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## **The Sino-Iran Strategic Partnership and Its Implications for Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

The growing strategic cooperation between China and Iran is one of the most important developments in international politics today, especially in the era of multi polarity and increasing competition among the great powers. China and Iran signed the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in 2021, which has intensified cooperation in areas such as energy, trade, infrastructure, regional connectivity, security, and has had an effect on the geopolitical and geo economic landscape in the region. With its geographical proximity to Iran and strategic relations with China, Pakistan plays a huge role in this evolving regional environment. In the light of Sino-Iranian alliance, it offers opportunities and challenges for Pakistan as well as implications for Pakistan's foreign policy, economy, and regional strategic landscape. It asserts that the partnership will bring Pakistan several advantages such as enhanced regional connectivity, energy cooperation, expansion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), trade diversification and greater integration into the emerging networks of the Eurasia Economic Zone. Meanwhile, the study identifies a number of problems, including increased pressure on the United States, conflicts in the region, sanctions against Iran, security issues and the danger of excessive dependence on China's strategic assistance. This is a qualitative study and secondary data sources include books, journal articles, policy reports, and government documents to analyze geopolitical events in the region and Pakistan's foreign policy behavior. The study explores the theoretical frameworks of Strategic Hedging and Neoclassical Realism to understand the Pakistan's approach in balancing its relations with China, Iran, the United States and the Gulf countries amidst the changing geopolitical realities and growing strategic competition. The study recommends that Pakistan needs to have a flexible, practical and balanced foreign policy which can capitalize on the strategic and economic opportunities while mitigating the geopolitical risks in the emerging multipolar world.



**Key Words:** China-Iran Partnership, Pakistan, CPEC, Geopolitics, Great Power Competition, Strategic Hedging, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

## Introduction

The international system today is witnessing significant geopolitical and economic changes as the transition from unipolarity to multipolarity and the growing competition between the great powers are profound. In this changing global landscape, regional cooperation, strategic partnership and connectivity projects have gone into the mainstream of international politics. One of the most important developments of the twenty first century is the rise of China's presence in the world through its approach of economic diplomacy and infrastructural investments alongside its regional integration programs. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a project with two main goals: to gain energy supply routes, to improve trade connectivity, to grow political influence and to change the economy of Eurasia and beyond (Rolland, 2017). In this broader strategic context, the Middle East is assuming greater significance in China's foreign policy, given its strategic importance as well as its energy resources and potential for regional connectivity. Due to its strategic location between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Persian Gulf as well as its abundant oil and gas deposits, Iran in particular has become a significant regional ally of China. The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement signed between China and Iran in 2021 institutionalized long-term cooperation in the fields of trade, infrastructure, energy, technology and security, not only in the economic sphere but also in the geopolitical sphere, as it were, between the two states (Fulton, 2022). Iran's partnership with China offers it the chance to mitigate the effects of U.S. sanctions and economic sanctions, while China's engagement with Iran helps it achieve its energy security and connectivity goals in the region in the long term (Vakil, 2021).

The growing cooperation between China and Iran is significant for Pakistan because of Pakistan's strategic ties with China and its geographical location near Iran. Pakistan and China have had close political, economic, and military ties for decades, especially since the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is considered to be the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Small, 2020). Pakistan has become more and more strategic in China's regional connectivity initiative via CPEC and Gwadar Port. The changing dynamics of the China-Iran relationship pose opportunities and challenges for Pakistan in this context. Greater regional connectivity between China, Iran and Pakistan can boost trade flows between South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East and help ensure Pakistan's energy security, including the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. Besides, improved regional cooperation can enhance the capacity of Pakistan as a center of regional trade and transit in the new economic



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corridors of the Eurasia region. But Pakistan has a lot of strategic and geopolitical problems due to the alliance. The foreign policy landscape for Pakistan is complicated by the rise of tensions between China and the United States, regional tensions between Iran and the Gulf Arab countries, the sanctions against Iran, and Pakistan's excessive dependence on China for economic support (Tellis, 2008). This means that Pakistan is confronted with a challenging task of maintaining its economic security and strategic independence, while balancing its relations with Saudi Arabia, China, Iran, the U.S. and others in its region.

