ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL
Available Online: https://assajournal.com
*Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026*.Page#.7271-7294
Print ISSN: 3006-2497 Online ISSN: 3006-2500
Platform & Workflow by: Open Journal Systems
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22772070

# Framing Economic Security: Political Communication and the Construction of Threats in Global Economic Competition

## *A Three-Voice Framing Analysis of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor*

**Natasha***
MPhil Graduate, School of Politics and International Relations (SPIR), Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.
*Corresponding Author Email: natasha.imtiaaz@gmail.com

**Abstract**

*This research paper examines the competing narratives of the West, China and Pakistan surrounding the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Recently, economic security has emerged as an arena of competitive communication, where states do not simply respond to threats but actively create them through framing. While most of the current research concerning the 'debt-trap' and 'China threat' narratives focuses on the Western security viewpoint and on China's reaction, it frequently fails to take into account the way the countries affected by these narratives understand and present them, which are central to these projects. Drawing on a qualitative approach, this article addresses this gap by offering a three-perspective framing analysis of discursive competition over the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). By synthesizing the insights from securitization theory with the framing tradition in political communication, it specifies five elements of each frame: definition of threat, object to be protected, and attribution of blame, proposed solutions, and moral evaluation. The framework is used in three different areas of discussion, and the analysis reveals that the West, China and Pakistan each present a different view of the situation and develops their own interpretation of CPEC and its importance, as a result of their respective strategic priorities and motivations. This article contributes to the study of economic security and analyzes the conceptual framing of threats through communication, advancing the framing discourse to an underexplored non-Western context, and extending a well-defined framework for comparative frame analysis.*

***Keywords:*** *Political Communication, Economic security, Belt and Road Initiative, Strategic narratives, China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, Framing, Securitization.*

## 1. Introduction

Economic security is no longer a minor foreign policy concern; it is now a major issue in competition among the great powers. In the contemporary international system, subjects such as infrastructure financing, supply chains, critical minerals, and international investment are generally assessed in terms of risk (Durak, 2024). However, when deciding whether an economic relationship poses a threat, actors rarely use solid evidence. Instead, these questions are usually discussed or examined through the lens of a narrative (Hu, 2023). States, research groups, and the media not only perceive economic threats but also create them by describing some dependencies as weaknesses and others as opportunities, and by calling certain creditors allies and others exploiters. Consequently, economic security has become a field in which various interpretations compete (Nye, 2004, 2008; Farrell & Newman, 2019).

Such a change isn't just a matter of words. If an economic association is seen as a security threat, it makes sense to implement several policy measures: investment screening, export restrictions, financial de-economization and securing transport lines by making them securitized. If the relationship is only considered as one of trade, such measures would not occur to people (Balzacq, 2010; Hillman, 2025). From this perspective, the problem is not just one more part of policy; it is indeed one of the conditions of policy's political feasibility because if it is defined as a threat, then it is defined as the necessity of making extraordinary economic decisions. The awareness of economic threats is also dependent on the political communication tools used for the authorization of economic statecraft (Blanchard & Ripsman, 2008).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and more specifically the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, provides a clear example of this situation. Since 2017, the concept of 'debt-trap diplomacy' has been used to claim that China intentionally provides infrastructure loans to poor countries that cannot repay them and then exploits their economic dependence for political gain This argument has evolved from a think-tank topic to a major policy concern, particularly in the United States ((Chellaney, 2017; Brautigam, 2020). It has since been incorporated into the European Union's move towards "economic security" and "de-risking" (European Commission, 2023). In response, China considers such initiatives as "mutually beneficial" based on cooperation, mutual connection and shared progress and it views Western criticism as an effort to contain it. Both of these viewpoints have been extensively studied. However, little attention has been given to how the host country interprets the issue; in its own way, the public, the media, and the government defines the corridor in terms of sovereignty, development, and financial vulnerability (Samad, 2025; Ahmed & Chaudhry, 2025).

