.

When President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump met on 14 May, they agreed to pursue what they described as "constructive strategic stability," signaling an effort to manage strategic competition in a more stable framework.

These developments create considerable opportunities for countries such as Pakistan to strengthen connectivity with China, Central Asia, and the wider Eurasian region.



10 Many European scholars believe that the emerging Asian order will consist of multiple regional centres rather than one unified order. How do you see this evolving?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

The world is moving towards a combination of regional orders, with every region gradually evolving its own security and economic architecture.

There can be no single Asian order because Asia contains several major points of strategic friction, including China-Japan, China-India, Pakistan-India, and the Gulf-Iran rivalry. These competing dynamics make a single regional order unlikely. Instead, Asia is likely to witness the emergence of multiple regional arrangements.

The trans-Atlantic alliance is gradually weakening, and Europe is increasingly focusing on developing its own defense and security capabilities.

East Asia will likely evolve its equilibrium around China, although Japan and India will remain important strategic actors.

West Asia is also witnessing the emergence of a new regional security architecture. If the United States gradually reduces its direct role, regional countries, including Iran, the Gulf States, Turkiye, and others may increasingly shape a collective security framework of their own.

Unfortunately, South Asia remains the least integrated and one of the most conflict-prone regions in Asia. As a result, the region risks missing many of these emerging opportunities.

India, as the largest country in South Asia, has an important responsibility in this regard. There have long been calls to revive SAARC because every other region is moving towards greater integration. Europe continues to deepen cooperation, African countries are strengthening regional institutions, and East Asia is expanding regional connectivity. The United States is also receding more towards the Western Hemisphere.

South Asia also needs to learn from these strategic shifts, and move towards greater regional cooperation.



11

Amid evolving geopolitical dynamics, what should be Pakistan's foremost foreign policy priority in the years ahead?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:



The foremost priority should remain maintaining and strengthening Pakistan's strategic partnership with China while preserving a stable and constructive relationship with the United States.

The second priority should be to find a medium for peaceful coexistence with India so that Pakistan can focus on its internal economic development.

The third priority should be managing Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan, which remains vulnerable to becoming a bastion of terrorist entities once again and poses a serious challenge to Pakistan's stability and progress.

A multi-pronged approach towards Afghanistan will be required. Kinetic action may be necessary where required, but the doors for bilateral diplomacy and multilateral engagement should remain open.



Another important priority lies in West Asia, where a new regional security architecture is gradually emerging. Pakistan has fortunately maintained balanced relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two principal regional powers. Our policy should remain focused on maximizing the economic dividends offered by West Asia. It is an energy-rich region, Pakistan has much to gain from it, and millions of Pakistanis are gainfully employed there.

These should remain Pakistan's four principal foreign policy priorities.

Let me add one point regarding relations with India. India has suspended the Indus Waters Treaty by holding it in abeyance, a move that could threaten the lives and livelihoods of millions of Pakistanis.

This, however, does not mean that Pakistan should immediately resort to war. War rarely resolves problems. Instead, Pakistan should utilize diplomacy to its fullest extent for India to see the broader regional picture. India itself will not be able to realize its global aspirations unless it carries its neighbours along.

There are signs that this thinking is gradually emerging within India's civil society, although it has yet to reach the country's political leadership.

Pakistan should therefore keep the option of dialogue open while waiting for India to take the initiative. Whenever such an opportunity arises, it should be utilized.

12 Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan remains difficult, particularly in the context of terrorism, CPEC expansion, and regional peace. How do you see the future, and what should Pakistan do?



Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

It is unfortunate that the Taliban, who enjoyed considerable sympathy among the people of Pakistan for many years, have adopted such a hostile posture. Since they are helping the TTP who have been shedding Pakistani blood for the past five years, we are left with no option but to use our military force wherever necessary. However, Pakistan should also seriously consider expanding its political and diplomatic options to deal with the Taliban regime. While ensuring firm border management, we should consider opening the border for bilateral trade and possible transit trade to Central Asia.

When people develop economic stakes in regional stability, terrorist groups find fewer opportunities to exploit the situation. Regulated and controlled economic activity should therefore begin.

Pakistan should also broaden its diplomatic outreach to the Taliban by utilizing every available channel, including religious scholars, diplomats, and other avenues of engagement.

Regional mechanisms should likewise be employed to build constructive pressure.

Most importantly, considerable resources should be invested in development activities in the FATA region so that local communities experience the benefits of economic development and deny space to the TTP and other militant groups.

A comprehensive, multi-pronged approach is essential along with the military option as required.



13

What message would you like to share with the next generation of Pakistani scholars, diplomats, and strategic experts committed to advancing Pakistan's national interests?

Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhry:

My advice to scholars is to identify the niche areas of Pakistan's foreign and domestic policies that require serious research and devote themselves to producing rigorous scholarship.

We are living in the age of artificial intelligence, where the literature that enters the global knowledge base becomes the source from which AI systems draw information. Unless Pakistan's narrative becomes part of that knowledge base, our perspectives will remain absent from international discourse.

Take the Mumbai incident as an example. The German scholar Elias Davidsson wrote The Betrayal of India: Revisiting the Evidence of 26/11. An Indian police officer also wrote Who Killed Karkare? in which he discussed the issue of saffron terrorism. Yet, one must ask if our own scholars have done similar scholarly works to expose India's politicization of terrorism. If not, why have we not undertaken research on issues that impact Pakistan's national interests and our image?

For nearly fifteen years, India has projected its own narrative internationally, attributing every terrorist incident to Pakistan. Pakistani scholars should also contribute serious research and present Pakistan's perspective.

The Indus Waters Treaty is another topical issue. Pakistan needs its own well-researched narrative and perspective. I have met Indian scholars during Track-II dialogues who now present a very different narrative. Rather than discussing the illegality of the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, they give their own spin to justify their unilateral suspension of the IWT.

Our researchers should focus on issues that are central to Pakistan's national life, particularly within institutions such as ISSI, other think tanks, and academia.

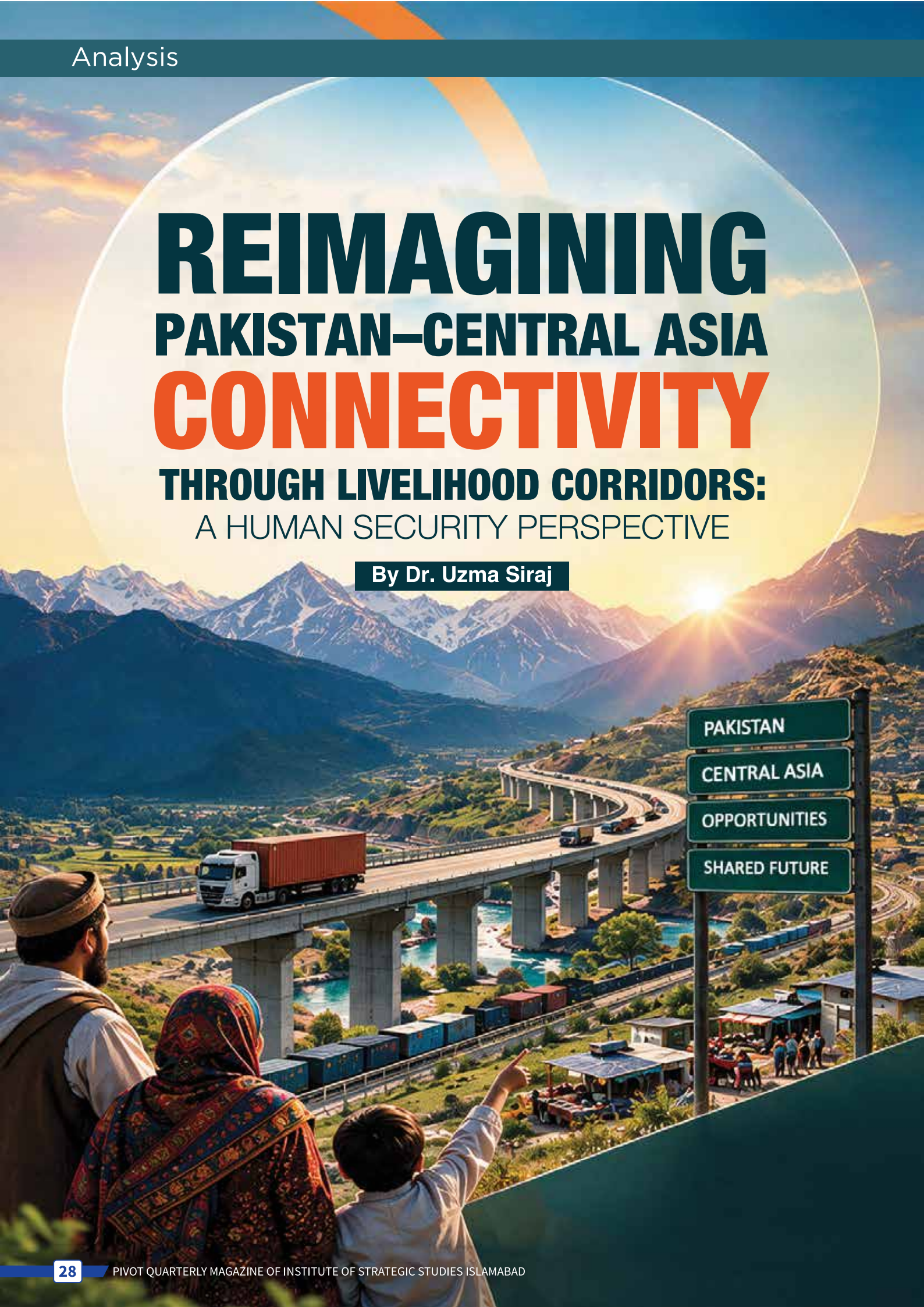
Many scholars complain that their MPhil theses and PhD dissertations receive little attention. The first step is to identify what the country actually needs. What questions are they seeking to answer? What national narrative requires stronger scholarly support? Once those priorities are identified, scholars should align their expertise with those priority areas and produce high-quality research.