This paper aims to examine the main features of the China-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and evaluate its consequences for Pakistan in light of regional transformation and great power competition. The study specifically looks at the geopolitical and strategic issues that have arisen in the region as a result of rivalry and competition, as well as the opportunities that the Sino-Iran partnership has given Pakistan in the areas of regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and energy security. Moreover, the study examines Pakistan's policy of strategic hedging to ensure a balance between competing global and regional powers and suggests policy recommendations to maximize the benefits and minimize the strategic risks. The Belt and Road Initiative, China-Iran relations and Pakistan-China cooperation have been studied in various ways in the existing literature. According to Rolland (2017), the BRI is an economic and geopolitical initiative to increase China's influence in Eurasia through connectivity and infrastructure projects. Likewise, Fulton (2022) argues that the China-Iran alliance is a result of the two nations' economic and strategic interests aligning in the face of evolving global dynamics. The strategic importance of Pakistan in China's regional connectivity initiative via CPEC is emphasized by Small (2020), and Kuik (2008) notes that middle powers tend to pursue strategic hedging policies to prevent being overly reliant on one power and to ensure they are able to cooperate with multiple competing powers. However, the literature on the Sino-Iran strategic partnership is still in its infancy and has not yet examined the multifaceted consequences of the partnership for Pakistan in the context of strategic hedging and great power competition. Hence, this study adds to the existing literature by qualitatively analyzing the opportunities, challenges, and strategic calculations of the changing Sino-Iran partnership from Pakistan's perspective by analyzing regional developments, policy trends, and strategic cooperation.

### **The China-Iran Strategic Partnership: Regional Significance**

The China-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is an example of the increasing alignment of Chinese and Iranian interests in a multipolar international system. Iran is strategically important for China due to its geographical location, energy resources and its



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proximity to the Persian Gulf and the Central Asian transit routes (Rolland, 2017). Iran is a key partner in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a Chinese initiative to bolster its economic and strategic footprint in the Middle East, and through cooperation with Iran China aims to gain long-term energy supplies and a strong geopolitical position in the Middle East (Garlick, 2021). The potential for Iran to deepen ties with China is to ease the economic and diplomatic burden imposed by the U.S. sanctions and international isolation (Vakil, 2021). China has emerged as one of Iran's most important economic allies in the face of Western pressure, ready to contribute to the nation's trade, energy, and infrastructure projects. Despite pressure from the West, China has emerged as one of Iran's most significant economic allies, ready to contribute to the nation's trade, energy, and infrastructure initiatives. Given that Pakistan shares a border with Iran and has close strategic ties with China, the expanding Sino-Iranian relationship has important ramifications for Pakistan (Small, 2020). This means that Pakistan's regional connectivity efforts, energy security and foreign policy interests all are affected more when Pakistan and China join forces more closely.

This emerging strategic convergence between China and Iran, and the development of alternative regional economic frameworks, may also help shape an alternative regional economic structure in which China and Iran are less reliant on Western financial and political systems. From this perspective, Pakistan could also leverage opportunities for enhanced cooperation with the regional powers via trade agreements, energy partnerships, and infrastructure connectivity initiatives related to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Fulton, 2022). Moreover, the partnership may shape the regional strategic landscape by fostering a more coordinated regional strategy amongst non-standard Western-led regional partners. Pakistan has the space of diplomacy to follow a more flexible and balanced regional policy thanks to China's balanced approach with both Iran and the Gulf countries (Garlick, 2021).

### **Opportunities for Pakistan**

#### **Regional Connectivity and CPEC Expansion**

The growth of regional connectivity initiatives linked to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of Pakistan's greatest opportunities. As the only nation connecting western China to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar Port, Pakistan is a key player in the Belt and Road Initiative (Small, 2020). Pakistan might become a hub for regional trade and transit connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East if Iranian transportation lines and infrastructure are included in CPEC (Wolf, 2020). Beijing's long-term strategic commitment to regional connectivity is demonstrated by the billions of dollars China has already invested in transportation infrastructure, roadways, railroads, and energy projects under CPEC (Hillman, 2020).



