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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20394981>**South Asia's Geo-Strategic Significance and Its Role on Changing World Order****Kashif Hamayoun**

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mumtaz.uob@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The region of South Asia is at the center of the transformation of the world order, given its geographies linking the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, East Asia and the larger Indo Pacific region. The area is home to nuclear powered rivals, growing maritime links, significant energy corridors, large consumer markets and states that come in ever increasing contact with the strategic rivalry between China, the United States and others outside the region. This study explores South Asia's geo-strategic importance and the way it has participated in the shift from a predominantly US-centric ordering to a more competitive, multipolar and geo-economic international system. It is studied based on a realist approach focusing on the key explanatory variables power, security, state survival, balancing and strategic geography. The method used in the study is qualitative with purposive sampling technique for participants which are 13 key informants who are academics, former diplomats, security analysts and regional connectivity experts. Thematic analysis was used to analyses data. The four main themes that arose were: South Asia as a strategic pivot of multipolar rivalry, Pakistan as a geo-economic bridge of connectivity and CPEC, Pakistan's stabilizing role in regional security and strategic restraint, and Pakistan's role in promoting multilateralism, Muslim world diplomacy and regional cooperation. The results indicate that the participants saw Pakistan as not just a security player, but also a constructive state, whose geostrategic outlook, diplomacy, connectivity initiatives and balancing act have the potential to contribute positively to the stability of the region. The study finds that South Asia would be even more important in the increasingly competitive world of politics and that Pakistan's positive contribution will rely on economic consolidation, institutional stability and on regional diplomacy and geo-strategic location being transformed to geo-economic influence.

Keywords: South Asia, Geo-Strategy, Changing World Order, Realism, Pakistan, CPEC, Multi-Polarity and Regional Security.

1. Introduction

South Asia has emerged as one of the most significant strategic locations in the modern-day international politics. Its importance is not just as much due to its numbers or economic strength as to its importance as the crossroads of continental and maritime power politics. The region is a connection between the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, Central Asia, western China and the Middle East and Southeast Asia. With a changing world order, this geography is not inert, but a tool by which states exercise power and assert energy routes, form alliances and vie for influence. The recent World Bank data continues to refer to the region as the fastest growing emerging and developing economy region; and also mentions that there is very little intra-regional trade compared to the potential of doing so, as only 5 per cent of South Asian trade is

intra-regional trade. The problem of strategic significance and low regional integration is one of the key conundrums of South Asian geopolitics (Kathuria, 2018; Kathuria & Mathur, 2018).

World order is changing and increasing the relevance of South Asia. The post-Cold War unipolar moment has come to an end and the world is now characterized not only by the US-China rivalry but also by the Indo-Pacific competition, the rise of the Chinese power, the ever-expanding strategic ambitions of the southeastern powers and the strategic autonomy quest of the middle powers, all of which have made it harder for the American to maintain their supremacy. The US influencers are now feeling the pinch of the new unipolar world, as the unipolar moment has come to an end and rivalries between the US and China, Indo-Pacific competition, the emergence of the Chinese power, the ever-expanding strategic ambitions of the southeastern powers and the search by middle powers for strategic autonomy have weakened their new found supremacy. For Acharya (2018), the international order is shifting from a unipolar to a more multipolar “multiplex” world. A realist view would argue that this shift adds to the uncertainty and leads to balance, hedging and strategic partnerships of the states. This can be seen in South Asia, with India continuing to move closer to the United States, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Pakistan's extensive cooperation with China, as well as in increased interest of other regional and extra-regional powers in the maritime routes and connectivity corridors.

The existing theoretical approach that is most appropriate for this study is Realism as it is a theory which recognizes that South Asia has been affected by security dilemmas, rival alliances, nuclear deterrence, territorial conflicts and balance of power calculations. Mearsheimer (2018) believes that great powers continue to pursue their survival, power, and strategic interests and that liberal assumptions that international politics is permanently altered through institutions or ideology are faulty. Both Mearsheimer (2018) and Walt (2018) contend that liberal assumptions that institutions or ideology can permanently transform international politics are incorrect. Hard security issues – in particular the rivalry between India and Pakistan have been the main force in dominating politics in South Asia, leaving institutions like SAARC weak. Parent and Rosato (2015) go on to say that balancing is a key behavior in an anarchic international system. The realist lessons have important implications for understanding the importance of geography in South Asia in the context of an evolving global order moving from US primacy to multipolarity.

