

**From Diplomatic Policies to Strategic Partnership: Case of Pakistan, China and Iran**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper looks at the changing strategic alliance between China and Iran and evaluates the implications of such an alliance for the foreign policy of Pakistan, security in the region, and economic opportunities. Traditionally, China-Iran relations were built on cautious diplomatic relations from the beginning of the formal relations in 1971 to the more pronounced strategic partnership based on economic, energy, and geopolitical relations. This was enhanced by the signing of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement in 2021 that further institutionalized cooperation in the energy, infrastructure, technology, and security domains, most notably with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The study identifies the geopolitical issues behind this union, such as Iran being strategically located between Asia and Europe, China increasing energy security, and the necessity of these two nations to offset US influence in the region. The paper describes the influence of systemic pressures, competition of power in the region, and economic interdependence on the strategic alignment between China and Iran using the theoretical approach of structural realism. Qualitative research approach, which is the secondary data, i.e. academic literature, policy reports, and official agreements, is applied, and thematic analysis is applied to determine the major patterns in the political, economic, and security cooperation. The results show that even though the China-Iran relationship is a factor in the new multipolar relations and regional connectivity, it also poses an opportunity and a strategic challenge to Pakistan. The positive side of the situation is that Pakistan can gain regional trade, energy integration, and connectivity by investing in such projects as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), yet it should not forget to balance its relations with Iran, China, the Gulf states, and the Western powers to be able to sustain its strategic stability and diplomatic flexibility.*

**Keywords:** China-Iran alliance, Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan foreign policy, regional security, economic connectivity, geopolitical strategy

**INTRODUCTION**

The formal diplomatic relations between China and Iran were built in 1971, and it began as a long-term partnership of caution. The relationship was confined to political and diplomatic involvement initially, but it grew after the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and China aimed to get energy resources, and Iran aimed to get international support (Sahriatinia\*, 2011).

Since the 2000s, economic relationships have become stronger, particularly in energy relations, infrastructure, and technology collaboration. Long-term cooperation in economic, political, and security fields was formalized in the 2021 25-year strategic partnership worth an approximate of 400 billion dollars (Knutson, 2021).

This alliance is observable in large Chinese initiatives in the Iranian energy, infrastructure, and technology segments. China has funded the development of Iranian oil and gas and the modernization of its refinery, the construction of its railways, and industrial zones in the Belt and Road Initiative. Such projects help Iran boost the economic strength, as well as local interconnectedness. To Pakistan, the China-Iran relationship poses an opportunity, as well as a challenge. The economically feasible aspect is that it can support CPEC without restricting regional trade interconnections, energy relations, and connectivity between Gwadar and other corridors. On the strategic level, it can transform the balance of power in the region and increase rivalry between Gwadar and Chabahar ports, as well as make Pakistan have to walk a fine line between its relations with Iran, China, or the Gulf states (Emadi, 2026).

**Table 01: Key Milestones in China-Iran Relations**

| Year  | Event/ Development                                    |
|-------|-------------------------------------------------------|
| 1971  | Formal diplomatic relations established               |
| 1979  | Post-Iranian Revolution, expanded ties                |
| 2000s | Strengthening economic and infrastructure cooperation |
| 2021  | 25-year strategic partnership signed                  |

**Source:** Chubin, S., & Zabih, S. (1974). *The Foreign Relations of Iran: a developing state in a zone of great-power conflict*. Univ of California Press.

### **Iran-China Cooperation as Driven by Geopolitical Forces**

Iran-China relations are shaped by a combination of geostrategic location, regional connectivity ambitions, energy security, and shared opposition to US influence. Several key geopolitical drivers can be identified:

#### **Strategic Location and Connections**

Iran is in a strategic place between Asia and Europe. Through its inclusion in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, Tehran can:

- Play the role of a go-between between Europe and Asia.
- Enlarge regional trade and movement routes.
- Minimization of the effects of US sanctions through enhancing regional economic relations.

During the reign of President Raisi, Iran has been hastening the process of forming transport corridors connecting the Gulf with Syria and Lebanon via Iraq. Other major projects include the Salameh-Basra railway, which links Iran with Iraq and further to Syria, and the shipping routes between Bandar Abbas and the port of Latakia in Syria. This is in line with the interest that China has in the China-Central Asia-West Asia BRI route (alam, 2008).