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Likewise, Iran's Chabahar Port and Pakistan's Gwadar Port are geographically near each other, offering opportunities for complementary regional trade networks, not competition (Fulton, 2022). Recently, Pakistan, Iran and China have also been talking about further regional transportation and trade cooperation through border connectivity and economic integration projects. Better regional connectivity could lead to more trade, foreign investment and boost Pakistan's economic significance in the trade corridors of Eurasia (Rolland, 2017). Better regional connectivity could also boost Pakistan's status as a gateway state between South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East. Pakistan can gain from more cooperation with China and Iran, which will enable more transit trade, industrial development, and cross-border economic activities associated with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Garlick, 2021). The development of Gwadar Port with regional transportation networks may generate jobs, enhance regional infrastructure and boost the geoeconomic importance of Pakistan in the connectivity projects in the region (Rolland, 2017). Moreover, enhanced economic cooperation between China, Iran and Pakistan will lower transportation fees and facilitate greater access to regional markets for Pakistani exports (Wolf, 2020). These developments could foster economic interdependence and trade between regions, and help achieve a more stable region. But, these opportunities will depend on Pakistan's efforts to enhance its institutions, infrastructure and political stability. Regional connectivity might not really serve Pakistan's interest in full if it fails to undertake internal measures for reform and making improvement in security.

### **Energy Security**

Energy security is another important benefit of the Sino-Iran alliance for Pakistan. Pakistan's dependency on imported fuels, persistent power interruptions, and circular debt problems have all had a negative effect on the country's industrial growth and economic stability. Iran has the second largest natural gas reserves in the world after Russia, and is a key energy partner for Pakistan (Ehteshami & Horesh, 2017). The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project was initially conceived as a "Peace Pipeline" to supply Iran's natural gas to Pakistan to meet the country's increasing energy demand. The project was stalled due to American sanctions, but Pakistan has expressed its interest in reviving the pipeline several times to meet its growing domestic energy needs and economic pressures in the region. Cooperation between Greater China and Iran could provide a conducive environment to revive regional energy projects and enhance energy connectivity in the region (Garlick, 2021). Access to Iranian energy resources may help Pakistan to cut dependence on costly fuel imports and stabilize the domestic energy market. In addition, the Chinese financial and technical assistance may help to



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build regional energy infrastructure. American sanctions against Iran, however, have posed significant hurdles to further deepen Pakistan-Iran energy cooperation (Riedel, 2011).

Iran will become a key ally for China to gain secure access to energy resources and mitigate risks from international energy crises and Persian Gulf insecurity (Rolland, 2017). The mutual cooperation on energy between China and Iran can also contribute to Pakistan's energy security by facilitating regional energy integration and investments in energy projects. Moreover, the stable involvement of China in Iran can help to make the maritime trade routes in the region secure which is a necessity for Pakistan as it is a major consumer of energy from the Gulf which is transported through the Arabian Sea and Strait of Hormuz (The Guardian, 2026). The changing equation of Sino-Iran energy cooperation could create new opportunities for Pakistan in terms of energy integration and economic development in the region. Lying on the intersection of China, Iran, and the Arabian Sea, Pakistan is also in a geopolitically significant position with respect to the new energy corridors of the region. Increased Chinese investment in regional infrastructure and energy could revive such projects as Iran Pakistan gas pipeline, which have been seen as an important solution to Pakistan's domestic energy deficits (Rafiq, 2020).

### **The integration of trade and economy**

The Sino-Iran partnership could also pave the way for increased regional trade and economic integration. The trade ties with Iran are not well developed due to the implementation of sanctions, banking restrictions, border management issues and poor infrastructure. Enhanced regional connectivity with China and Iran may enhance the regional trade routes and provide new trade opportunities for Pakistan (Wolf, 2020). Pakistan's geographical location makes it an important transit hub for the regional trade network between South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Western China, making it more significant in the regional trade network (Husain, 2019). Better cooperation with Iran could also help Pakistan diversify its energy imports and mitigate long-term energy shortages which have a negative impact on industrial growth and economic productivity (Khan, 2021). Furthermore, better border markets, railways and transportation infrastructure could facilitate legal cross-border trade and diminish smuggling and informal trade in border areas. Yet, political trust, policy continuity and stable security conditions among the states involved are needed for regional economic integration (Garlick, 2021).