It is a very strategic environment with regard to Pakistan. It is situated at the junction of South Asian, Central Asian, China, Afghanistan, Iran, Arabian Sea and Middle East. However, Pakistan has always been a key part of China's grand strategy for Central and South Asian countries as its strategic location is a gateway to the Middle East and energy-rich Persian Gulf countries, Chaziza (2016) observes. The same, Jahanzaib and Ahmed (2024) suggest that Pakistan's foreign policy is gradually shifting towards the inter-connections between geopolitics and geo-economics due to its geographic position and status in both South and Central Asia. These arguments are supported by the scholarship relating to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which sees CPEC as a significant connectivity project between the China's Xinjiang region and the Gwadar Port in Pakistan and a new equation in South Asian strategic calculations.

The overall aim of this study is thus to discuss the geo-strategic importance of South Asia and its contribution to a new order in the world, especially that of Pakistan that is perceived as positive by key informants. According to the study, South Asia is not just a conflict zone anymore; it is a strategic region where the dynamics of global power transition, connectivity politics, nuclear deterrence, maritime security and geo-economic competition are converging. The role of Pakistan is pivotal as it is located at the intersection of several strategic regions and its policies have the potential to either increase the fragmentation of the region or promote connectivity, balance and stability.

2. Literature Review

The process of the unipolar world is declining and how the global system is becoming more competitive is the theme of recent literature. American-centered order is also part of the larger trend of a world of multiple centers of authority, as described by Acharya (2018). In his book, *The Tragedy of American Realism* (2018), Mearsheimer asserts that liberal hegemony has proved to be a failure because the nature of international politics remains nationalist and is based on power and state security. Walt (2018) also argues that liberal interventionism has been overused as the means to change international politics since the end of the Cold War. The realist and post-hegemonic arguments apply directly to South Asia, where multiple power transitions are set to impact the region, including the U.S.-China rivalry, China-India competition, India-Pakistan confrontation, and multiple actors looking to gain influence on the region, including Russia, the Gulf States, etc.

Majority of the recent scholarship has been on China's rise and its influence on South Asia. As South Asian regional dynamics have changed, and the claim of regional dominance has been complicated by the role of China (Wagner, 2016). The relationship between China, India and Pakistan is described by Lou (2022) as an 'entangled' nuclear and geopolitical triangle, created by chronic confrontation and tensions between India and Pakistan, strained relations between China and India and growing competition between the United States and China. This literature legitimizes the realist perspective of South Asian security as no longer characterized by two poles but three and globalizing. India-Pakistan rivalry is just one part of the equation for regional security dynamics; they need to be linked to China's rise and the US's Indo Pacific approach.

The literature pertaining to CPEC is particularly relevant to discuss how Pakistan has played a positive role. According to Hameed (2018), the CPEC project is political and economic in nature and it is both developments driven and strategic. Hussain and Jamali (2019) define CPEC as a 'new great game' in South Asia as it is linked to the infrastructure, trade, energy and geopolitics. Kuszewska and Nitza-Makowska (2021) suggest that CPEC could impact the security situation in South Asia, a region with a history of conflict, as well as economic, political, and social conditions in Pakistan. Manhas et al. (2025) also argue that CPEC is not just a piece of infrastructure, but a strategic pivot that enhances the China-Pakistan partnership and the balance of power in the region.

The second segment of literature revolves around the geo-economic potential of Pakistan. According to Jahanzaib and Ahmed (2024) the geopolitical and geo-economic significance of Pakistan is further boosted by its strategic location, as its foreign policy is becoming more economic-centric. According to Majeed et al. (2023) CPEC is a symbol of Pakistan-China cooperation and they believe in the positive impact of CPEC for Pakistan, China and the region. The literature is significant since it has the ability to transcend a security-centric mindset on Pakistan. Rather than seeing Pakistan solely in the prism of conflict, terrorism or nuclear threat, recent scholarship has increasingly noted its potential as a 'force of linkage' between the three main regions of South Asia, Central Asia, China and the Middle East.