### **Energy Security and Infrastructure Development**

Iran wants to use the investments of China in energy and infrastructure for economic development and strategic power. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is regarded as a prototype of linking the Makran coast of Iran to the regional energy systems.

- Iran-Pakistan gas pipelines might be connected to Chinese-built gas infrastructure of LNG in Gwadar.
- The ports, such as Chabahar and Jask, are developed; this diversifies the routes of exports, decreases the reliance on the Strait of Hormuz, and establishes a stronger position of Iran in the energy trade of the region (ahmed, 2019).

### **US Influence Counterbalancing**

One of the motives of the alliance is the common desire to restrain the US geopolitical and economic power in the area. Iran is a member of multilateral organizations like BRICS and SCO to overcome unilateral sanctions and develop the level of cooperation. Other financial systems like the CIPS of China and SPFS of Russia are also in place to lessen reliance on the US-controlled global financial system and SWIFT (Maqsood, 2023).

### **Cooperation in Security and Regional Stability**

Iran-China relations are also motivated by security reasons and maritime strategic concerns: Military cooperation: This involves training, counterterrorism, and joint naval operations in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.

- Iran has also acquired asymmetric capabilities with the Chinese missile technology to ensure its maritime boundaries and energy corridors are safe.
- The presence of China in the regional security, though minimal, promotes the Iranian vision of regional self-reliance and discourages unilateral US actions (Saraswat, 2022).

### **Economic Dimension**

The most powerful and resilient branch of the Iran-China relationship is the economic cooperation. Iran is a country that has some of the largest oil and natural gas reserves in the world. China being the largest energy consumer and importer in the world needs stable and long-term energy. Iran offers China energy at competitive prices and on long term basis. China has still been trading with Iran even with international sanctions. It employs other banking systems, regional currency, and barter trade. These processes assist the two parties in evading US-dominated financial networks (hartpence, 2011).

This is an important trade for Iran to survive economically. In the case of China, it provides energy security and a market. China has a large exportation of products to Iran. They consist of industrial machinery, consumer goods, technology, and construction material. Chinese companies are particularly important in Iran's industrial and manufacturing industries. This business association increases the economic reliance of Iran on China. The 25-year long-term agreement of cooperation is strategic. It encompasses energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, ports, railways, and industrial development. Chinese investment helps Iran in its transport systems and planning. Such projects also reinforce the Belt and Road Initiative of China that links East Asia to the Middle East and Europe (Mangi, 2021).

**Table 02: Total Bilateral Trade among China, Iran, and Pakistan [2024]**

| State          | Figure          | Year    |
|----------------|-----------------|---------|
| China-Iran     | \$15billion     | 2024*   |
| Pakistan-China | US\$23.1billion | 2024**  |
| Pakistan-Iran  | US\$3.13billion | 2024*** |

Source: \*Malikova Adel, A., & Kotova Veronika, A. Donald Trump's economic policy in 2025 and its impact on the world economy.

\*\*Huld, A. (2022). China Infrastructure Investment in 2022-Can it Stimulate Economic Growth. *China Briefing*.

\*\*\*Anjum, A., Chauhan, J., Enam, M., & Ali, I. (2024). Emerging Issues in Energy Sustainability: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda. *Nature Environment and Pollution Technology*, 23(3), 1333-1344.

**Table 03: China's Annual ODI Flows and Investment Stock in Pakistan (2019–2023)**

| State          | Exact Figure of Economic Cooperation                                                               | Year |
|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|
| China-Pakistan | US\$562.16 million (Annual ODI flow) <sup>1</sup> ; US\$4.8 billion (Total ODI stock) <sup>2</sup> | 2019 |
| China-Pakistan | US\$947.66 million (Annual ODI flow); US\$6.2 billion (Total ODI stock)                            | 2020 |
| China-Pakistan | US\$727.39 million (Annual ODI flow); US\$7.5 billion (Total ODI stock)                            | 2021 |
| China-Pakistan | US\$563.37 million (Annual ODI flow); US\$6.8 billion (Total ODI stock)                            | 2022 |
| China-Pakistan | US\$324.67 million (Annual ODI flow); US\$6.3 billion (Total ODI stock)                            | 2023 |

**Source:** Huld, A. (2025). China-Pakistan trade, investment, and strategic partnership. *China Briefing News*.

The table will reveal that Chinese investment in Pakistan rose significantly up to 2020, and it went high in 2021. Subsequently, the pace of new investment decreased primarily due to the economic instability, security issues, and financial risk in Pakistan. The overall Chinese investment that is already in Pakistan is, however, high, and this implies that China has not pulled out, just that it is now more cautious in the initiation of new projects.