The China-Iran cooperation can help advance the trilateral cooperation on economics between China, Iran and Pakistan in the arising framework of connectivity in the Eurasian continent. Both the region has manifested an interest in fostering connectivity and



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economic cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Iran has indicated a greater desire to engage with the CPEC-related projects (Iran-Pakistan relations, 2026). Moreover, the China-Iran alliance could help Pakistan achieve long-term aims of economic diversification in the region and easing reliance on limited trading partners and access to larger markets in the Eurasian region. The focus of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China on infrastructure-based regional integration is expected to resonate with Pakistan's interest in improving connectivity and economic modernization (Khan & Liu, 2022). Thus, Pakistan needs to enhance its economic planning, regional diplomacy and institutional reforms to reap the maximum gains from the new trade opportunities that have been opened up by the expanding Sino-Iran partnership.

### **Pakistan's Strategic Importance**

With the rise in China-Iran cooperation, Pakistan's strategic significance in China's regional policy may further rise. Pakistan is already playing a significant role for China in the context of CPEC, Gwadar Port and defense cooperation (Small, 2020). Deeper China-Iran cooperation can enhance the importance of Pakistan as a connecting bridge between South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East (Fulton, 2022). The strategic location could give Pakistan more diplomatic leverage and make it more relevant in the geopolitics of the region. This could be a chance for Pakistan to enhance regional cooperation and play a more active role in the region. But Pakistan's strategic significance can only be of benefit in the long term if Pakistan has a balance of relations with a number of regional and international actors.

China's growing co-operation with Iran will further strengthen Pakistan's position as a regional transit hub and connector. If the Iranian transportation and trade infrastructure and energy infrastructure are interconnected with CPEC, Pakistan can become a key corridor between Chinese markets and Middle East and Central Asia (MECA) (Hilali, 2019). Gwadar Port, being located near Iran and the Persian Gulf, could play a strategic role by facilitating trade transport, transport of energy resources and commercial access of China to the region (Munir, 2021).

### **Challenges for Pakistan**

#### **United States Pressure and Sanctions**

The most important problem for Pakistan is the pressure of the Americans on cooperation with Iran. The U.S. has been adamant against deepening economic ties with Iran, especially in the energy and strategic infrastructure areas (Riedel, 2011). Washington has repeatedly threatened regional states against breaking sanctions against Tehran. For instance, American authorities had earlier voiced concerns over the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and had



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threatened Pakistan with economic repercussions if it breaches the sanctions. Pakistan thus has a challenging policy choice as it wants to cooperate with Iran for economic gains, but also relies on Western financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for economic security. The economy of Pakistan is fragile and the country has faced balance of payment crises in the past, making it more vulnerable to external pressures. Foreign investors and international banks are reluctant to invest in projects that include Iran, as they are scared of secondary sanctions, which makes Pakistan's financial and diplomatic situation difficult (Vakil, 2021). Moreover, Pakistan has to strike a balance between China and the United States as over-dependence on either side may have a negative impact on its foreign policy goals and economic interests (Tellis, 2008). In order to protect its strategic ties and economic stability, Pakistan continues to do a careful balancing act.

### **Regional Rivalries**

Regional rivalry is a major barrier for Pakistan. Pakistan has close political, economic, and religious relations to Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab countries. Millions of Pakistani workers are employed in the Gulf countries, and Pakistan's economy still heavily depends on remittances from these countries. Pakistan has diplomatic difficulties since many Gulf countries consider Iran to be a serious regional foe. If Pakistan aligns itself too closely with Iran, ties with its neighbors in the Gulf Arab region may become strained. However, it is also hard to overlook Iran because it remains a crucial neighbor with significant regional significance. Furthermore, due to regional rivalries in the Middle East, Pakistan is often compelled to adopt a cautious and impartial diplomatic approach in order to prevent disputes with competing regional countries. The competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of which seek to expand their influence in the Muslim world, has frequently affected the political and security environment of the greater Middle East (Wehrey, 2014). In the past, Pakistan has had robust security and economic relations with Saudi Arabia and has also tried to maintain cordial relations with Iran as its neighbour (Small, 2020). Diplomatic tensions face Islamabad in this complex scenario, especially when relations between Tehran and Gulf Arab countries are at a low due to the rise in tensions in the region. In addition, the sectarian conflicts and regional proxy wars can impact on Pakistan's social stability and internal security indirectly (Nasr, 2006). The concept of strategic neutrality, regional cooperation, and balanced diplomacy has come to the fore in Pakistan's foreign policy, aimed at protecting national interests.