Thank you.

REIMAGINING PAKISTAN–CENTRAL ASIA CONNECTIVITY THROUGH LIVELIHOOD CORRIDORS:

A HUMAN SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

By Dr. Uzma Siraj



"Connectivity is no longer measured by the number of roads a country builds, but by the number of opportunities those roads create."

Pakistan's aspiration to become the gateway between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea is steadily moving from rhetoric to reality. The revival of regional trade initiatives, renewed engagement with the Central Asian Republics (CARs), and growing regional interest in multimodal transport corridors have placed Pakistan at the centre of an emerging geo-economic landscape. Yet, amid discussions on railways, highways, ports, and transit agreements, one critical question remains largely overlooked: Who ultimately benefits from connectivity?

More than a decade into Pakistan's renewed focus on regional connectivity, the country's strategic ambitions have expanded considerably. However, improvements in human development have not kept pace with these ambitions. Pakistan continues to rank in the low human development category, placing 164th out of 193 countries in the UNDP Human Development Report 2023/2024. More importantly, many districts located along existing and proposed connectivity corridors particularly in parts of Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Gilgit-Baltistan continue to face comparatively weaker socio-economic indicators, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate access to public services. This gap suggests that while connectivity has strengthened Pakistan's geo-economic outlook, its long-term success will increasingly depend on how effectively it improves the lives and livelihoods of the communities through which these corridors pass.

For too long, regional connectivity has been viewed primarily through the prism of infrastructure and trade. Success has often been measured in kilometers of roads, tonnes of cargo, and transit revenues. While these indicators remain important, they tell only part of the story. Sustainable connectivity is not merely about moving goods across borders; it is about creating economic opportunities, strengthening communities, and enhancing human security. Unless regional corridors improve the lives of the people who live along them, they will remain transit routes rather than genuine pathways to shared prosperity.

“Connectivity is no longer measured by the number of roads a country builds, but by the number of opportunities those roads create.”





For Pakistan, this calls for a strategic shift from viewing connectivity as a network of transit corridors to developing livelihood corridors that integrate infrastructure with local development, economic inclusion, and social resilience.

Pakistan's strategic geographic location provides a natural bridge between Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Initiatives such as the Uzbekistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan Railway, CASA-1000, TAPI, and expanding regional connectivity through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and broader regional transport networks further reinforce Pakistan's relevance within the evolving Eurasian geo-economic landscape. Likewise, the Central Asian Republics seek diversified access to warm-water ports and alternative trade routes that reduce dependence on traditional transit corridors.

However, geography alone cannot guarantee regional integration. Connectivity corridors often traverse economically underdeveloped border regions where unemployment, weak governance, and limited economic opportunities continue to undermine long-term stability. Infrastructure may facilitate trade, but without parallel investment in people and communities, it cannot generate sustainable peace or shared prosperity.

This is where the concept of livelihood corridors becomes strategically important.

A livelihood corridor goes beyond connecting markets; it connects people to opportunities. It transforms transport infrastructure into platforms for local enterprise, employment, skills development, and community resilience. Instead of viewing border regions simply as transit spaces, they should become engines of regional economic growth.

This approach carries significant strategic dividends for Pakistan.

First, it strengthens the sustainability of regional connectivity. Communities that derive tangible economic benefits from cross-border trade become active stakeholders in maintaining secure and efficient transport routes. Economic inclusion creates local ownership, making connectivity more resilient and sustainable.

Second, livelihood corridors reinforce human security. Border regions vulnerable to unemployment, informal economies, and illicit cross-border activities require more than enhanced border management. Expanding legal economic opportunities, improving access to markets, and investing in local entrepreneurship help address the socio-economic conditions that often contribute to instability and organised crime.

Human security, therefore, becomes an essential pillar of regional security rather than a separate development agenda.

Third, Pakistan can further strengthen its position as a reliable regional connector rather than merely a transit state. For Central Asian partners, reliability is measured not only by physical infrastructure but also by predictable governance, efficient customs procedures, and stable border environments. Integrating community development with connectivity planning enhances Pakistan's credibility as a long-term economic partner and reinforces confidence in regional cooperation.

Perhaps the most overlooked dimension of regional connectivity is gender inclusion.

Women remain largely absent from policy discussions on transport corridors despite their enormous potential contribution to regional economic integration. Connectivity projects reshape labour markets, local businesses, and service sectors, yet women often face structural barriers that prevent them from benefiting fully from these transformations. A livelihood corridor framework should therefore incorporate gender-responsive policies by expanding women's access to vocational training, digital entrepreneurship, small-business financing, and cross-border value chains. Women-led enterprises in agriculture, handicrafts, tourism, and digital services can become important contributors to corridor economies. No regional integration strategy can achieve shared prosperity while excluding half of its human capital.

For Pakistan, translating this vision into practice requires policy innovation alongside infrastructure development.

First, future connectivity projects should include Human Security Impact Assessments alongside economic feasibility studies to evaluate employment generation, local livelihoods, and community resilience.

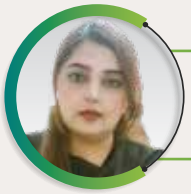
Second, border districts connected to regional trade corridors should receive targeted investments in logistics services, warehousing, vocational training, digital customs facilitation, and small-enterprise development so that local populations become participants not spectators in regional commerce.

Third, Pakistan's connectivity diplomacy with Central Asia should expand beyond transport agreements to include cooperation in skills development, women's entrepreneurship, digital trade facilitation, and community-level economic partnerships.

Finally, corridor governance should be institutionalised through stronger coordination among federal and provincial authorities to ensure that infrastructure development is accompanied by comprehensive social and economic planning.

As regional competition over connectivity intensifies, Pakistan has an opportunity to distinguish itself through an approach that places people alongside infrastructure. Roads and railways may connect states, but livelihoods connect societies. Corridors that generate employment, empower communities, and strengthen human security are far more likely to deliver lasting regional stability than those designed solely to move cargo.

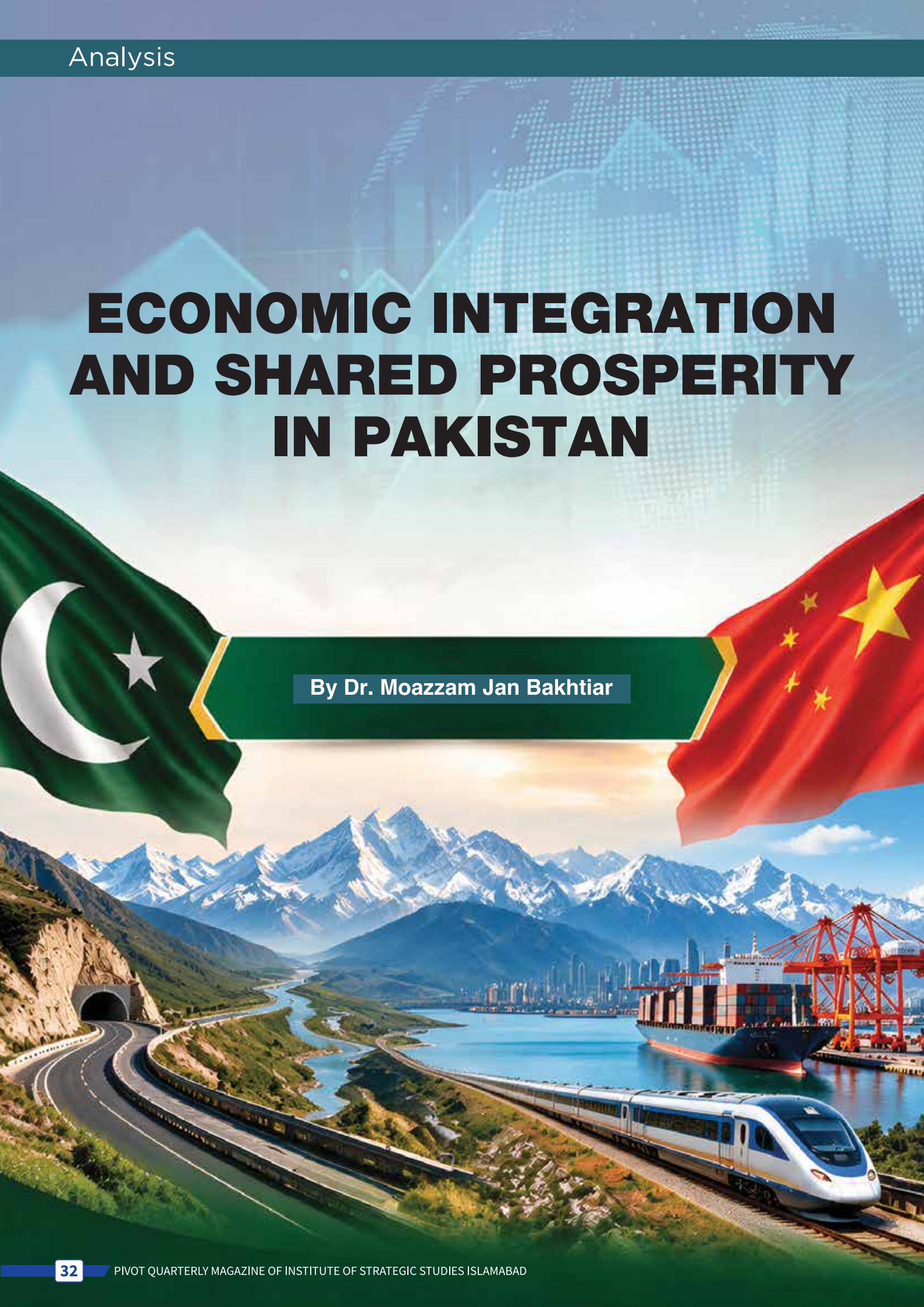
Pakistan's strategic location has always been one of its greatest assets. The challenge now is to ensure that geography becomes a source of inclusive development rather than simply a transit advantage. The future of Pakistan–Central Asia connectivity will ultimately be judged not by the number of corridors it builds, but by the number of lives those corridors improve.