<sup>1</sup> Annual ODI = money invested this year

<sup>2</sup> Total ODI stock = money invested all year combined until now

**Table 04: bilateral trade between Pakistan and Iran**

| Bilateral State | Total Trade Amount (USD billion) | Year      |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|-----------|
| Pakistan-Iran   | 0.98-1.22                        | 2013-2014 |
| Pakistan-Iran   | 0.87                             | 2014-2015 |
| Pakistan-Iran   | 1.16                             | 2015-2016 |
| Pakistan-Iran   | 1.32                             | 2016-2017 |
| Pakistan-Iran   | 1.58                             | 2017-2018 |

Source: Verdelho, I. (2025). Internship Report at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

### **Security and Defense cooperation**

Since 1951, Pakistan and China have enjoyed a close strategic relationship that has seen the two countries work together on the defense, infrastructural, and nuclear sectors. Cooperation between the military started in 1964, and the India-Pakistan war of 1965 and the U.S. arms embargo prompted China to provide fighter jets and tanks, among other military equipment, to Pakistan. China has since been the biggest and most dependable arms supplier to Pakistan with great joint development, licensed production, and transfer of technology (Raza, 2019).

Chinese tanks and artillery, such as the Type-85-IIAP, Al-Khalid, and VT-4, and rocket launchers and missile systems are used in the Pakistan Army (Bakar-Shikan, Anza). The Pakistan Air Force uses Chinese jets, such as the F-6, A-5C, JF-17, and J-10CE, most of which are co-developed and upgraded. Some of the vessels acquired and co-developed by the Pakistan Navy include Azmat-class fast attack craft, Zulfiqar- and Tughra-class frigates, and Hangar-class submarines, some of them locally manufactured under technology transfer agreements. The readiness exhibited by China in selling and jointly developing arms has augmented the defense capabilities of Pakistan and has rendered it a major strategic alliance to the nation (Hussain, 2025).

**Table 05: Chronology of Pakistan–China Defense Cooperation and Military Procurement**

| Year/Period | Domain                       | Cooperation                                                                      | Example                                                                           |
|-------------|------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1964        | Initial Military cooperation | First Chinese defense procurement by Pakistan                                    | Fighter jets, tanks, other military equipment                                     |
| 1965-1970s  | Military Support             | After 1965 India-Pakistan war and U.S. arms embargo, China supplied military aid | Fighter jets, tanks, artillery                                                    |
| 1980s-1990s | Land Systems                 | Tanks and artillery supplied and jointly developed                               | Type-85-IIAP, Al-Khalid tank, Type-83 & A-100 MLRS; Bakar-Shikan ATGM; Anza MPADS |

|             |                                              |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                     |
|-------------|----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1990s-2000s | Air Systems                                  | Fighter jets acquired and jointly developed.                                                | F-6, A-5C, F-7P/PG; JF-17 development begins 1995; upgrades over years                                              |
| 2000s-2020s | Air & Land Systems                           | Modernization and local production                                                          | JF-17 Block upgrades, VT-4 tank induction, and Haider variant                                                       |
| 2020s-2023  | Naval Systems                                | Acquisition and co-development of ships and submarines; technology transfer                 | Azmat-class FACs, Zulfiqar-class frigates, Tughrik-class frigates, Hangar-class submarines; built locally under Tot |
| Ongoing     | Technology Transfer & Strategic Significance | Pakistan produces and upgrades Chinese systems locally; China is a dependable arms supplier | Enhanced military capabilities, long-term strategic partnership, reduced dependency on Western arms                 |

Source: Ali, S. Z., Ali, S. H., Javeed, A., Ullah, I., Memon, S. A., & Manzoor, S. (2024, November). Supervised Learning Approaches for Vibration Analysis and Anomaly Detection in Rotating Machines. In *2024 3rd International Conference on Emerging Trends in Electrical, Control, and Telecommunication Engineering (ETECTE)* (pp. 1-6). IEEE.