Mostly the research on economic security takes a bilateral approach, examining how West views the economic influence of China as a security threat and how Beijing responds (Zheng et al., 2024). Yet by focusing on competition between two superpowers, these studies pay relatively little attention to the options and strategies of the countries that receive support. Current debates generally present recipient nations in one of two opposing ways, either casting their engagement with China as a case of

Chinese propaganda or linking it to the broader challenge this poses to Western influence (Mandon & Woldemichael, 2023; Roberts & Lamp, 2023).

This basic dichotomous approach distorts and oversimplifies the real political views of these projects and also repeats the same great-power focus it sets out to examine (Pan, 1999; Beeson & Crawford, 2022). This paper presents an alternative approach and asks how Chinese, Pakistani, and Western actors compete to frame CPEC as an economic-security initiative, and what insights this contest offers. It proposes a three-voice framing analysis in which each discourse is treated as a construct evaluated using the same analytical criteria, rather than comparing two frames with a third considered correct (Buzan et al., 1997). Methodologically, it combines the Copenhagen School's securitization theory with the framing approach in political communication by identifying five framing dimensions applied consistently across all three perspectives (Entman, 1993; Mortensgaard, 2018).

The article makes three important contributions. Empirically, it conducts one of the first systematic, three-sided analyses of how economic-security threats are formulated in a non-Western setting, thereby restoring the framing authority of states from the Global South that the existing literature currently ignores (Kiesel & Dannenberg, 2023). Methodologically, it presents a repeatable five-dimensional coding framework that other researchers can apply in further cases (Lin-Greenberg, 2023). Theoretically, it redefines economic security not as an inherent feature of a relationship but an achievement that is produced through competitive framing, demonstrating that the analytically impartial method of securitization, namely, one that does not concern itself with the truth of the threat claims, is especially suitable for investigating this kind of competition (Baele & Jalea, 2022).

## 2. Literature Review

Securitization theory provides the basis for examining how threats are formulated. Based on the Copenhagen School's approach, security is not a natural or inherent condition but an act: a concern becomes a security issue when a securitizing agent convinces a relevant audience that a particular object faces a fundamental threat that calls for exceptional measures (Buzan, 1983). The theory thus does not deal with the veracity of the threat; rather, it focuses on the process of something being named as a threat and on the conditions which make that designation work. Therefore, securitization is viewed as a constructivist, and essentially communicative, understanding of security, appropriate to the School, which identifies as one of five areas where securitization is clearly a key area of the economic field (Stritzel, 2014).

Subsequent studies have built on and doubted the framework. Balzacq (2005, 2010) shifted the focus from verbally to practical and social aspects of the audience, context, and the set of practices that enable the securitizing of actions to become "in place. Williams's securitization, as seen from both the visual and mediated perspective, was brought to the fore by Williams (2003).

Nevertheless, McDonald (2008) criticized the limitations of the original model and promoted a more extensive view of how security is formulated through a wider range of communication actions. Stritzel (2014) emphasized the "translation" and adaptation of threat narratives as they move from one context to another. At the same time, Wilkinson (2007) expressed doubts about the framework's applicability beyond its European origins, a point which is especially pertinent to research carried out in South Asia. Hansen (2006) developed the discourse-analytic framework for examining security as a textual phenomenon.

For the present discussion, the main insight is Watson's (2012): securitization is fundamentally a form of framing, and the two bodies of literature should be analyzed together. Framing is one of the most effective concepts in political discussion. Framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality to make them stand out, promoting a particular description of the issue, a specific interpretation of the causes, a certain moral evaluation, and a proposed course of action. The four-part structure covering the issue, the origin, the ethical evaluation, and the solution closely matches the elements involved in a securitizing action and thus provides the analytical framework for the present study (Benford and Snow; 2000, Dardis, 2007). The practice of framing has been developed through research on the impact of the media and the rhetorical and ideological functions framing carries out. The study of social movements introduced ideas of frame resonance and collective action frameworks (Goffman, 1974; Fairclough, 1995; Hall, 1997; Schrøder, 1998; Van Dijk; 1998; Scheufele, 1999).