Dr. Uzma Siraj
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ECONOMIC INTEGRATION AND SHARED PROSPERITY IN PAKISTAN

By Dr. Moazzam Jan Bakhtiar



Pakistan's economy stands at an important crossroads. While persistent development challenges continue to constrain inclusive growth, new opportunities are emerging through the evolving framework of the

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC 2.0). According to the World Bank, the International poverty rate stands at 42.4 percent under the US$3.65-a-day poverty line for fiscal year 2025, with rapid population growth adding an estimated 1.9 million people to the ranks of the poor each year, even as inflation begins to moderate. At the same time, CPEC 2.0 is gaining momentum, supported by more than US$25.9 billion in cumulative Chinese investment, the creation of over 260,000 jobs, and the expansion of the Special Economic Zone (SEZ) pipeline from seven to 44 approved sites across the country.

Against this backdrop, this article examines whether aligning CPEC 2.0's five corridors Growth, Innovation, Green, Livelihood, and Regional Connectivity with Pakistan's national 5Es Framework can transform this capital-intensive expansion into broad-based and sustainable prosperity. More importantly, it explores whether Pakistan can ensure that the gains of macroeconomic stabilization are translated into tangible improvements in the lives and livelihoods of ordinary citizens.

Over the past decade, CPEC has laid a strong foundation for Pakistan's economic transformation by strengthening energy security, upgrading transport infrastructure, and enhancing regional connectivity. As the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has steadily evolved from an infrastructure-focused program into a comprehensive framework for high-quality development. Building on these achievements, CPEC 2.0 places greater emphasis on industrial cooperation, agricultural modernization, science and technology, digital connectivity, green development, and socio-economic development. Reflecting the shared priorities of Pakistan and China, the second phase also focuses on six key areas of cooperation: industrialization, agriculture, information technology, mining and minerals, energy, and livelihood development. Together, these priorities are intended to accelerate economic diversification, strengthen domestic productive capacity, promote innovation, and generate employment while supporting Pakistan's long-term development objectives. In doing so, CPEC 2.0 closely complements Pakistan's national development priorities while further deepening the enduring All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership between Pakistan and China.

Building upon the achievements of the first phase, the strategic vision of CPEC 2.0 is to shift Pakistan's economic trajectory from an infrastructure-led model towards industrial and agricultural modernization. Through its Five Corridors, the initiative seeks to promote inclusive growth, reduce poverty, narrow regional disparities, and support environmentally sustainable development. Sustained foreign investment and technology transfer are expected to strengthen Pakistan's industrial base, develop a skilled workforce, and facilitate the transition towards higher-value manufacturing. At the same time, greater investment in indigenous and renewable energy sources can reduce dependence on imported fuels and ease pressure on the country's external account. The traditional trade-off between economic growth and environmental sustainability often explained

through the Environmental Kuznets Curve is precisely what the Green Corridor seeks to overcome by integrating industrial expansion with Pakistan's climate commitments rather than treating them as competing priorities. Achieving these objectives, however, requires strong institutions. Transparent governance, effective regulation, and accountable oversight enhance investor confidence, improve the ease of doing business, and help ensure that the benefits of growth are shared across society rather than concentrated among a few. Likewise, aligning domestic policies with internationally recognized sustainability standards will further strengthen Pakistan's attractiveness as a competitive destination for diversified foreign investment.

An important pillar of CPEC 2.0, the Green Corridor combines energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy infrastructure with innovative financial instruments, including green bonds, sustainable financing mechanisms, and climate-risk insurance, to mobilize greater private-sector investment, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which remain a key driver of employment generation and inclusive economic growth. Climate-smart agriculture, precision irrigation, and drought-resistant crop varieties are equally important, given that agriculture continues to employ a significant proportion of Pakistan's workforce while remaining highly vulnerable to climate-related shocks. Similarly, climate-resilient urban planning, sustainable transport networks, and afforestation initiatives can simultaneously strengthen biodiversity, enhance carbon sequestration, and support long-term industrial development.

Complementing these efforts through the Digital Silk Road by expanding digital infrastructure, e-commerce, digital financial services, and technological connectivity can help formalize Pakistan's sizeable informal economy, which still accounts for roughly one-third of overall economic activity. Greater formalization would improve access to finance, broaden the tax base, enhance productivity, and enable small businesses and entrepreneurs to integrate more effectively into regional and global value chains. At the same time, increased digital



connectivity can foster innovation, improve service delivery, and create new opportunities for youth entrepreneurship and knowledge-based industries.

Ultimately, the success of CPEC 2.0 will depend not only on investment and infrastructure but also on people. Addressing structural skills shortages through vocational education, technical training, and industry-academia collaboration is essential for preparing Pakistan's workforce for higher-value industries. Equally important is expanding opportunities for women's economic participation, which currently remains below 24 percent of the labour force, thereby unlocking a significant source of untapped human capital and promoting more inclusive and equitable development.

At the regional level, strengthening trade partnerships, improving customs harmonization, and enhancing cross-border connectivity through regional transit corridors, including the Wakhan Corridor, can reinforce Pakistan's role as a gateway linking China, Central Asia, South Asia, and beyond. Realizing this potential, however, requires policy continuity, efficient institutions, and effective social protection mechanisms that safeguard vulnerable communities while ensuring the uninterrupted flow of trade and investment. As the Pakistan–China partnership continues to evolve, greater emphasis on industrial cooperation, technological collaboration, innovation, and people-to-people exchanges will further deepen the All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership and help ensure that the benefits of development extend beyond major urban centres to underserved regions across the country.

The available data underscore why this alignment must go beyond policy declarations. According to the IMF, female labour-force participation of around 24 percent represents a substantial loss to Pakistan's long-term economic potential, while a labour force of approximately 79 million remains only partially formalized and unevenly skilled. Meanwhile, the World Bank estimates that Pakistan's national poverty rate declined from 25.3 percent in fiscal year 2024 to 22.5 percent in fiscal year 2025, supported by economic growth of around 3 percent, indicating that the foundations for sustained recovery are gradually strengthening, even as the broader US$3.65-a-day poverty measure highlights the scale of the remaining challenge. The Five Corridors of CPEC 2.0 can translate into lasting and inclusive prosperity only if industrial modernization, financial inclusion, human capital development, women's economic empowerment, and institutional reforms advance together as an integrated national development agenda rather than as isolated initiatives.

Looking ahead, the success of CPEC 2.0 will be measured not merely by the scale of investment it attracts or the infrastructure it develops, but by its ability to generate inclusive growth, strengthen economic resilience, and improve the quality of life of Pakistan's people. Aligning the Five Corridors with Pakistan's national development priorities and the agenda of high-quality Belt and Road cooperation is therefore a strategic imperative for promoting industrial competitiveness, technological innovation, sustainable development, and regional connectivity. As Pakistan and China continue to deepen their All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership, CPEC 2.0 has the potential to translate this enduring partnership into tangible socio-economic dividends, serving as a catalyst for shared prosperity and contributing to the vision of building a closer Pakistan–China community with a shared future in the new era.



Dr. Moazzam Jan Bakhtiar
Senior Analyst

From Infrastructure to Integration:

How CPEC 2.0 Transcends the "Debt Trap" Narrative

By Yuheng Geng

Since its launch in 2013, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been regarded as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). However, since its inception, the corridor has been interpreted through the lens of so-called "debt-trap diplomacy" by Western governments, think tanks, and media outlets. In recent years, China and Pakistan have jointly launched the upgraded second phase of CPEC, commonly referred to as CPEC 2.0. It is not only a further deepening of bilateral cooperation based on the achievements of the first phase. CPEC 2.0 represents not only a deepening of bilateral cooperation but also an opportunity to address persistent misconceptions and present a more comprehensive picture of the corridor's objectives and outcomes.