Pakistan and Iran have always exercised a practical, problem-oriented security and defense relationship to contain cross-border militancy, smuggling, and insurrectionists because of their 900+ km border, which is part of Balochistan. Until 2023, the cooperation was reactive, with the deployment of border fencing, joint patrols, intelligence sharing, etc. against such groups as Jaish al-Adl and Baloch separatists. The politics in the region, such as the Iran-Saudi rivalry, did not allow further integration of defense. Cooperation has been more multi-dimensional and structured since 2023. Border security drills were held to increase operational preparedness, and maritime security MOUs were entered into to curb smuggling and illegal fishing. The counter-terrorism coordination, joint operation procedures, and sharing of intelligence, as well as regular meetings of the High Border Commission, strengthened the bilateral engagement. Major areas of cooperation have been shifted to border security, counterterrorism, maritime security, and institutional coordination, which represents a slow transition in response actions to long-term, systematic cooperation. China and Iran have conducted sea drills to collaborate and make the sea secure. These activities occur in the Gulf of Oman and the Strait of Hormuz, and occasionally Russia is involved. In the exercises, they train rescue operations, action against pirates, and ship navigation. Such exercises enable them to learn amongst themselves, collaborate, and trust each other more. Although they conduct few exercises on their own, it demonstrates the fact that China and Iran desire their navies to be more powerful and ensure the safety of the region.

**Table 06: China-Iran-Russia "Security Belt-2025" Joint Naval Exercise**

| State     | Ships/units participated                                                                  | Exercise dates    | Location                        | Key activities                                                       |
|-----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| China     | Guided-missile destroyer <i>Baotou</i> (Hull 133), Supply ship <i>Gvoryahu</i> (Hull 904) | March 9-13, 2025, | Waters near Chabahar Port, Iran | Maritime target strikes, VBSS, damage control, joint search & rescue |
| Iran      | 10+ ships, including <i>Jamara an</i> and <i>Alvand</i> destroyers                        | March 9-13, 2025, | Waters near Chabahar Port, Iran | Maritime target strikes, VBSS, damage control, joint search & rescue |
| Russia    | Corvettes <i>Hero of the Russian Federation Aldar Tsydenzhapov</i> , <i>Rezk</i>          | March 9-13, 2025, | Waters near Chabahar Port, Iran | Maritime target strikes, VBSS, damage control, joint search & rescue |
| Observers | South Africa, Pakistan, Oman, others                                                      | March 9-13, 2025, | Waters near Chabahar Port, Iran | Observing exercise                                                   |

Source: Jaiyan, W. U., Peng, R. E. N., & Long, Y. A. N. G. (2025). 3D deployment of multi-UAV networks for maximizing total system throughput of ground users. *Chinese Journal of Aeronautics*, 103866.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Neorealism Structural Realism is an international relations theory that was formulated by Kenneth Waltz (1979), and which claims that the behavior of states is determined by the structure of the international system, and not by the inner states of the states. According to this model, the international system is anarchic, i.e., there is no central authority to impose rules. The operation of states within this environment is that of maximizing states' security and their strategic positioning in response to systemic pressures like the allocation of power amongst other states. These external constraints are said to be in the form of internal politics, ideology, or domestic preferences. Applied in the case of the China-Iran In the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, structural realism can be useful in perceiving the alliance as a strategy of responding to changes in the global and regional power relations. China would like to have access to energy resources and develop its influence in the region, whereas Iran would like to overcome the pressure of the U.S. and decrease its isolation in the region. Core ideas that have been pointed out by the theory include balance of power, strategic alignment, and competition over security, which are critical when examining the partnership and its impact on the stability of the region.

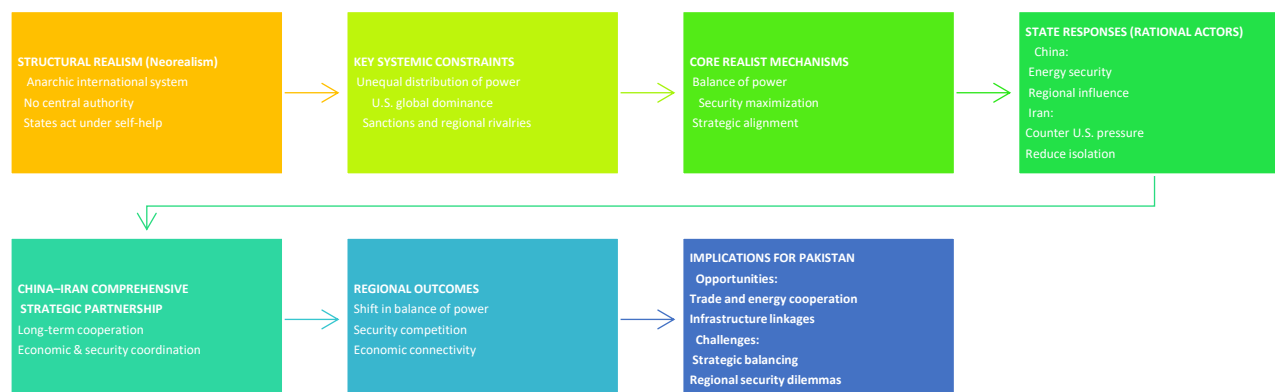
Application for the Study.