Globally, the concept of framing has been extended through the idea of strategic narratives: narratives deliberately created about the international system, its participants, and the challenges it faces, which states use to influence how others see and respond (Miskimmon et al., 2013). Research on strategic narratives combines a rationalist view of communication as a tool of statecraft with a constructivist view of narratives as structures for expressing interests and identities (Kurlantzick, 2007; Manor, 2019), and it has been explicitly applied to analyzing the reception of the BRI. This research work also examines soft power and public diplomacy, including the digital methods countries use to spread their narratives (D'Hooghe, 2015; Repnikova, 2022; Tran & Mo, 2025).

A growing body of scholarly work now also examines how China's economic engagement has been framed as a security issue (Norris, 2021). Scholars have documented the post structural evolution of the "China threat" and examined the development and spread of the debt-trap story. However, this narrative has faced empirical challenge (Liu, 2023). The research carried out by Jones and Hameiri (2020) for Chatham House suggests that the debt-trap theory is mainly a fabrication; in the case of Sri Lanka and Malaysia, the governments of the beneficiary countries initiated the controversial projects in pursuit of their own domestic aims, the debt problems arising more from the local political situations and from Western-oriented financial markets than from any tactics on the part of China. Brautigam (2020) and Pearson et al., (2022) have reached the same conclusion, and quantitative analyses of lending data have likewise found little evidence of a systematic trap At the policy level, the framework has become firmly established as part of an institutional structure through the EU's economic-security and de-risking measures as well as through the wider trend towards military interdependence (Kratz & Mingey, 2019; Drezner et al., 2021

A large volume of area-studies literature focuses on the geopolitics and political economy of CPEC and the wider BRI, on the strategic narratives associated with the initiative (Small, 2015; Callahan, 2016; Garlick, 2018; Markey, 2020; Boni, 2019; Sidaway & Woon, 2017; Rolland, 2017; Miller, 2017), and on the way in which Pakistani institutions frame and challenge the CPEC discourse. Nevertheless, two inconsistencies remain. Theoretically, economic security and legitimacy are usually treated as measurable outcomes rather than as communicative processes (Minatti, 2024). Empirically, the way the recipient state frames the issue, since it is internally diverse and varies between support and concern, has not been well explained and has instead been absorbed into the great-power dichotomy rather than treated as a distinct and unique viewpoint (Samad, 2025). This research aims to deal with both shortcomings.