Narrative, defined as a coherent structure of stories unfolding across particular temporal and spatial contexts, functions through framing and cognitive heuristics to shape audience perceptions of issues, while also simplifying complex information, thereby expanding its dissemination scope and increasing its level of audience acceptance. During the CPEC 1.0, the most visible outputs were power plants, highways, railways, and the Gwadar Port. However, some Western governments portrayed Chinese infrastructure projects as deliberate attempts to create debt dependency and seize strategic assets, arguing that China used debt leverage to gain control over infrastructure. Although an increasing number of empirical studies have demonstrated that accusations of "debt trap" lack factual foundations, the debt-trap narrative provides a ready-made and simplified explanatory framework. It regards almost every CPEC project as evidence of a debt trap and, with the amplification of Western media, spreads more rapidly and extensively than academic research.



As a result, such narratives have contributed to negative perceptions of CPEC among some audiences.

Therefore, China and Pakistan have jointly developed a more resilient narrative framework for CPEC 2.0. Firstly, CPEC 2.0 is structured around the Five Corridors, namely Growth, Livelihood, Innovation, Green, and Openness. By framing CPEC around these five widely recognized concepts, the narrative aligns the corridor with international development norms, thereby reducing the discursive space available for alternative misrepresentations. By summarizing the characteristics and objectives of CPEC through these terms, the narrative shifts the corridor away from previous images associated solely with infrastructure and large-scale projects, making it easier for audiences to quickly understand its goals and purposes. Since audiences generally share a relatively consistent understanding of these concepts, and the influence of alternative misinformation and disinformation by other actors can be effectively reduced.

Secondly, CPEC 2.0 is aligned with Pakistan's 5Es framework, emphasizing industrialization, agricultural modernization, green development, and people-centered cooperation while encouraging investment and collaboration among enterprises. Pakistani PM Shehbaz Sharif has stated that Pakistan's reform initiatives and its goal of prioritizing FDI as a key area of development are consistent with the Five Corridors. This demonstrates that CPEC focuses on addressing Pakistan's current challenges of economic growth, and that Pakistan is not merely a passive recipient of Chinese investment as portrayed by some Western narratives. Instead, China-Pakistan relations represent a partnership based on equality and mutual benefit. The transition from G2G toward B2B cooperation also helps prevent the stigmatization of CPEC through a purely geopolitical lens.





Thirdly, CPEC 2.0 emphasizes the integration of "small and beautiful" livelihood projects alongside major infrastructure development. Although large-scale projects are important, small and beautiful livelihood projects such as youth training programs and people-to-people exchanges enhance people's sense of gain from China-Pakistan Cooperation, thereby promoting trust in CPEC. A notable example is the successful completion of a training program for 1,000 young Pakistani agricultural technicians in China, with China further committing to provide 3,000 training opportunities for Pakistan from 2025 to 2029.

Finally, China and Pakistan have provided comprehensive empirical evidence to refute the debt-trap narrative. Chinese loans not only carry more favorable interest rates and extended repayment schedules, but also remain devoid of political conditionalities. In contrast, the International Monetary Fund typically attaches stringent policy requirements to its lending to developing countries. Moreover, a significant proportion of Pakistan's external debt is owed to multilateral institutions such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Paris Club. When Pakistan has faced external financing pressures, China has provided bilateral financial support and continued cooperation through CPEC. Meanwhile, CPEC investments have contributed to infrastructure development and economic activity, although their broader impact on Pakistan's debt sustainability remains a subject requiring careful assessment. This counter-narrative directly undermines the credibility of the debt-trap accusation and seeks to cultivate a more balanced and accurate perception of CPEC.

Overall, through the joint efforts of China and Pakistan, CPEC 2.0 has not only challenged the debt-trap narrative, but has also sought to present a more vivid and human-centered story of bilateral cooperation. The emergence and dissemination of the debt-trap narrative reflect the persistence of a zero-sum perspective among some actors in interpreting China's engagement with the world. During the construction of CPEC 2.0, China and Pakistan should not only continue to deepen technical and economic cooperation, but also carefully construct and manage narratives in order to communicate a more precise and trustworthy vision of reality.

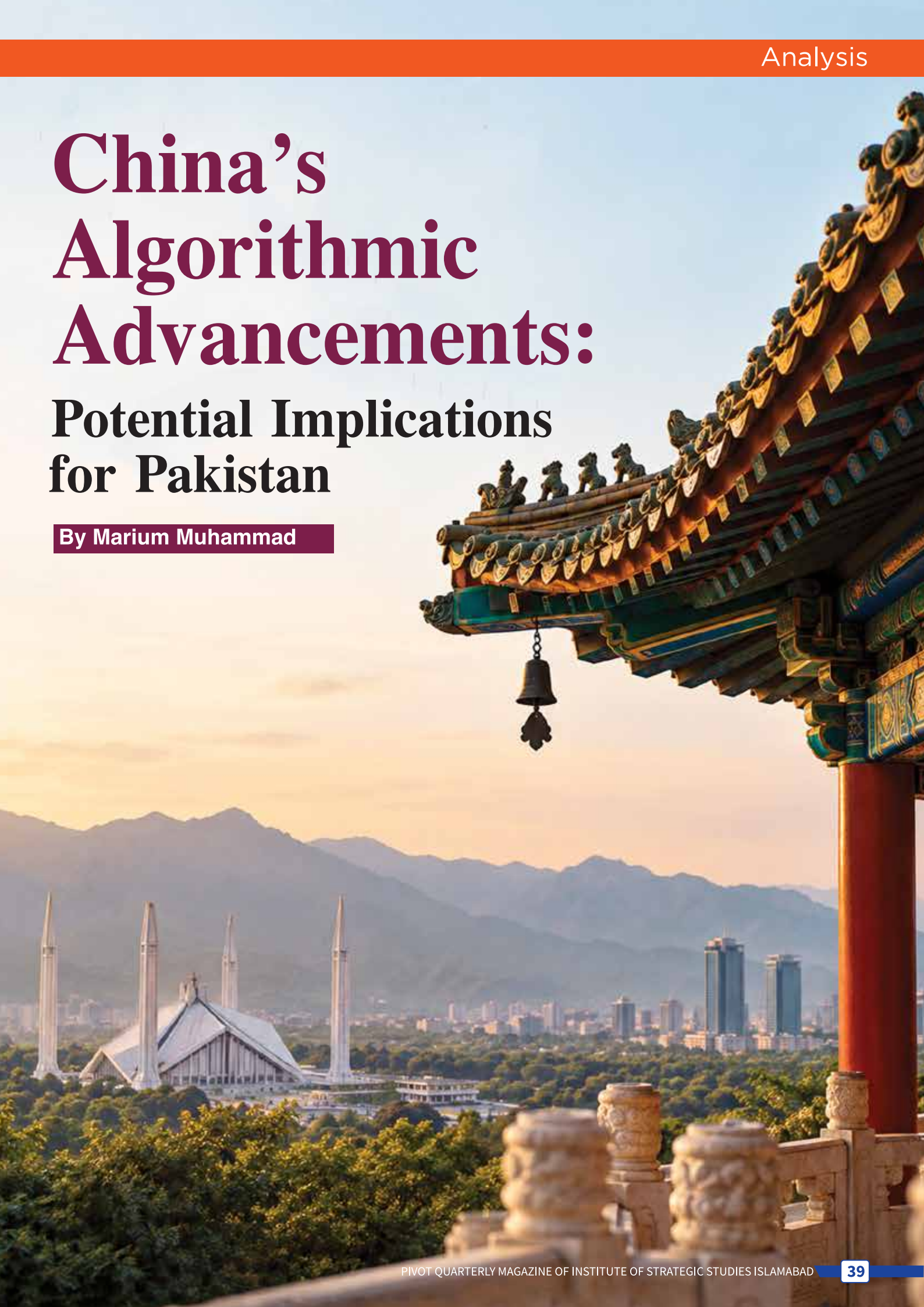


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China's Algorithmic Advancements:

Potential Implications for Pakistan

By Marium Muhammad



China is rapidly developing as the global power-hub of Artificial Intelligence (AI); its journey has evolved through a highly deliberate multi-decade transition from isolationism to state-driven AI-market dominance. It has been projected that it will surpass U.S. AI technological hardware by 2032. Its brisk algorithmic expansion has transformed China's digital outlook, creating a powerful ripple effect for the world. It has the potential to directly shape allies' digital infrastructure, national security, and economic policies, offering critical technological opportunities for the South Asian region and specifically for Pakistan.

Artificial intelligence (AI) represents a major technological transformation in human history, in which machines increasingly perform tasks traditionally requiring human intelligence, while human oversight remains essential. AI has proven unprecedented dominance in automation and data analysis. It interprets humans' intent by an AI agentic role to solve any problem worldwide. Countries are expanding their AI domains for control and influence. The U.S. is currently leading the worldwide AI algorithmic development, followed by China, whereas India is ranking globally in sixth position. Drawing on global advances in AI, China has rapidly developed indigenous capabilities, producing pioneering and wide-reaching innovations that have positioned it as a major player in the AI domain. China has strengthened its footing in every potential sector, leading to rapid development in the economy, automation, public services, smart infrastructure, health care, agricultural efficiency, urban operation, judicial service, and security.