- a) Primary Items and Objectives of the Alliance. The concept of structural realism assists in determining the strategic goals of both China and Iran, which are security, access to economic



resources, and influence over the region. Using systemic pressures as a speculative tool to analyze the partnership, the study clarifies why such two states strategize by making their alliance decisions outside their ideological or domestic agenda.

- b) Pakistan has the following opportunities and challenges. Through an analysis of the change in the regional balance of power, the theory can be used to evaluate the opportunities (e.g., economic cooperation, infrastructure development), as well as challenges (e.g., security dilemmas or strategic competition) that Pakistan can encounter because of the strengthening China-Iran alliance.
- c) Issues that Promote the Iranian Chinese Relationship. Structural realism attributes actions of Iran to external influences such as international sanctions, geopolitical isolation, and threats in the region. The alliance with China is hence presented as a strategic imperative and not necessarily a political decision (Xinlei, 2025).



## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Type

This study takes the secondary research method and will purely use existing data sources since it is not feasible to conduct primary research. Secondary research enables a thorough study of the current literature in terms of scholarly articles, books, policy papers, and valid international reports. With these sources, the study would access a plethora of information about the China-Iran strategic partnership, its formation, its strategies, and its implications on regional dynamics, and this is in respect to Pakistan.

### Research Approach

The research design is qualitative, which is applicable in situations where there is a need to find out the complex phenomena, like international strategic partnerships, where the contextual understandings and interpretation of relations are of the essence compared to numerical measurements. A qualitative methodology will allow an in-depth examination of political, economic, and security aspects, which will give a comprehensive picture of the partnership between China and Iran.



### **Qualitative Research Approaches**

This paper aims to discuss the China-Iran relationship using a qualitative descriptive approach, which will be a detailed account of how the relationship has evolved through the years and its current strategic dynamics. The descriptive approach permits narrating the most important political, economic, and security trends, whereas the qualitative research determines repetitive patterns, themes, and trends in the partnership. The study derives the motivation behind the cooperation between the two states by analyzing official agreements, policy statements, and secondary scholarly materials since they can help gain a closer insight into the motivations that motivated the cooperation of the two states. In this way, it is possible to approach the China-Iran alliance in a multidimensional way, connecting current actions and behavior with historical context and determining its consequences in the region, especially on the balance of power, security relations, and economic connections. The partnership is described through the framework of structural realism as a rationality to systemic pressures instead of domestic or ideological influences, which makes the theoretical consistency of the analysis.

### **Research Design**

The research design of the given study is a secondary data qualitative study. The study is based on the relationship and cooperation between China and Iran and the consequences of it for Pakistan. As the primary data collection was not an option, the information was gathered using scholarly articles, books, policy papers, and international reports that are credible. The research is descriptive and analytical in nature. It seeks to explain the history of the China-Iran relationship and examine possible political, economic, and security impacts of the partnership on Pakistan. Information is analyzed in a systematic manner to find out the main trends, patterns, and insights into the strategies pertinent to the foreign policy of Pakistan with reference to regional security.

### **Data Collection Method**

Three stages of data collection were made. Primary sources comprised of the full text of the 25-year cooperation agreement used as the first stage. The second phase was a study of academic articles, books, and research reports, and the third phase utilized data on Iran's bilateral trade, military exercises, and ODI flow, which are in tables of the main thesis.

### **Analysis Technique**

This paper is based on thematic analysis to analyze the China-Iran strategic partnership and its implication for Pakistan. Thematic analysis is a qualitative approach that enables a researcher to discern, analyze, and understand patterns or themes within textual data. Because the research is completely based on secondary data, such as academic articles, books, policy papers, and reports that are made by strategic think tanks, thematic analysis will give systematic means to systematize and interpret the data.