### **Strategic Dependence on China**

While Chinese investment leads to improvement in infrastructure and economic opportunities, a high degree of reliance on China can



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diminish Pakistan's geopolitical maneuverability. With CPEC related projects, China has emerged as Pakistan's biggest bilateral investor and a vital defense and economic partner. The targeted investment under CPEC ranges from \$60 billion, comprising of infrastructure, transportation, energy, and industrial development projects (Hillman, 2020). Although these investments promote economic modernization, critics have stated that such heavy dependence on Chinese assistance could lead to higher debt levels and economic risks in emerging economies. Sri Lanka's Hambantota port is a textbook case of how unsustainable debt and reliance on infrastructure can represent strategic issues for smaller states (Nye, 2011). Pakistan's strategic need of China also impacts its decision making autonomy in regional and international affairs. With the growing importance of Chinese economic investments and financial assistance to Pakistan's economic stability, Islamabad may find it challenging to reject and stand aloof from Chinese regional policies and strategic interests (Pant & Joshi, 2021). This interdependence can affect the country's foreign policy decisions on the sensitive matters of the region, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), regional connectivity, and the greater China and United States rivalry. Pakistan, therefore, has to be cautious about its relationship with China in order to prevent the country from becoming overly dependent on China and diminishing Pakistan's policy space. Moreover, Pakistan's dependence on China for infrastructure development and regional connectivity projects could lead to the economic imbalance and governance issues within the country. Despite the benefits of CPEC on the transportation and energy sector, there are some challenges in terms of disparity in economic benefits among the provinces, transparency in the agreements and local dissatisfaction with some development projects (Nazir & Brohi, 2019). To achieve strategic autonomy, Pakistan should be very careful while keeping its strategic partnership with China and develop its economic relations with the Gulf countries, Central Asian states, Turkey, and the western countries.

### **Security Concerns**

Pakistan faces security threats as its foremost concern in terms of regional connectivity and strategic cooperation. Insurgencies, smuggling, sectarianism and poor border management have always been a problem in the Pakistan-Iran Border region especially in Baluchistan. A number of extremist attacks on Chinese workers and the CPEC related works have caused apprehensions regarding the security of regional infrastructure investments. The vulnerability of foreign investment projects and important commercial routes has been demonstrated by attacks in Gwadar and other parts of Baluchistan. The efforts to link China, Iran and Pakistan could be delayed, and foreign investment discouraged, if the border areas continue to be unstable.



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Because security risks have a direct impact on investor confidence and project execution, China has frequently stressed the significance of safeguarding CPEC infrastructure and Chinese employees operating in Pakistan (Wolf, 2020). Pakistan's security environment is further complicated and pressure on state institutions is increased by the existence of separatist groups, sectarian organizations, and transnational militant networks in border areas (Fair, 2014). Furthermore, worries about terrorism, refugee flows, and illegal cross-border activity have grown throughout the area due to instability in Afghanistan following the withdrawal of US soldiers (Riedel, 2021). These difficulties show that without long-term peace and efficient regional security coordination, economic cooperation and regional integration cannot be successful. As a result, Pakistan has to engage in local economic development in border regions, enhance intelligence collaboration, and fortify border coordination with Iran. In addition to military action, long-term regional stability necessitates socioeconomic growth, political inclusion, and job creation.

### **Pakistan's Hedging Strategy**

A more comprehensive approach to strategic hedging is shown in Pakistan's reaction to the Sino-Iran cooperation. In order to safeguard national interests, strategic hedging is a foreign policy strategy in which nations maintain cooperative relationships with several rival players while avoiding total alignment with one large power (Kuik, 2008). This trend is evident in Pakistan's foreign policy, which upholds engagement with the United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other Gulf nations while maintaining close strategic cooperation with China through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), defense cooperation, and diplomatic support. Pakistan depends on Western financial organizations like the IMF and World Bank for economic stability, but it also leans on China for defense cooperation and infrastructure investment. In a similar vein, Pakistan avoids actions that could gravely harm ties with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab nations while concurrently pursuing energy and border cooperation with Iran. Pakistan's approach to the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is an example of this hedging behavior. Pakistan has been cautious due to American sanctions and potential diplomatic pressure from Western nations, despite the fact that it needs Iranian gas to address its energy difficulties (Riedel, 2011). However, since both nations have a long border and share interests in trade, border security, and regional stability, they shouldn't totally disregard Iran. As a result, Pakistan makes an effort to keep cooperative ties with Iran without completely siding with the US or other Gulf Arab nations. According to Neoclassical Realism, domestic economic requirements, energy constraints, institutional flaws, and security concerns all influence Pakistan's foreign policy behavior in addition to the struggle between