In addition, there are difficulties identified in the literature. However, with respect to CPEC's promises, Garlick (2018) cautions that the political, institutional and security realities need to be taken into account. According to Abb (2023) local politics and center-periphery relations in Pakistan influence CPEC, hence, geo-economic projects need local acceptance and participatory development. However, CPEC can be both stabilizing and destabilizing aspects, as it can create both development, security, and local participation, or generate new grievances (Kuszewska & Nitza-Makowska, 2021). Good governance, stability within Pakistan and equitable distribution of

benefits and regional diplomacy are required to ensure that Pakistan plays a positive role, these studies indicate.

Another key strand of research is related to regionalism in south Asia. The World Bank's South Asia regional integration study reveals that the intra-regional trade in the region is much less than potential, and trade in cross-boundary commerce among South Asian countries is smaller than the estimated potential. This underlines the point that the significance of South Asia's geo-strategic location has not yet been realized in the true economic integration of the region. As a realist, this is a very low integration because this is a sign of unresolved security dilemma and distrusts between states. But it also offers a positive opportunity for Pakistan to assist in connectivity, trade transit, energy cooperation and multilateral platforms, the country being one of the nations (Kathuria, 2018; Kathuria & Mathur, 2018).

This study is also influenced by the works in the field of nuclear deterrence and strategic stability. Noor (2023) suggests that the concept of strategic stability in South Asia is complicated due to the overlapping rivalries and nuclear weapons possessed by China, India and Pakistan. The China-India-Pakistan triangle poses risks of crisis instability and escalation (Lou, 2022). A realist view of nuclear deterrence would suggest that it can stop full scale war but it also generates a steady competition within the non-nuclear realm. Pakistan's role in this context is important as in the eyes of many Pakistani analysts it is a balancing mechanism between India's conventional superiority. The positive profile of Pakistan is not just economic; it is also in matters of deterrence, crisis management and advocating for strategic stability.

Overall, literature reveals that South-Asia has become a region of centrality within the changing world order as it is a region of economic growth, a region of nuclear rivalry, a region of maritime competition, a region of connectivity politics and a region of great power contestation. In the existing literature, there are some valuable analyses on China, India, CPEC, Pakistan's geo-economic shift and instability in the region. Yet it is important to explore the informed participants' perception of Pakistan's positive contribution in the evolving strategic context in South Asia. This study is trying to fill that lacuna using qualitative thematic analysis.

The realism is basis for this study. Realism makes some basic assumptions about the international system: it is an anarchic system, states are the principal actors, survival is the main goal, and power is the most important tool states use to ensure their interests will be satisfied. Realism is highly relevant in the South Asian context as the politics of the region is driven by territorial issues, nuclear arms, military modernization, strategic cooperation and distrust. The realist approach provides a partial explanation as to why cooperation is still limited in spite of the fact that economic gains are obvious. It also sheds light on why the presence of the infrastructure projects like CPEC is viewed as a "tool of power, influence and strategic positioning" rather than a development project.

Mearsheimer's (2018) critique of liberal hegemony is useful as it exemplifies the limits of liberal institutionalism in South Asia. Sovereignty, security and relative gains remain states' top priorities and strategic rivalry remains in institutions. Walt's realist critique on overreach in foreign policy is also applicable in the case of South Asia as the external powers are more interested in strategic rather than only moral objectives. A Pakistan-China alliance and alliance of China with Pakistan's smaller South Asian neighbors would fit with their being aligned with the United States and India's alignment with China, respectively, and the strategic importance of these two smaller South Asian neighbors to avoid being dominated by a single power.

The realistic approach helps one to understand Pakistan in two ways. First, Pakistan's survival depends on its ability to play a balancing game in a conventional environment where India has an edge and Kashmir has still not been resolved, and where the United States' agenda is

constantly changing. Second Pakistan is a geo-strategic bridge which puts it in a position where it can leverage from the competition between China, India, USA, Central Asia and the Middle East. Hence, the positive role of Pakistan in terms of connectivity, deterrence and diplomacy is not idealistic, but rather both Pakistan's national interest and strategic necessity and balance-of-power logic.