China has been known for its dedicated economic growth over the last four decades, which has been one of the major factors behind its global economic reach. Besides its economic ascendance, China is rigorously focused on generative AI and Large Language Models(LLMs) and the usage of AI for industrial automation, optimized manufacturing, surveillance and security, smart cities, and fintech and payments. The digitization process in China sped up with



the changing global dynamics, especially after Covid 2019 pandemic, challenging climatic changes, pollution, security limitations, aging population, and shrinking labour force, which eventually have added an edge for AI developments.

However, AI's initial traces are linked to the automated theorems and logic reasoning in the mid-50s; in 1980, China launched its first localized AI tracking. The AI-driven commercialized era began in 2000-2015, shifting to massive commercial usage and generating immense, hyper-concentrated behavioural datasets. In 2016, Beijing consciously started its efforts to adopt modern machine learning, and by 2017, it extended to big data and deep learning. The State Council issued the landmark New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan (AIDP). The AIDP blueprint detailed its catchup polices by 2020, major pioneering breakthrough by 2025, and to achieve undisputed global leadership and technology and application vision by 2035.

From 2023 to the present, China relied strongly on LLMs and hardware self-reliance, despite all the international discrimination China built access to cutting-edge AI chips and shifted its primary focus toward building fully self-reliant ecosystems. The transformer neural network architecture reshaped Chinese technology across nearly all industries, enabling parallel data processing, powering advanced large language models, and transforming sectors like e-commerce, manufacturing, and finance. After generating an AI-tech boom, it adopted the "AI Plus" action plan, which mandates deep algorithmic integration across public classrooms, factories, and civic management offices to ensure high-utility deployment.

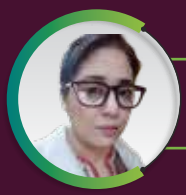
Under the current scenario U.S. is leading the global stage in Artificial Intelligence. In 2025, the total U.S. investment reached around $ 364 billion in AI software and infrastructure. U.S. AI policy has developed a strong network between the government, academic institution and the commercial sector, and is placing a high priority on national security, ethical AI development, and infrastructure improvement. Whereas China's growth is unprecedented, initially the market size value was $ 28.18 billion in 2025, which has been projected to grow to 202.00 billion by 2032. China has the edge of top-tier talent; it has the largest pool of AI talent worldwide. Secondly, China has generated a vast amount of data due to its huge population and wide usage of digital technology. As it has been claimed that 'data is the new oil', it is the much-needed information to train AI models in language, vision, analytics, and other domains, and lastly, state support. China is aggressively advancing AI applications across diverse sectors and transforming rapidly into a global AI powerhouse due to robust government support, massive data availability, and a vibrant tech ecosystem.

China is actively deepening its technological cooperation with South Asian states and emerging as a leading force in the region's AI and digital transformation. By making advanced Chinese AI models, open-source technologies, and cloud-computing solutions increasingly accessible, China is supporting technology localization and enabling South Asian countries to develop applications tailored to their own socioeconomic needs. At the same time, China is strengthening academic and research partnerships with South Asian countries through scholarships, exchange programmes, joint research initiatives, and opportunities for students and researchers to engage with leading Chinese universities and AI research institutions. These initiatives are helping build local technological capacity, nurture a new generation of digital talent, and moving towards a more interconnected and innovation-driven South Asian digital ecosystem.

China's AI development and its close nexus with Islamabad can further strengthen their partnership. Both countries have already joined hands for the flagship, multi-billion-dollar pilot project of CPEC. Pakistan is one of the primary recipients of

Chinese technological exports; its AI trajectory can broadly support Pakistan's multiple sectors. As it can support CPEC in upgrading and redefining trade routes, AI-driven cargo tracking and Gwadar port control, smart agriculture and its optimization, AI-supported health care, safe cities, fintech proliferation in the telecom sector, defence and security collaboration enhancing surveillance, electronic warfare, cyber defence, and drone technology, and lastly, AI-oriented geopolitical alignment. Pakistan needs to bridge the gap and work on the existing talent gap. "To fully capitalize on these technologies, Pakistan must rapidly scale its internal engineering talent to customize, maintain, and audit advanced algorithmic systems".

Pakistan must swiftly respond to the AI paradigm shift while recognizing that emerging technologies are becoming increasingly important alongside traditional dimensions of national security. Pakistan must align with China and formulate its own AI governance and ethical policy to implement AI-driven initiatives across all sectors. It needs to build a robust digital foundation, align its education system with the AI developments, build localized cloud data centres, and specify a satisfactory budget for AI development and infrastructure for future digitization.



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Towards a Common Export Governance Framework for TÜRKIYE–PAKISTAN Joint Defence Exports

By Mehmet Enes Beser

On 4 July, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that Türkiye–Pakistan defence-industrial cooperation was advancing through "new projects" being implemented step by step. The statement also highlights an important policy question: once Ankara and Islamabad jointly develop a frigate, drone, or electronic warfare system, who will have the authority to export it, under what conditions, and to which markets? As bilateral defence cooperation deepens, export governance will become as important as technological innovation.

The two countries would benefit from establishing what may be described as an export constitution a standing framework agreed before the next jointly developed platform reaches its final design stage. Key issues, including intellectual property, third-country approvals, pricing, foreign-sourced components, sanctions exposure, and end-use restrictions, should be settled well before a prospective customer emerges. The strength of the Türkiye–Pakistan strategic partnership provides a solid foundation for such cooperation, but it should be supported by a clear institutional framework defining the rights and responsibilities of each partner.

The February 2025 High-Level Strategic

Cooperation Council Declaration reaffirmed both countries' commitment to expanding joint defence-industrial cooperation. Pakistan's Defence Production Yearbook also highlights Karachi Shipyard's collaboration with Türkiye's ASFAT on the Jinnah-class frigate. As bilateral cooperation moves beyond the procurement of finished platforms towards joint design and production, both countries would benefit from a common framework governing the export of jointly developed defence systems.



Pakistan's own experience underscores why such a framework is becoming increasingly important. The JF-17 Thunder, jointly developed with China, has successfully entered the international defence market, including through the 2024 agreement with Azerbaijan. As future Türkiye–Pakistan platforms reach export readiness, relying on fresh negotiations for every potential sale could delay commercial opportunities and create uncertainty for both governments and industry. A common framework would facilitate timely and coordinated decisions on export destinations, pricing, and system configurations.

The experience of the T129 ATAK helicopter programme offers an important lesson. The 2018 contract for 30 helicopters, valued at approximately US$1.5 billion, was affected by the platform's reliance on LHTEC engines, making the transaction subject to U.S. export licensing requirements. Although the T129 was not jointly developed with Pakistan, the programme demonstrated that export approval depends not only on platform ownership but also on the origin and licensing conditions of critical components. This underscores the importance of incorporating export-control considerations into future joint development programmes from the outset.

Every joint development programme should therefore begin with a comprehensive component-sovereignty register identifying the origin, licensing conditions, and replacement complexity of critical components, including engines, chips, sensors, weapons, and embedded software. The contractual framework should also allocate responsibility for redesign costs if a foreign supplier blocks an export. Equally important, the concept of joint intellectual property requires greater clarity. Pre-existing technologies should remain with the company or country that originally developed them, while technologies created through shared investment should follow an agreed ownership formula. Beyond ownership, the framework should clearly define access to technical data, source code, derivative development rights, technology upgrades, and arrangements should either partner withdraw from future programme development. Such provisions would strengthen long-term industrial cooperation while reducing uncertainty in jointly developed defence projects.

Third-country exports should require mutual consent, but this should not amount to an indefinite veto. A permanent joint export

coordination mechanism could classify markets as pre-approved, restricted, or subject to case-by-case review. Once an export proposal is submitted, both governments should work within an agreed timeframe, such as 45 days to approve, reject, or request additional safeguards. Any decision to withhold approval should be based on clearly defined legal obligations, sanctions, technology-security concerns, or agreed end-use criteria rather than administrative delays. Likewise, no company should announce an export agreement before the approval process is complete.

Pricing arrangements should also be clearly defined. A model agreement should distinguish the base platform, nationally supplied packages, royalties, and lifecycle support while establishing transparent mechanisms for exchange-rate adjustments and customer-requested modifications. This would help ensure that commercial responsibilities remain balanced throughout the export process.

Both countries already operate established export-control and end-user certification systems. Building on these existing mechanisms, jointly developed platforms should operate under a harmonized bilateral framework covering re-export restrictions, serial-number tracking, sanctions screening, and provisions allowing technical support to be suspended if equipment is transferred or used outside agreed conditions. While Türkiye and Pakistan may occasionally differ in their assessment of particular destinations, an agreed institutional mechanism would enable such differences to be managed transparently before equipment is delivered.

Some may argue that a permanent framework could reduce flexibility or require the disclosure of sensitive information. In practice, neither outcome is inevitable. The two governments can institutionalize decision-making procedures while keeping technical specifications, commercial arrangements, and security assessments confidential. Project-specific annexes can continue to accommodate unique requirements where both sides agree. The objective is not to reduce flexibility, but to minimize uncertainty through predictable and transparent procedures.

The institutional foundations for such cooperation are already in place. In 2025, Türkiye's Secretariat of Defence Industries and Pakistan's Ministry of Defence Production signed a memorandum to deepen bilateral defence-industrial cooperation, while Turkish Aerospace and Pakistan's Naval Research and Development Institute established an additional channel for technical collaboration. These institutions are well positioned to develop a comprehensive protocol involving legal, technical, and export-control experts. The framework could initially be applied to the next export-oriented configuration of the Jinnah-class frigate or any future jointly developed defence platform.