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global powers (Rose, 1998). Pakistan's capacity to make completely autonomous foreign policy decisions is hampered by its weak economy, reliance on foreign loans, energy problems, and internal security issues. As a result, Pakistan's stance on the Sino-Iran cooperation is a reflection of both internal and external restrictions.

The primary agenda for Pakistan is to capitalize on the business, energy and regional connectivity synergies between Pakistan and China without becoming too dependent on China or having tensions with the US or any other Gulf countries. Pakistan's hedging policy in a new multipolar order can also be seen in its engagement with such groups as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Pakistan continues to have diplomatic relations with Western countries and Gulf states and also has strong relations with China and other regional countries regarding security, counterterrorism, trade and regional connectivity issues with the aid of SCO. Like this, Pakistan has often made a point of highlighting the importance of peace in Afghanistan, as the instability in the country poses a direct threat to the work of economic integration, border security, and connectivity programmes in relation to the CPEC and broader Eurasian trade corridors. The occurrences show the action-taking foreign policy flexibility and sensibleness to balance conflicting strategic interests in Pakistan. This is where strategic hedging offers a viable policy option to Pakistan's foreign policy in the hyper-competitive multipolar world.

### Findings

The following are the study's main conclusions:

1. Shared economic, geopolitical, and strategic interests—particularly those related to energy security, regional connectivity, and resistance to Western pressure—are the driving forces behind the China-Iran Strategic Partnership.
2. Iran's geographic location, oil resources, and access to regional trade lines linking the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia make it strategically significant to China.
3. With CPEC and Gwadar Port, Pakistan's location offers substantial chances for regional trade integration and connectivity.
4. Pakistan's position in Eurasian economic and strategic networks may be strengthened by the integration of Chinese, Iranian, and Pakistani connectivity projects.
5. Through regional energy cooperation and the potential resuscitation of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, the Sino-Iran collaboration may benefit Pakistan's energy security.
6. One of the primary barriers to further economic and energy cooperation between Pakistan and Iran is the United States' sanctions on Iran.
7. Pakistan's foreign policy decisions are under diplomatic and geopolitical strain due to China's and U.S growing strategic rivalry.



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8. Pakistan's diplomatic balancing strategy is complicated by regional tensions between Iran and Gulf Arab governments, with whom Pakistan maintains significant political and economic ties.

9. Pakistan's long-term strategic flexibility and economic autonomy may be diminished by an over-reliance on Chinese investment and infrastructure finance.

10. The success of regional infrastructure and connectivity initiatives is still threatened by security issues in Baluchistan and the Pakistan-Iran border region.

11. In an effort to maximize advantages and reduce risks, Pakistan is increasingly using a policy of strategic hedging by simultaneously retaining ties with several rival states.

12. Both internal economic, institutional, and security issues as well as external geopolitical forces have an impact on Pakistan's foreign policy conduct.

13. Without political stability, institutional reforms and efficient governance, regional connectivity initiatives cannot ensure economic progress on their own.

14. Pakistan's capacity to turn its geographic location into a long-term economic and geopolitical advantage will determine its future importance in regional geopolitics.

### **Suggestions**

The study makes the following suggestions in view of these findings:

1. 1. Pakistan should follow a flexible, pragmatic, and balanced foreign policy that improves ties with China and Iran while preserving those with the US, Saudi Arabia, and Gulf nations.

2. The government should diversify its strategic, diplomatic, and economic alliances with regional and international players in order to avoid becoming overly dependent on any one large power.

3. Pakistan needs to enhance its internal infrastructure, institutional effectiveness, and border control and governance capabilities to reap the maximum benefits of regional connectivity projects.