3. Research Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design for the purpose of understanding the geo-strategic importance of South Asia and the role of Pakistan in the new world order from realist lens. The study did not intend to measure numeric variables; hence the qualitative approach was chosen. For selecting the key informants with relevant knowledge about international relations, security in South Asia, Pakistan's foreign policy and regional connectivity and geo-economics, purposive sampling technique was used to select thirteen key informants. The panel comprised of academics, former diplomats, policy analysts, security experts and economic-connectivity experts. To facilitate flexibility and focus, semi-structured interviews were conducted, on themes of South Asia's strategic location, great-power competition, CPEC, Pakistan's role and future trends in the world-order. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. Interviews notes were reviewed multiple times and coded and clustered more broadly. Four key themes were identified, namely: South Asia as a pivot of multipolar competition; Pakistan as a geo-economic bridge; Pakistan in the region's security and stability; and Pakistan's role in multilateral diplomacy and cooperative regionalism. Ethical issues emphasized informed consent and anonymity of participants and confidentiality of their responses.

4. Data Analysis & Interpretation

4.1. South Asia as a Strategic Pivot in Multipolar Competition

South Asia was seen as one of the most strategic parts in the new world order by participants. The majority of the participants felt that the significance of South Asia has grown due to its location at the interface of various power centres like that of China, India, United States, Russia, Central Asia, Gulf and the Indian Ocean. They saw it not only as a geographical space but as a strategic corridor where the process of reorganization of global power relations is taking place. From these perceptions, South Asia is thought to have value in terms of military, economic, maritime and diplomatic.

One thing that was common among the findings was the shift from one-polarity to competitive multi-polarity. Participants felt that this shift has enhanced the significance of South Asia for great powers as they have to look for regional partners, trade routes, ports, military access, and diplomatic influence. In this context, India is seen as a key player in US Indo-Pacific Policy, and China is building up its presence in India with BRI and CPEC. The participants highlighted the importance of Pakistan as a link between China and the Arabian Sea, and the access route to Middle East and Central Asia.

The interpretation of this theme is that the importance of South Asia geo-strategic lies in "balance of power" politics. All participants did not consider the centrality of the region as provisional rather they felt that strategic competition would keep playing its central role in international politics of South Asia. A positive role was identified for Pakistan in that regard that it is capable of acting as a balancing and bridging state. Pakistan can leverage its strategic position to foster connectivity, strategic balance and diplomatic engagement between competing players rather than be a passive target for rivalry.

4.2. Pakistan as a Geo-Economic Bridge through CPEC, Gwadar and Regional Connectivity

Pakistan's ability to harness geo-strategic location to become a geo-economic influence was the second one. Pakistan was consistently hailed by the participants as a bridge between South

Asian, China, Central Asian, Middle Eastern and the Indian Ocean region. The most significant symbols of this role were viewed to be CPEC and Gwadar Port. Amidst the participants, many saw CPEC as a project which can help in the enhancement of infrastructure, energy supply, trade routes and industrial development of the country and also make it more important in the eyes of the world from a diplomatic point of view.

Participants stressed the importance of providing Pakistan with a positive role connectivity and not confrontation. They argued that the region of Central Asian states and landlocked countries will be able to transform economically with Pakistan's support to connect with warm water states by establishing land sea trade and land sea corridors, which will help them connect with western part of China and the Arabian Sea and minimize the need for long sea routes. The perception aligns with a literature that suggest that CPEC is a huge project that will link the region of Xinjiang to Gwadar and will change the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

The results indicated that participants had an awareness about the difficulties associated with this activity. Constraints mentioned were security threats, political instability, provincial grievances and funding problems of CPEC. But these limitations did not mean that the positive role of Pakistan was wiped out. Rather, participants felt that the strategic agenda of Pakistan should be to ensure more inclusivity, transparency and regional openness of CPEC. With proper management, Pakistan can move from a security-oriented country to a connectivity-oriented country thanks to CPEC.

This interpretation is that Pakistan's geo-economic role is a realistic interpretation of its national interest. Participants didn't talk about connection as charity or idealism; they spoke of it as a strategic tool that Pakistan can use to enhance its power, to bring down its economic vulnerability and to give itself a diplomatic leverage. This discovery is consistent with the realist view on the economic corridors as tools of State power.

4.3. Pakistan's Positive Contribution to Regional Security, Deterrence & Crisis Management

The third theme related to the contribution of Pakistan towards regional security and strategic stability. It was noted by the participants that South Asia is one of the most vulnerable regions in the world in terms of nuclear weapons due to disputes and military modernization among the three countries, India, Pakistan and China. Members of the audience felt that the presence of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence was a factor of stability which kept the country from being engulfed in large-scale war and countered India's conventional military superiority.