**Table 07: Main Themes and Sub-Themes for the Study**

| Code | Main Theme                                        | Sub Theme                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Description / Focus                                                                                                   |
|------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Historical Evolution of China-Iran Relations      | Early diplomatic and economic ties<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post-Cold War interactions</li> <li>• Key turning points (2000s energy deals, nuclear agreements)</li> <li>• Impact of sanctions and isolation</li> </ul>                                           | Examines how China-Iran relations developed over time and major events shaping the partnership.                       |
| 2    | Strategic and Security Dimensions                 | Balance-of-power considerations<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Military and defense cooperation (joint exercises, technology)</li> <li>• Strategic alignment against external pressures</li> <li>• Security implications for regional states</li> </ul>               | Focuses on defense, security policies, and how both states respond to threats in the region.                          |
| 3    | Economic and Energy Cooperation                   | Energy security (oil, gas, renewables)<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trade relations and investments</li> <li>• Infrastructure development (transport corridors, ports)</li> <li>• Regional economic influence</li> </ul>                                            | Analyzes trade, energy, and infrastructure projects and their role in strengthening the partnership.                  |
| 4    | Structural Realism                                | Anarchy and self-help behavior<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External constraints shaping strategy</li> <li>• Rational state behavior vs. domestic/ideological factors</li> <li>• Regional power distribution.</li> </ul>                                            | Explains the partnership through structural realism, showing how systemic pressures shape China and Iran's decisions. |
| 5    | Implications for Pakistan and Regional Stability. | Opportunities (trade, infrastructure, energy projects)<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategic challenges (balancing China, Iran, other actors)</li> <li>• Shifts in regional security and power dynamics</li> <li>• Policy recommendations for Pakistan.</li> </ul> | Evaluates how the China-Iran alliance affects Pakistan politically, economically, and strategically.                  |
| 6    | Prospects and Challenges                          | Sustainability of the partnership<br><ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerging geopolitical shifts</li> <li>• Potential global economic or energy impacts.</li> </ul>                                                                                                      | Discusses long-term trends, possible changes, and challenges facing the partnership in the future.                    |

Source: Sharlatina, M. (2011). Iran-China Relations: An overview of critical factors. *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, 1(4), 57-85.

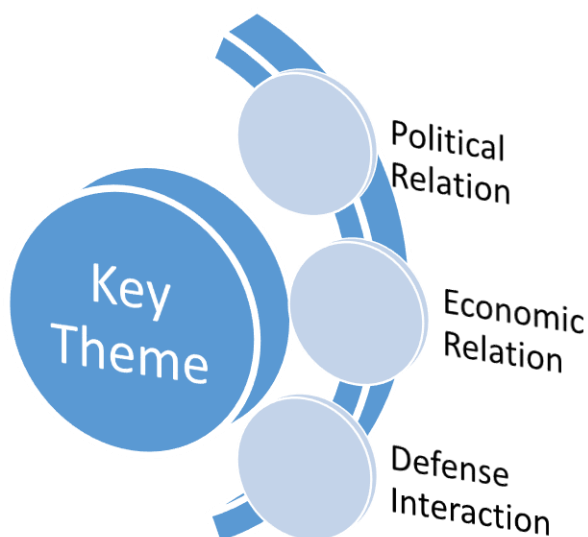
Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Waltz, K. N. (2014). Realist thought and neorealist theory. In *The Realism Reader* (pp. 124-128). Routledge.

Figure 1: Thematic analysis involves the following steps:



Figure 2: Key Themes of Study Include:



### From Diplomacy to Strategic Partnership

The relationship between Pakistan, China, and Iran has gradually moved from a simple relationship of diplomacy to a more complex relationship in terms of strategic partnership. In the past, these countries enjoyed a relationship based on mutual respect, sovereignty, and respect for internal affairs. However, over

time, regional issues in these countries encouraged them to move closer in addressing these issues. China and Pakistan formed an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership," which is based on political trust, military cooperation, and large-scale economic cooperation in regional infrastructure development through initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key project in China's Belt and Road Initiative aimed at enhancing regional connectivity in these countries (ahmed k. , 2026).