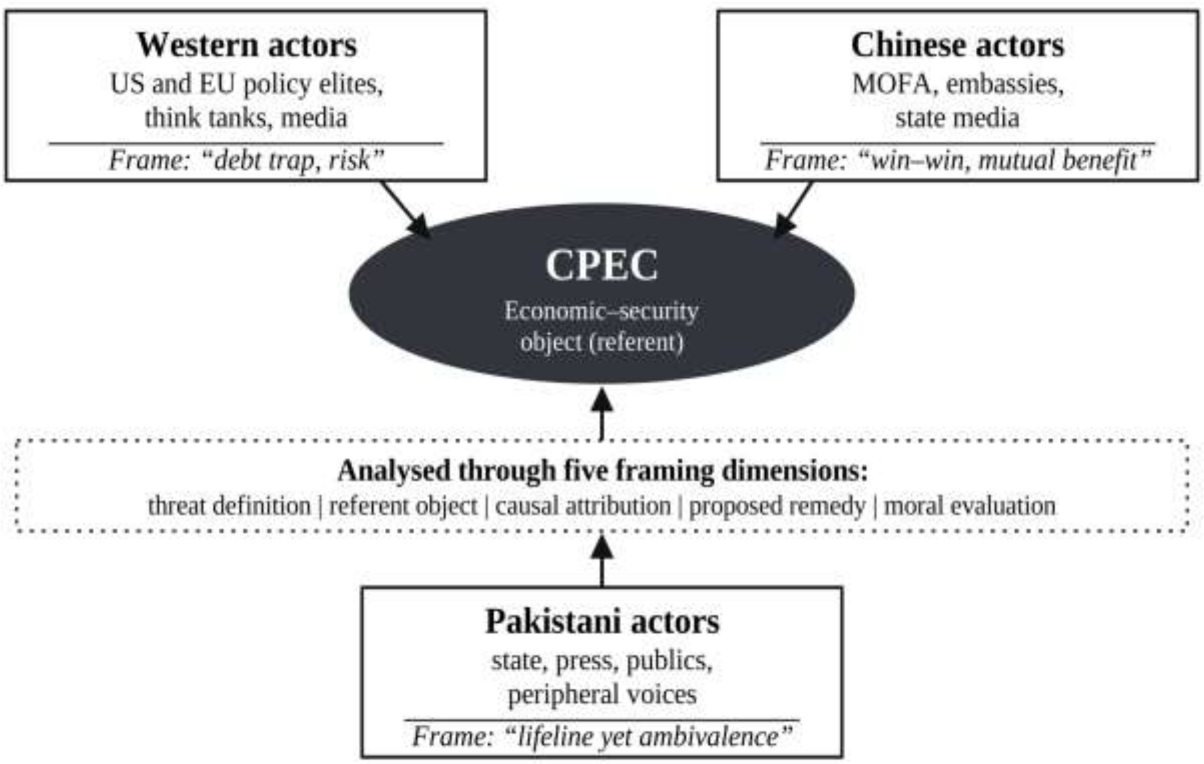
Another limitation of current scholarship is its imbalance in sympathy. Studies that question the debt-trap narrative usually focus on the actions and concerns of the recipient states. In contrast, research on Chinese influence often highlights the risks of dependency and rarely considers other perspectives. Only a few approaches avoid judging all three frames at once, and the method that does so treats each frame with equal analytical interest. Securitization theory delivers precisely this kind of approach, since its basic feature is to set aside the question of whether the threat is true and instead to examine the claim (McDonald, 2008; Balzacq et al., 2016; Wæver, 2011). In this balanced manner, the recipient frame is regarded as a constructed concept and is not seen as representing genuine resistance, any more than the two great-power frames are regarded as true resistance. At the same time, it is not treated as an 'ensnared' discourse.

## 3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

The framework combines securitization and framing into a single, symmetrical analytical method (Mortensgaard, 2018). Securitization is a particular form of framing in which the issue in question is framed as an existential threat and the suggested response calls for exceptional measures (Watson, 2012). This combination results in two duties that form the basis of the entire analysis. The first is analytic impartiality: within the securitization framework, the research sets aside any assessment of the accuracy of each threat claim. It does not decide whether CPEC is a financial trap or a developmental benefit; instead, it looks at how each participant perceives it. The second is analytical symmetry: each point of view is examined using the same framework, so no reference point is used to judge the others as being in dissonance (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Karyotis et al., 2020).

The study identifies five framing dimensions by applying Entman's (1993) framework together with the components of a securitizing move. The definition of the threat refers to what, if anything is regarded as the danger. The referent object is that which is presented as being protected or at risk. Causal attribution involves naming the entity or factor considered to be responsible. The suggested solution is the course of action the framework recommends. The ethical assessment deals with how individuals are viewed in terms of their morality and identity. The five dimensions, as summarized in Table 1, are used for each of the three voices. Because the same grid is applied to all the frames, the analysis of this research can be carried out on a dimensional basis, highlighting areas of agreement, disagreement, and the insights that can be gained from the disagreements. Figure 1 shows the full framework: three securitizing agents imposing opposing interpretations on a single referent object, and this is examined through a common analytical lens.