Participants also spoke about Pakistan's experience of counterterrorism and its efforts in dealing with instability associated with Afghanistan. Some of the participants felt that Pakistan is facing high price of instability in the region and thus has an interest in peace, border management and counterterrorism cooperation. They said that Pakistan's positive role has been felt in its support for a negotiated political process in Afghanistan, its involvement in regional forums, and its ongoing focus on keeping the situation under control in Pakistan and avoiding uncontrolled escalation with India.

An important discovery was that citizens of Pakistan saw it as a state that wanted to maintain balance instead of dominating in the region. This perception is crucial as most external narratives have been positioned around the lens of insecurity or crisis in Pakistan. The participants made the following contribution to stability—Pakistan's contribution is in maintaining deterrence, promoting diplomatic efforts, being a part of counterterrorism activities, and advocating for regional balance. It is not to say that Pakistan had no policy problems, but rather participants considered Pakistan's security behaviour to be influenced by its survival in an unequal and competitive region.

The understanding of this theme is that, in Pakistan the positive role in security is best seen in the light of realism. With low trust levels and weak institutions, participants view deterrence and balance as two essential requirements for peace in the region. In the context of Pakistan, the contribution to stability will be about not allowing hegemony, dissuading war and encouraging negotiated solutions.

4.4. Pakistan's contribution to Multilateral Diplomacy and Cooperative Regionalism

The fourth theme was on the role of Pakistan in Diplomacy. Participants said that Pakistan is not only contributing to Pakistan-China relations positively, it is also contributing in a positive way to other aspects. They highlighted that Pakistan has joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, been engaged with the Muslim world, had relations with the Gulf states, played an important role in various peacekeeping operations under the auspices of the United Nations and supported regional dialogue as important aspects of its foreign policy. The participants felt that Pakistan has a geopolitical domain to play between strategic communities which can be China and the Muslim world, the South Asian region and the Central Asian region, Gulf and Asian region in general.

The participants also highlighted the need of fostering regional cooperation in the form of cooperative frameworks in South Asia due to the poor regionalism received there. They felt that the lethargy of the SAARC was a great loss to the region, but said that Pakistan could still continue to work on other platforms for trade, energy, climate and counterterrorism cooperation. Some participants felt that Pakistan has a greater geo-economic than geo-political role in the future and that Pakistan's attention needs to be focused on trade corridors, energy pipelines, transit agreements, climate resilience and educational exchanges.

The results show that when the domestic stability and economic policy are aligned with foreign policy, participants considered Pakistan to be a state of great constructive diplomacy. They said Pakistan has to shun bloc politics wherever possible, have a strategic partnership with China, reset functional relations with the USA and enhance relations with neighbouring countries and promote peaceful solution of conflicts. This was perceived to be consistent with a realist strategic approach of strategic autonomy.

The understanding of this theme is that Pakistan's positive role is relying upon diplomacy balancing. The world is changing in order and states that have the ability to communicate across competing blocs are becoming more important. But it is only when Pakistan becomes coherent within itself, is strong in economy and is continuous in its institutions that it can realize this potential, which is given by its location and relationship.

5. Discussions

This research confirms the overall trends of the growing significance of South Asian countries in their strategic context, as is reflected in the literature. The perception among the participants that South Asia is a pivot of multipolar competition confirms Acharya's (2018) calculations of the shift towards multipolarity and less US primacy of the world order. It also conforms to Mearsheimer's (2018) realist understanding that power competition has continued to be the primary feature of the world even with globalization. These issues of the US-China rivalry, China-India tensions and India-Pakistan competition show the participants' focus on the intertwined geopolitical and nuclear dynamics in South Asia, which is well captured by Lou's (2022) argument. The study results endorse the argument by Jahanzaib and Ahmed (2024) that geo-economic aspect is becoming a part of Pakistan's foreign policy. Participants have repeatedly called Pakistan as a 'bridge' between the regions and this is similar to the claim made by Chaziza (2016) that geography is the key to Pakistan for China's access to the Middle East and Persian Gulf. This

establishes Pakistan's multifaceted role in the evolving contours of world order, which is military, ideological, logistical, economic and spatial.