Within this dynamic regional landscape, another key player in this region is also Iran, which has emerged as a key player in this region in view of its geographical position, its economic resources, and its common interests with Pakistan and China. Therefore, it may be observed that in this dynamic regional landscape, China's long-term economic interests in the region, Iran's need for economic cooperation in view of sanctions imposed on it, and Pakistan's geographical position as it bridges the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia have provided an opportunity for these three countries to strategically align themselves with each other, and thus, it may be observed that the transition from traditional diplomacy to a strategic partnership is also in consideration of the regional landscape in which these countries are placed to strengthen economic cooperation in this region (Yi, 2025).

## **CONCLUSION AND ANALYSIS**

This paper discussed the historical development and current dynamics of the Pakistani relations with China and Iran and the new China-Iran strategic alliance, but more specifically in terms of its impact on Pakistani foreign policy, regional security, and economic growth. As shown in the analysis, the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan is influenced by the historical alliances, the changing geopolitical aspects, economic interdependence, and long-term strategic considerations. Pakistan-China relations have become a thoroughgoing strategic partnership with strong defense ties, growing economic interaction, infrastructure building, and diplomatic synchrony. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the primary pillars of such relations that increases the strategic confidence of Pakistan, enhances connectivity, and contributes to economic development. The steadfast foreign assistance that China has been giving to Pakistan has also enhanced its presence on the regional and international platforms.

Pakistan-Iran relations, on the contrary, are practical and circumspect. Although there are geographic proximities, cultural and religious interconnections, and shared security interests, the bilateral cooperation has been limited owing to regional political rivalries, Iran's relationship with Gulf states, and international sanctions. However, Iran still has a strategic value to Pakistan, especially about border security, regional stability, and cooperation with the energy supply. This strategic alliance between China and Iran is further complicating the strategic environment in Pakistan. Although it helps bring about a more multipolar regional order and allows possibilities of regional economic integration, it is also causing a complication in the diplomatic calculus of Pakistan. Pakistan, as a close ally of China and neighboring state of Iran, is in a strategic location as a regional linkage between South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. To balance this position successfully, it is important to maintain a delicate diplomacy, balancing the need to not get involved in the disputes of the region and, on the other hand, not to spoil good relationships with Gulf states, the United States, and other key players. Overall, the results indicate that the international policy of Pakistan should remain pragmatic, visionary, and institutionally strong. Through the selective use of regional relationships and control of the related risks, Pakistan could improve its security, economic opportunities, and power in an already complicated international system.

The China-Iran strategic partnership strengthens a multipolar regionalism that fits the balanced diplomacy and strategic independence preferences of Pakistan. The more China participates in the Middle East, the more Pakistan gains geopolitical relevance as a regional bridge and its relevance as a diplomatic partner. Nevertheless, Pakistan should strategize its ties with Gulf powers, western nations, and India to ensure it is not sucked into the regional politics.

The collaboration provides economical and strategic prospects and opportunities for regional connectivity and increased relevance of CPEC, especially by means of Gwadar and prospective energy integration. Although these developments may contribute towards the long-term economic and security objectives of Pakistan, the sanctions on Iran and the power rivalry in the region are also major limiting factors. Overall, the capability of Pakistan to gain advantages lies in being neutral, pragmatic in diplomacy, and economically and institutionally strong internally.

### **Policy Recommendations**

**Strategic Balance and Diplomatic Neutrality** Pakistan must develop a moderate and realistic foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, to relate to China, Iran, and the Gulf states to effectively manage the situation. Diplomatic flexibility will ensure strategies remain neutral so that they are not exposed to regional conflicts, and the diplomatic interests of the region will be safeguarded whilst also enabling constructive interaction with key actors in the region and the world at large. **Regional Connectivity and Institutional Capacity** The government of Pakistan needs to focus on becoming a regional hub of transit, whereby the focus should be on infrastructure development like CPEC and Gwadar Port to enable South Asian, Central Asian, and Middle Eastern economies to be economically integrated. At the same time, it is necessary to enhance domestic institutions, systems of governance, and policy coordination so that foreign alliances will result in sustainable development results and tangible strategic benefits.

The progress between Iran and China on the regional level can have indirect implications on the strategic environment of Pakistan in relation to India and Central Asia. The fact that the regional connectivity is changing can make Pakistan have a high degree of strategic relevance but could also increase the level of competition between the regions; hence the argument that Pakistan should have a careful and stability-focused foreign policy.

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