Before introducing such platforms to international markets, both governments should test the proposed framework against a hypothetical third-country export scenario. If they can identify all relevant licensing requirements, approve customers within an agreed time frame, present a unified commercial offer, allocate support responsibilities, and enforce common end-use conditions without requiring high-level political intervention, Türkiye–Pakistan defence cooperation will be well positioned to evolve from successful joint development into a mature, predictable, and internationally competitive defence-industrial partnership.



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Keeping the Door to Diplomacy Open:

PAKISTAN'S UNIQUE ROLE IN THE IRAN – U.S. CONFLICT

By Arhama Siddiqa



The renewed hostilities between Iran and the United States demonstrate how quickly a diplomatic opening can be overtaken by military escalation. The conflict, which began with attacks against the Islamic Republic of Iran on 28 February 2026, continues despite a temporary ceasefire and the subsequent Islamabad Memorandum of Understanding.

The resumption of military exchanges has placed that understanding under severe pressure. Yet this does not make Pakistan's diplomatic contribution irrelevant. On the contrary, the continuation of the war makes Islamabad's role more necessary than before.

Pakistan occupies a unique position that few other countries can replicate. Iran is not merely another regional actor for Islamabad. It is a neighbouring and brotherly country with which Pakistan shares history, faith, culture, geography, and considerable economic potential. The peace, stability and prosperity of Iran are directly connected to Pakistan's own security and development. At the same time, Islamabad maintains working relations with Washington and close partnerships with countries across the Gulf. It can therefore communicate across political divides while retaining the confidence of Tehran.

Pakistan's value does not arise from maintaining an artificial equidistance between Iran and the United States. Its position is grounded in clear principles: respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference, non-use of force, adherence to the United Nations Charter and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Pakistan has condemned the attacks against Iran and has consistently argued that military action cannot provide a sustainable solution to political and security disagreements. Its joint five-point initiative with China specifically called for the protection of Iran's sovereignty, national independence and security, an immediate cessation of hostilities and the commencement of peace negotiations.



Pakistan has similarly maintained that the Iranian nuclear question must be addressed through established diplomatic and international mechanisms. Attacks on peaceful nuclear facilities undermine not only regional security but also the authority of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the broader non-proliferation framework. A durable settlement must recognise the rights, obligations and legitimate security concerns of all sides and cannot be produced through coercion.

This principled position helped Pakistan gain acceptance as a facilitator. Tehran viewed Islamabad as a trusted interlocutor, while Washington recognised Pakistan's ability to communicate messages and create political space. During the initial phase of the war, Pakistan maintained open channels with the concerned parties and undertook sustained diplomatic engagement aimed at halting hostilities and bringing the two sides towards negotiations. These efforts contributed to the temporary ceasefire and the resumption of direct diplomatic activity. Delegations from Iran and the United States travelled to Islamabad on 11–12 April 2026 for intensive peace talks. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the substantive negotiations continued for approximately 21 hours, with Pakistan's civilian and military leadership facilitating several rounds of engagement. The talks did not resolve every outstanding question, but they represented an important transition from military confrontation to structured diplomacy.

The process later produced the Islamabad MoU, electronically signed by Iran and the United States on 18 June. It was followed by a high-level meeting at Bürgenstock, Switzerland, attended by representatives of Iran, the United States, Pakistan and Qatar. The meeting established working arrangements covering nuclear issues, sanctions, monitoring, dispute resolution and the prevention of miscalculation. A roadmap was also proposed for further negotiations towards a more comprehensive agreement.

The return of hostilities should not erase what was achieved. Mediators cannot compel sovereign states to reach a final settlement, nor can they guarantee that every ceasefire will survive unresolved disagreements. Pakistan's achievement was to establish a channel between two states whose relations have been defined by decades of mistrust. The present crisis shows the limitations of a temporary ceasefire that is not rapidly converted into a durable political settlement. It does not prove that mediation was misplaced.

Pakistan's immediate responsibility is therefore to keep the door to diplomacy open. Islamabad has already urged the parties to exercise restraint, uphold their commitments and return to the framework of dialogue. Its diplomacy should remain



patient, discreet and focused on outcomes rather than public recognition. Highly publicised mediation can harden positions by making compromise appear politically costly. Quiet communication, by contrast, gives the parties greater room to reconsider their positions without appearing to retreat under pressure.



The first objective must be an end to hostilities, protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, prevention of wider regional escalation and restoration of dependable communication. Once minimum stability is restored, negotiations can again address the more difficult issues of sanctions, nuclear assurances, maritime security and regional stability. A phased process, based on reciprocal and verifiable steps, is more likely to survive than an overloaded agreement that attempts to settle every disagreement at once.

Pakistan's interest in peace is also economic. Prolonged conflict threatens energy supplies, commercial shipping, border communities and Pakistan's wider geo-economic ambitions. The activation of the Gabd–Rimdan transit corridor through Iran in April 2026 demonstrates the possibilities that regional stability can create. Under the international TIR framework, the first consignment, carrying frozen meat from Karachi to Tashkent, travelled through Iranian territory to Uzbekistan, formally opening an additional route between Pakistan and Central Asia.

The corridor cannot end the war, but it gives peace a material foundation. Traders, transporters, border communities and regional markets acquire a direct interest in stability when functioning commercial routes connect their economies. It also demonstrates that Pakistan's engagement with Iran is not directed against any third country. It is part of an inclusive vision in which Iran serves as an important bridge linking South Asia with West Asia, Central Asia and beyond.

Pakistan should therefore combine diplomacy with deeper economic connectivity. Greater lawful trade, improved border infrastructure, active border markets and expanded transit arrangements can turn the Pakistan–Iran frontier into a genuine zone of opportunity. This would reinforce the argument that the future of the region lies not in military confrontation, but in cooperation, connectivity and shared prosperity.

Pakistan cannot determine the final decisions of either Tehran or Washington. It can, however, preserve the channel through which those decisions may eventually move away from confrontation. Its role is to support Iran's legitimate rights and security while maintaining communication with the United States; to defend diplomacy when military options appear dominant; and to transform regional peace into practical economic cooperation. At a moment when war continues, and earlier understandings are under pressure, keeping this bridge intact may be Pakistan's most important contribution to regional stability



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BEYOND ROADS AND BRIDGES: CONNECTING KNOWLEDGE FOR SHARED PROSPERITY

By Muhammad Habib Ur Rehman



For decades, connectivity has been measured in kilometers of highways, railways, and economic corridors. While such infrastructure remains indispensable, the true strength of regional cooperation in the twenty-first century lies not only in physical infrastructure but also in the movement of ideas, talent, and innovation. Nations that invest not only in physical links but also in intellectual and technological partnerships are better positioned to achieve sustainable development and lasting prosperity.

China's remarkable transformation demonstrates that modern connectivity extends far beyond roads and bridges. Through sustained investments in education, scientific research, digital innovation, and people-to-people exchanges, China has demonstrated the growing importance of knowledge, skills, and innovation as foundations of sustainable development. As regional cooperation enters a new phase, strengthening knowledge connectivity offers an opportunity to foster deeper trust, stronger partnerships, and shared prosperity that endures well beyond any physical project.

China's rise over the past four decades is often associated with its remarkable infrastructure achievements. High-speed rail networks, modern ports, and world-class industrial zones have transformed the country's economic landscape and strengthened regional connectivity. Yet these physical accomplishments represent

only one dimension of China's development strategy. Equally significant has been its long-term investment in education, scientific research, technological innovation, and talent development. These investments have enabled China to emerge as a global leader in advanced manufacturing, digital technology, renewable energy, and artificial intelligence, offering valuable lessons for countries pursuing sustainable and inclusive development.



The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) reflects this broader understanding of connectivity. Although it is often viewed primarily through the lens of transport infrastructure, the initiative has gradually evolved into a platform for comprehensive cooperation encompassing education, technology, healthcare, cultural exchanges, digital connectivity, and sustainable development. This evolution reflects a simple yet powerful reality: roads and bridges create access, but knowledge creates opportunity. Physical infrastructure can shorten distances, yet it is scientific collaboration, innovation, and skilled human capital that generate long-term prosperity.

China's emphasis on educational cooperation has become one of the most influential pillars of its international engagement. Thousands of international students pursue higher education at Chinese universities each year, gaining access to modern research facilities, advanced laboratories, and globally competitive academic environments. Beyond earning degrees, these students experience a culture that values innovation, discipline, and continuous learning. They return home not only with academic qualifications but also with practical skills, professional networks, and a deeper appreciation of international cooperation.

Scientific collaboration has become another defining feature of China's engagement with the world. Joint research programmes, university partnerships, and collaborative innovation platforms enable researchers from different countries to address shared challenges in areas ranging from public health and renewable energy to climate resilience and advanced materials. These partnerships demonstrate that scientific knowledge transcends national boundaries. At a time when global challenges require collective responses, cooperation in research and technology has become an increasingly important pillar of international diplomacy.

The digital revolution has further expanded the meaning of connectivity. Today, data, ideas, and innovation move faster than goods. China has emerged as a leading force in digital transformation through advances in artificial intelligence, e-commerce, smart manufacturing, and digital infrastructure.