The results on CPEC are also consistent with recent literature available about CPEC. According to Manhas et al. (2025), CPEC is a project which is changing the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, whereas Majeed et al. (2023) believe that CPEC can work favorable for the benefit of both the countries of China and Pakistan and for the stability of the region. The participants shared similar sentiments particularly about Gwadar, transit facilities, energy facilities and regional connectivity. Nevertheless, the results also reinforce the caution expressed by Kuszewska and Nitza-Makowska (2021) that the impacts of CPEC may be stabilizing or destabilizing depending on the security and governance and local political conditions.

The discussion of Pakistan's Security role is also in line with the realist literature. The participants considered the deterrence posture of Pakistan as a stabilizing factor, because it is a balancing force of India's military superiority. This discovery is in line with the realist assumptions regarding balance, survival and deterrence. It is also related to the recent publications that refer to South Asia as a complex nuclear environment between China, India and Pakistan. But the discovery is more radical than much of the literature in highlighting Pakistan's positive image as a crisis manager, counterterrorism partner, and advocate for regional balance, in addition to being a nuclear actor.

The results also reveal a huge dichotomy in South Asia. The region is very economically and strategically advantageous, but has a weak integration. Participants' belief that political mistrust and security disputes are the reason for the South Asian region not being able to reach its economic potential is reflected in the World Bank's observation that intra-regional trade is only about 5 percent of the total trade between South Asian countries. It's not surprising from a realist point of view. Indeed, states do not cooperate just because it is economically beneficial to them; states cooperate when they think that the balance of relative gains, security threats and sovereignty issues can be taken care of (Kathuria, 2018; Kathuria & Mathur, 2018).

The study's novelty lies in the fact that it highlights the positive contribution of Pakistan in a context where this aspect has been less emphasized than in previous studies. A lot of studies have been carried out on Pakistan and its instability or its rivalry or dependence on China. This research does not underestimate these obstacles, but it reveals that the key informants had a positive view about strategic potentials of Pakistan as a state. For the regional stability Pakistan can play a positive role in maintaining the deterrence, promoting the connectivity, dialogue and participation in the multilateral institutions and link South Asia with the neighboring countries. This is not a role for idealists; it's a role for realist national interest. The more stable and connected, as well as economically robust Pakistan, will be able to enhance its own power and will be able to contribute to the order in the region.

In the meantime, the discussion shall be confined to limitations. Domestic political stability, economic reforms, improvement and security measures, provincial inclusion and institutional continuity and credible diplomacy are all the prerequisites for the positive role that Pakistan play. If not, geo-strategic location might not be leveraged to its full potential. In the literature, the link between CPEC and regional transformation is discussed, and it is noted that without addressing local backwardness and concerns, debt worries, and security risks, as well as regional opposition, there is no possibility of transformation. So, it's possible to play a positive role in Pakistan, but it will need conscious policy decisions.

6. Conclusions

Geo-strategic importance of the South Asia has been rising in the world order that is undergoing a transformation due to the geo-economic connectivity, energy security, maritime competition,

nuclear rivalry and transition of global power. A realist view of South Asia is that it is a critical region in which power, geography and security are intermingled. As the world loses its unipolarity, China's rise, India's ambition, the Indo-Pacific strategy of US and growing interest in connecting route by the US and China has made South Asia a key international politics zone. Through this study, it has been revealed that the key actors had strategic perceptions about the multipolar competition in South Asia and saw Pakistan as a constructive actor, which can make positive contribution in the region in terms of order. Four themes were observed in the thematic analysis, namely, South Asia in the multipolar context, Pakistan's geo-economic bridge role, Pakistan's contribution to regional security and deterrence, and Pakistan's role in multilateral diplomacy. In all these themes, it was observed that Pakistan's strategic location makes it a strategy-oriented country. By CPEC, Gwadar could connect Pakistan with China, the Arabian Sea and its close proximity to Central Asia and the Middle East would facilitate connectivity and regional economic change in Pakistan. The study finds that in terms of Pakistan's positive contribution realism is the most appropriate concept. Security, balance and influence are Pakistan's aspirations in a challenging region. Its contribution to the national interest is not in opposition to it, but as part of it. Pakistan can advance its own power and contribute to the regional stability in South Asia through connectivity, maintaining strategic stability, dialogue, and pursuing balanced diplomacy. But this potential is contingent upon the domestic economic strength, political stability, and improved governance and inclusive development. Against this backdrop, South Asia will take center stage in the new world order, and Pakistan's geo-economic and geo-political influence will be crucial to its future role.

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