**Figure 1. Competitive Threat Construction around CPEC**




*Source: Author's elaboration.*

Two improvements to the grid are worth noting. First, the scope of the threat definition must include not only securitizing actions but also their opposite: a framework can work well by refusing to use the language of danger and by stating that an issue is merely part of ordinary political debate or routine business. This desecuritization initiative (Waever, 1995) is at the heart of the Chinese approach and should be seen as a positive strategy rather than just the absence of securitization. Second, since the same actor may at the same time securitize one entity while desecuritizing another, that is, by treating the other side's narrative as the real threat while ignoring the risks associated with its own actions, the framework is applied according to the internal logic of the frame rather than the actor's overall stance. Recognizing the reflexive, second-order character of the competition, in which frames in turn refer to other frames, is a major advantage of analyzing securitization and framing together (Mortensgaard, 2018).

Table 1. Analytical framework: dimensions, guiding questions, and theoretical anchors.

| Dimension | Analytical question | Theoretical anchor |
|---|---|---|
| **Threat definition** | What is named as the existential danger? | Securitizing move; problem definition (Entman, 1993; Buzan et al., 1998) |
| **Referent object** | What is represented as endangered or protected? | Referent object (Buzan et al., 1998) |
| **Causal attribution** | Who or what is held responsible? | Causal interpretation (Entman, 1993) |
| **Proposed remedy** | What treatment is recommended? | Treatment recommendation; extraordinary measure (Entman, 1993; Waever, 2011) |
| **Moral evaluation** | How are actors morally and identity-wise positioned? | Moral evaluation; identity framing (Entman, 1993; Hansen, 2006) |

## 4. Methodology

The study conducts a qualitative, comparative analysis of how the discourse on CPEC is framed. In this approach, the framing aim remains constant. CPEC is seen as both an economic and a security issue. At the same time, the framing agent shifts across three points of view, making the apparent differences stem from construction rather than content. What this amounts to is a highly analogous form of comparative reasoning about the subject and a considerably different one concerning the actor. The collection includes, for each voice, publicly available and comparable materials chosen to ensure consistency in both source type and volume.

For the Western viewpoint, the selected materials include policy statements, think tank analyses, and expert opinions from both the United States and the European Union. For the Chinese perspective, the materials include statements from the foreign ministry, communications from embassies, and coverage provided by state-controlled media. The materials for the Pakistani perspective include government statements, opinion articles and editorials in English-language media, think tank publications, and reports on activities of marginal and civil-society groups voicing dissent. The analysis spans from the birth of the debt-trap narrative (2017) to the formation of economic-security policy

(2023–24), when the three perspectives are evidently responding to a sequence of shared events. The study focuses on how the material is framed rather than how it is received or its effect on its audience; therefore, the statements refer to the structure of the material, not its persuasive strength.

## 5. Analysis: Three Constructions of One Corridor

### 5.1 The Western frame: dependency, opacity, and the responsible order

From a Western perspective, CPEC is regarded as an instance of a broader type of threat: strategic economic dependence (Petry, 2023). This threat involves Chinese infrastructure financing on unclear terms, which can create obligations that can, in turn, be used to gain political and possibly military influence over the country that receives the funds (Himmer & Rod, 2023). On this basis, Chellaney (2017) first advanced the "debt-trap" hypothesis. Policymakers quickly adopted this view (Brautigam, 2020). The problem is complicated: it seems to be about the sovereignty and financial independence of the benefiting country, but it is more about maintaining a liberal international order and protecting supply chains and key infrastructure that the countries setting the narrative have a direct interest in (Farrell and Newman, 2019).