These achievements illustrate that future competitiveness will depend not only on physical assets but also on the ability to generate, share, and apply knowledge. Building digital capabilities and promoting technological cooperation therefore represent strategic investments in shared prosperity and long-term resilience.

Equally important is the role of people-to-people exchanges in strengthening mutual understanding. Enduring partnerships are sustained not only by agreements between governments but also by trust among societies. Academic exchanges, cultural dialogue, and youth engagement foster friendships that outlast political cycles and economic fluctuations. Students, researchers, and young professionals often become informal ambassadors, helping bridge cultural differences while encouraging collaboration based on mutual respect and shared aspirations. Such exchanges create a strong foundation upon which broader diplomatic, economic, and societal cooperation can flourish.

China's vision of building a community with a shared future reflects this comprehensive approach to development. It recognizes that peace, stability, and prosperity are interconnected, and that no country can effectively address contemporary challenges in isolation. Climate change, food security, public health, and technological transformation all require cooperation rather than confrontation. By promoting dialogue, knowledge sharing, and collaborative innovation, China has increasingly positioned connectivity as a catalyst for common development and shared progress.

As regional and global dynamics continue to evolve, the next stage of connectivity should be guided by quality as much as quantity. Success should no longer be measured solely by the number of infrastructure projects completed, but also by the number of researchers collaborating across borders, students participating in academic exchanges, technologies jointly developed, and innovations that improve people's lives. These forms of knowledge connectivity generate benefits that are sustainable, inclusive, and capable of driving long-term economic and social progress.

The future belongs to societies that embrace learning, innovation, and cooperation. China's development experience demonstrates that physical infrastructure provides the foundation for growth, but knowledge infrastructure determines its long-term resilience. Roads and bridges may connect destinations, yet it is education that connects generations, research that connects solutions, and innovation that connects the future. By placing knowledge at the centre of regional and global cooperation, China is helping shape a model of connectivity that extends beyond geography and commerce. It is a vision in which shared learning leads to shared development, and where collaboration becomes the strongest bridge towards lasting prosperity.



By Muhammad Habib Ur Rehman
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BUILDING PAKISTAN'S AI Future Through CPEC 2.0

By Emaan Farqaleet Khan



The second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), often referred to as CPEC 2.0, places greater emphasis on industrialization, innovation, and digital development compared to the first phase, which focused substantially on physical infrastructure and energy projects. China's focus on innovation and digital transformation has brought about significant changes in its economy, with cities such as Shenzhen and Hangzhou emerging as major centres of advanced manufacturing, artificial intelligence (AI), fintech, and green technology. CPEC 2.0 provides Pakistan with an opportunity to draw upon this experience and develop its own capacity in emerging technologies.

The longstanding strategic partnership between Pakistan and China gives Pakistan significant potential to benefit from China's experience and adapt relevant approaches to its own economic and institutional context. One of the most promising areas of cooperation is the development of AI technologies and supporting infrastructure. In today's world, technological capability is increasingly linked to economic competitiveness and national resilience, with countries across the world seeking to integrate AI into a wide range of sectors to improve efficiency, productivity, and innovation. Major economies, including the United States and China, are making substantial investments in AI infrastructure and related technologies. China, in particular, has pursued large-scale investments in AI, semiconductors, digital infrastructure, and other emerging technologies through a combination of public and private initiatives. Pakistan should also begin investing in the infrastructure and human capital required to develop and deploy its own AI capabilities in order to strengthen its long-term economic and technological resilience.

CPEC 2.0 provides an important avenue for exploring this potential by enabling Pakistan to strengthen the physical and digital foundations required for an AI-driven economy. Beyond roads, industrial zones, and energy projects, CPEC 2.0 can support the digital infrastructure necessary for technological development. It also provides opportunities for the development of smart-city initiatives in major urban centres across Pakistan, including the application of AI and digital technologies for traffic management, public-service delivery, urban planning, and administrative systems. China's experience in developing smart cities and digital governance provides valuable lessons that Pakistan can adapt according to its own governance needs, institutional frameworks, and regulatory requirements. The responsible incorporation of AI into urban management can improve traffic flows, enhance public services, strengthen administrative efficiency, and support evidence-based decision-making.

China's progress in AI and digital technologies is particularly relevant in this context. Many Chinese cities have developed advanced telecommunications networks, digital public services, and smart-city applications. Chinese companies such as Huawei and ZTE have also contributed significantly to Pakistan's telecommunications infrastructure, creating an existing foundation for further technological cooperation. CPEC 2.0 therefore provides an opportunity to build upon this established cooperation and expand it towards the broader development of Pakistan's digital and AI ecosystem.

This push towards technological development can extend beyond AI to emerging fields such as blockchain, biotechnology, and space technology, all of which have the potential to contribute to Pakistan's economic and technological transformation. CPEC 2.0 can also support the development of 5G infrastructure, fintech platforms, and fibre-optic networks. Taken together, these investments can provide the digital foundation required for the effective development and deployment of AI technologies.

AI systems require high-speed connectivity, cloud-computing capabilities, secure data



storage, and reliable data infrastructure to function effectively. Strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China in telecommunications and information and communications technology (ICT) can therefore contribute significantly to the development of Pakistan's digital economy. CPEC 2.0 should also encourage investment in domestic data centres and cloud-computing facilities, which are increasingly important for training, deploying, and maintaining AI systems.

Energy availability, however, remains an important consideration. AI systems and data centres require reliable and substantial supplies of electricity, making energy security an essential component of Pakistan's AI ambitions. Pakistan's existing energy challenges highlight the need to develop a more resilient and diversified energy base alongside digital infrastructure. Expanding solar, hydropower, and other renewable-energy projects could provide a stronger foundation for Pakistan's long-term technological development while supporting the country's broader transition towards sustainable energy.

Pakistan's growing adoption of renewable energy presents an opportunity to support future AI infrastructure while potentially reducing pressure on the national electricity grid. Through CPEC 2.0, Pakistan and China can explore opportunities to integrate renewable-energy investments with the development of AI-ready digital infrastructure. Such an approach could help ensure that future data centres, technology parks, and digital industries have access to reliable and sustainable sources of electricity.

As artificial intelligence continues to reshape economies around the world, investment in AI infrastructure is becoming increasingly important for national competitiveness and sustainable development. CPEC 2.0 gives Pakistan an opportunity to move beyond traditional infrastructure projects and strengthen the digital foundations required for future growth. By investing in telecommunications, renewable energy, data infrastructure, human capital, and technological innovation, Pakistan can position itself to participate more actively in the global AI economy rather than remain dependent solely on technologies developed elsewhere.

For Pakistan, the future of CPEC 2.0 therefore lies not only in connecting markets and industries but also in connecting the country to the technologies, skills, knowledge, and innovation that will shape the next phase of global economic development. Through deeper Pakistan-China cooperation, responsible technology adoption, and sustained investment in domestic capabilities, CPEC 2.0 can contribute to building a more digitally connected, technologically capable, and economically resilient Pakistan.



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Lanzhou Beef Noodles

兰州牛肉面

"A bowl of Lanzhou Beef Noodles is more than a meal. it is a taste of tradition, crafted by hand and served with warmth."

Diplomacy is not always conducted across conference tables.

Sometimes, it begins around a dining table.

Lanzhou Beef Noodles, originating from Gansu, China, have travelled thousands of miles to reach Pakistan. As authentic Chinese cuisine finds a growing audience in Pakistani cities, this bowl is becoming more than just food-it is an opportunity to experience Chinese culture through taste, tradition and craftsmanship.

By Ramsha Ashraf

The hand-pulled noodles reflect a centuries-old culinary tradition; the clear broth and carefully chosen toppings tell a story of Lanzhou; and the act of sharing the meal creates something that no diplomatic document can quite achieve-a moment of human connection.

In a country where **China-Pakistan friendship** is often described as "higher than mountains and deeper than oceans," food offers another language through which that friendship can be experienced.

One bowl. Two cultures. A shared table.

This is the quiet power of culinary diplomacy: bringing people closer, one meal at a time.

Cuisine: Chinese-Gansu/Lanzhou

Serves: 4	Preparation Time: 30-40 minutes	Cooking Time: 2 hours

Ingredients

1. For the Hand-Pulled Noodles

- 400 g all-purpose flour
- 200 ml water, approximately
- ½ tsp salt
- 1 tsp vegetable oil
- Extra flour, for dusting

2. For the Beef & Broth

- 500 g beef shank or beef brisket
- 1.5-2 litres water
- 1 small onion, halved
- 4-5 slices fresh ginger
- 3 cloves garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- 2-3 star anise
- 1 small cinnamon stick
- 1 tsp Sichuan peppercorns
- 1 tsp cumin seeds
- Salt, to taste
- 1-2 tbsp soy sauce, optional

3. For the Toppings

- 1-2 white radishes, thinly sliced
- 2-3 spring onions, finely chopped
- Fresh coriander/cilantro, chopped
- 2-3 tbsp chili oil
- Cooked beef, thinly sliced

Method

Step 1-Prepare the Noodle Dough

1. Add flour and salt to a large bowl.
2. Gradually add water while mixing until a rough dough forms.
3. Knead for 8-10 minutes until the dough becomes smooth and elastic.
4. Cover and allow the dough to rest for 20-30 minutes.
5. Knead it briefly again, then roll it into a thick rectangular sheet.
6. Lightly coat the surface with vegetable oil and allow it to rest for another 10-15 minutes.