4. Legal trade routes, transportation systems and border markets with Iran should be strengthened more to facilitate bilateral economic cooperation.

5. Pakistan should review projects on energy cooperation in the region with care including Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, while ensuring mitigating measures and risk management against the threats of sanctions through diplomatic engagement and multilateral dialogue. To decrease the dependency on foreign loans,

6. Policymakers should pay attention to drawing the different foreign investment into technology, renewable energy, etc., and transportation sectors.

7. Pakistan must increase intelligence coordination and security cooperation with neighbouring countries to ensure safety of



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infrastructure projects and regional trade routes from terrorist activities.

### **Conclusion**

Sino-Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership is one of the most important geopolitical developments in the current multipolar world order. The alliance embodies the emerging convergence of China and Iran in the fields of energy security, regional connectivity, trade, infrastructure development, technology, and strategic cooperation. The growing economic ties between China and Iran are a part of the global geopolitical changes taking place in the international system, as countries look to forge alliances outside the Western-dominated political and economic frameworks. Being strategically located near Iran, Pakistan has a strategic partnership with China and it is playing a pivotal part in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the midst of this transformation. This analysis reveals that Sino-Iran partnership provides Pakistan with a number of geo-political and economic opportunities. Regional connectivity, which includes China, Pakistan, and Iran, could bolster the trade corridors between the markets of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia. The possible integration of Iranian energy and transportation infrastructure with CPEC may enhance Pakistan's importance as a regional transit and commercial hub. The success of the regional connectivity projects could make Gwadar Port more important geopolitically and economically. Similar to this, Pakistan may be able to address long-standing energy shortages, promote industrial expansion, and contribute to long-term economic development with access to Iranian energy resources and regional energy cooperation. In addition to strengthening Pakistan's position within developing Eurasian economic networks, further regional commercial integration may also enhance economic prospects in impoverished border regions, especially in Balochistan.

The study also shows that Pakistan faces difficult geopolitical, diplomatic, and strategic problems as a result of the Sino-Iran cooperation. Pakistan's foreign policy environment is complicated by US sanctions on Iran, expanding Chinese influence in the region, regional rivalries between Iran and Gulf states, and escalating strategic competition between the US and China. In order to safeguard its economic, geopolitical, and security interests, Pakistan must concurrently maintain balanced relations with China, Iran, the United States, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations. Such reliance on China might limit Pakistan's long-term strategic options and make it more susceptible to vulnerabilities on the outside. The lack of proper institutional capacity and the border militancy, the instability in neighbouring Afghanistan and the internal security problems also affect the proper implementation of regional connectivity plans.

This study also uncovers the growing signs of “hedging” in Pakistan's



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foreign policy action. Pakistan is determined to see the advantages of diplomatic and economic in a number of competing regional and global power while refraining from total alignment with any group. This doctrine enables Pakistan to be able to maintain strategic flexibility in a more unpredictable world. In addition to the external geopolitical rivalries and involvement in the global balance of power, external economic needs, energy crisis, institutional limitations, and internal security concerns have also affected Pakistan's foreign policy agendas, according to Neoclassical Realism. Thus, Pakistan has a dualistic approach towards the Sino-Iranian cooperation, stemming from structural constraints within Pakistan and strategic constraints from outside. Pakistan has several geopolitical advantages due to its location which are translated into long-term economic and strategic gains only through political stability, institutional efficiency, economic reform, and good governance. A number of conditions are required for regional connectivity initiatives such as the CPEC and possible collaboration of China-Iran-Pakistan including stable security environments, investor confidence, efficient handling of infrastructure and regional policies. With political instability and institutional development at home, Pakistan will not have any new potentials in the region.

The report also highlights the importance of geo-economics, along with rivalries, affecting the regional order in Asia and the Middle East in the future. Regional connectivity and energy networks, infrastructure projects, trade routes and economic corridors are becoming significant instruments of influence and power in international politics. In this changing landscape, Pakistan's strategic relevance will be significantly dictated by its capacity to put itself on the map as a secure regional transit hub between South Asia, Central Asia, and China as well as the Middle East. Thus, Pakistan needs to pursue a foreign policy with long time perspective rather than short-term geopolitical considerations, which would be economic diplomacy, regional cooperation, strategic balance and sustainable development.

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