Step 2-Make the Hand-Pulled Noodles

1. Cut the dough into long strips.
2. Take one strip at a time and gently stretch it with both hands.
3. Pull and fold the dough repeatedly until long, thin noodles are formed.
4. Dust lightly with flour if the noodles become sticky.
5. Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil.
6. Add the noodles and cook for approximately 2-3 minutes, depending on their thickness.
7. Drain and set aside.

Step 3-Prepare the Beef Broth

1.Place the beef in a large pot and cover with cold water.
2. Bring to a boil and skim off the foam that rises to the surface. This helps keep the broth clear.
3. Add onion, ginger, garlic, bay leaves, star anise, cinnamon, Sichuan peppercorns and cumin seeds.
4. Reduce the heat and simmer gently for 1½-2 hours, or until the beef is tender.
5. Remove the beef from the pot and allow it to cool slightly.
6. Slice the beef thinly and reserve it for serving.
7. Strain the broth to remove the spices and aromatics.
8. Season with salt and, if desired, a small amount of soy sauce.

Step 4-Cook the Radish

Slice the white radish into thin rounds or half-moons.
2. Add it to the hot broth.
3. Simmer for 5-8 minutes, until tender but still firm.

Step 5-Prepare the Chili Oil

For a simple homemade chili oil, combine:

- 3 tbsp red chili flakes
- ½ tsp Sichuan peppercorns
- ½ tsp cumin seeds
- 4 tbsp neutral cooking oil

Heat the oil until hot but not smoking. Pour it carefully over the chili mixture and allow it to infuse for several minutes.

Step 6-Assemble the Noodles

1.Place a generous portion of freshly cooked hand-pulled noodles in a deep bowl.
2. Pour over the hot clear beef broth.
3. Add several slices of tender beef.
4. Arrange the cooked white radish on top.
5. Garnish with chopped spring onions and fresh coriander.
6. Finish with a drizzle of aromatic chili oil.

Serve Hot

The finished dish should have springy hand-pulled noodles, tender beef, a clear and fragrant broth, white radish, fresh green herbs and a vibrant layer of chili oil.

Traditional presentation: Clear broth + white radish + red chili oil + green herbs + tender beef and noodles.





#Mirha Saleem

Islamabad, Pakistan
Hong Kong Polytechnic University Graduate

Beyond the Classroom:
A Pakistani Student's Research Journey in China



In summer 2024, I had the incredible opportunity to attend the Future Scientist Exchange Program at the University of Science and Technology of China (USTC) in Hefei, China. The program paired me with professors to research bounce cosmology, an area of theoretical physics that explores alternatives to the traditional Big Bang model. We worked in well-equipped laboratories, learned from professors who were leaders in their fields, and had access to facilities and technology that many students only read about. The emphasis on innovation and hands-on learning made it clear why Chinese universities are becoming increasingly competitive on the global stage. Beyond the research itself, what made the experience unforgettable was the community, students from all over the world, each bringing their own perspective on science, culture, and what it means to step into a completely new environment. We explored what it meant to be foreigners navigating a country that felt both futuristic and steeped in history. I not only gained lifelong friendships but also the chance to contribute to research that has fascinated me.

As the program encouraged us to travel, we hopped on high-speed trains and explored Beijing, Suzhou, Zhangjiajie, and Shanghai, each city offering something different, from the great wall to towering sandstone peaks and ultramodern skylines. For Pakistani students, opportunities like this are still rare but increasingly within reach, and I'd genuinely encourage anyone curious about science or research to look into such programs. Between growing scholarship pipelines, China's push for global academic partnerships, and Pakistan's own strengthening ties with Chinese universities, there's real room for young Pakistani scientists to gain exposure most people dream of, and it's worth chasing. Looking back, the experience reminded me that some of the best learning happens when you step outside your comfort zone, and that's an opportunity well worth chasing.



Judy Gong

Shanghai, China and Lee



China at Your Fingertips: Everyday Convenience in the Digital Age

Growing up in China, I feel like I've always taken certain conveniences for granted, and have only begun to appreciate them since I started studying abroad. The thing that I miss the most is how fast delivery platforms can reach me with basically anything, ranging from food, drinks, groceries, and even medication at an average of under 25 minutes. Personally, I've been almost too reliant on the food delivery service, as it costs about 3 RMB to have food delivered to your doorstep. If you want an even faster service for the food to be delivered to you in under 15 minutes, you can choose to pay an extra 3 RMB for the expedited service. It has really made me feel so spoiled as I constantly feel just a few taps on my phone away from all the amazing food Shanghai has to offer.



Speaking of food, the one major difference I have seen growing up is how traditional paper menus are now less common. When I was younger, I remember having to pick up heavy, laminated, and often greasy menus from the counter just to flip the whole thing from front to back. Now, with just a quick QR code scan, everyone can access a digitized menu, which allows you to browse, order, and pay all on your phone. What's even better is that if you're eating out with friends, you can see what each of your friends put in to order, so you won't have to worry about having duplicates. It's perfect for those days when you are in a hurry or your social battery is just running low. Beyond restaurants, that same level of convenience extends to almost every part of daily life. Whether I'm paying for groceries, booking a train ticket, renting a bike, calling a taxi, or sending money to a friend, everything can be done through my phone in just a few seconds. Mobile payment has become so deeply integrated into everyday life that it's not uncommon to go an entire day without carrying any cash or even a physical wallet. After living abroad, I realized just how unusual this level of digital integration actually is.

Cindy Xie

Beijing, China and Lee

From Mountain Peaks to Smart Cities: Discovering Modern China



After having visited many different parts of China, I have realized that no matter where I am, China has done a great job at making processes very efficient and convenient. During my most recent trip, I went to many national parks, and I found this theme common throughout every single one. Many of the national parks we went to, like Zhangjiajie, Tianmen, and Jiuzhaigou, were all very high up in the mountains. It takes a lot of effort to get people up to the top, where the attractions are. Instead of making people walk long distances to see the beautiful views, there are a variety of transportation services provided to make the journey as easy as possible. For example, to see Tianmen cave, you take the longest cable car in the world, take a bus through the winding mountains, and then take multiple escalators to get to the bottom of the cave. Everything is very straightforward and you can just sit and relax while these transportation services do the majority of the work. I really appreciate how the national parks offer these services so that people can see everything they want to see without being too tired to enjoy it.

Another part of China I am always amazed at is how technologically advanced it is. In today's China, technology is incorporated into everyday life. For example, most purchases are made with WeChat, a social communication app. It is very easy to set up your WeChat pay, and after that, you pay by simply having your QR code scanned. It's easy, quick, and doesn't involve needing to take out your credit card or even needing to have another person involved. You use We Chat Pay at restaurants, food stalls, retail stores, and more. Technology throughout China is there to help make everyone's lives easier. In restaurants, you see robots that deliver small dishes to tables. In one of the hotels we stayed at, there was a smart device called "Xiao Jun" that acted as a virtual assistant. You could tell her to close the window curtains, open the hotel lights, or call the front desk. Overall, China has not shied away from developing and advancing technological progress within society.



> ***"It takes a lot of effort to get people up to the top, where the attractions are. Instead of making people walk long distances to see the beautiful views,"***

Cheng Hu

Suzhou, China and Lee



Suzhou: A Living Legacy of Reform and Opening Up

If I had to choose the single most influential policy in modern China, it would be 改革开放 (Reform and Opening Up). Introduced in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping, this policy marked a turning point in China's history. Rather than remaining isolated, China gradually opened its economy to international trade, foreign investment, and new technologies while encouraging economic reforms at home. Over the following decades, the policy transformed China from a largely agricultural country into one of the world's largest economies and dramatically improved living standards for hundreds of millions of people. It also encouraged cities to modernize, attracted global businesses such as Apple, Microsoft, Samsung, etc and created opportunities that simply did not exist for previous generations.

For me, the best example of this transformation is my hometown, Suzhou, especially the Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP). I grew up watching the area develop into one of China's most modern districts. What was once mostly farmland has become a skyline filled with skyscrapers, the famous one is 东方之门, technology companies from all over the world, universities (Liverpoor university, shopping centers 苏州中心, and beautiful parks around Jinji Lake(where i do sailing). It is hard to imagine that many of these buildings did not exist just a few decades ago. The Industrial Park, established in 1994 as a joint project between China and Singapore, became a model of China's Reform and Opening Up by attracting international companies, encouraging innovation, and creating countless new jobs(that's how my dad get his job). Every time I return home, there seems to be another new building, subway line, or business district, reminding me how quickly my city has grown.

What I appreciate most is that Suzhou has managed to balance modernization with its history. While SIP represents China's future with its impressive skyline and advanced industries, only a short distance away is the old city, where centuries-old canals, stone bridges, classical gardens, and traditional architecture have been carefully preserved. Growing up, it was completely normal for me to spend one day walking through modern shopping malls and office towers, and the next day exploring quiet streets that have existed for hundreds of years. To me, this combination perfectly reflects the spirit of Reform and Opening Up: embracing change and innovation without completely losing the culture and traditions that make China unique.