Instead of considering the more complex relationship between the actions of the recipient countries and the responses of the international financial markets, the outcome is regarded as the result of a deliberate plan on the part of China. Researchers have objected to this approach since it goes against similar assertions (Jones and Hameiri, 2020; Kratz & Mingey, 2019). The way in which policy responded was to move away from the confrontational term 'decoupling' and to adopt instead more nuanced ideas such as 'de-risking', diversification, and a greater level of scrutiny of investments and transparency requirements. As a result, the EU introduced its 2023 economic-security framework (European Commission, 2023). On an ethical level, the framework presents the Western countries as responsible parties who are safeguarding vulnerable countries and regulatory systems from a lender that is described as predatory, or at most, negligent The establishment of the framework meant that the emphasis moved from individual measures to the broader concept of economic security, a major shift in rhetoric (Hameed, 2018).

Two framing devices occur frequently in Western literature; they must be examined separately. The first of these is the metaphor of the ‘trap’, which does a lot of heavy lifting in the background, showing that there is intention (a trap is set), suggesting a sense of victimhood (the borrower is the prey) and implying inevitability (the jaws will close), so as to reduce a variety of possible economic results to a single teleological story (Brautigam, 2020). The second is confidentiality. The exact terms of [the agreement] have never been made public and the extent of the borrower's obligations remains undisclosed, and it is this blank space that does the work. Since the repayment schedule and the collateral clauses cannot be seen, critics fill the gap with the most negative possibility they can imagine, and the act of concealment begins to appear as proof that something is being hidden (Budd et al., 2019). Together, these two devices make the framework resistant to empirical challenge; whenever specific debt-trap cases are refuted, the framework shifts to the more defensible idea of systemic risk and transparency, just the kind of shift that is seen in the transition from 'debt trap' to 'de-risking'.

**5.2 The Chinese frame: win-win development and the containment counter-narrative**

From the Chinese perspective: mutually beneficial growth and the alternative narrative of containment. There is almost a total reversal of the Chinese position, with its main feature being de-securitization, namely, the denial that the CPEC presents any threat and instead viewing it as a way to achieve connectivity, industrialization, and favorable development through a "win-win " focus shift; the basis shifts from the autonomy of the recipient to collective prosperity and more generally to the developmental objectives positions Global South, where China rather than itself as a collaborator rather than as a benefactor. While West sees it as dependence, Chinese view it as interconnectedness (Sidaway & Woon, 2017; Rolland, 2017).

At the same time, the frame includes a counter-approach designed to promote securitization. It points to a danger, yet the danger is the Western narrative itself. Criticisms of the CPEC are described as being based on a "Cold-War mindset", on envious strategic competition, and on attempts at containment, thus reinterpreting the debt-trap argument as a kind of informational attack rather than as a real evaluation. Instead of focusing on the causes, the approach attributes the situation to hostile external parties; the proposed solution is to increase cooperation, reject any "intervention" in bilateral issues, and speed up the development of a superior "BRI 2.0" (Gupta, 2025; García-Herrero & Xu, 2019). Ethically, China is viewed as a sincere and non-intrusive ally in contrast to dominant aggressors. This situation is expected through an increasingly assertive and digital public diplomacy strategy, and it gains persuasive power from the same academic refutation that weakens the Western viewpoint (Tran Sautedé & Mo, 2025; Repnikova, 2022; Manor, 2019; Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021).

The Chinese approach is not simply a reactive one; it promotes a positive set of terms, such as 'community of shared future', 'connectivity', and 'development first' which redefines the standards by which infrastructure lending should be assessed, shifting the criteria from the liberal values of transparency and debt sustainability to the developmental ones of growth, energy, and connectivity (Kurlantzick, 2007; Callahan, 2016). In this way, it is more than just an alternative response. It questions the subject itself, what strategic-narrative researchers call the deepest type of narrative power: changing the rules of debate rather than simply winning under existing circumstances. At the same time, the frame has a particular weakness: its demand for non-interference and bilateral confidentiality can be used against it, providing exactly the kind of opacity that the Western frame needs; the two frames are therefore in a mutually reinforcing relationship in which each one provides the other with evidence (Van Noort & Colley, 2021; Miskimmon et al., 2013, 2018).

### 5.3 The Pakistani frame: lifeline, sovereignty, and the divided view

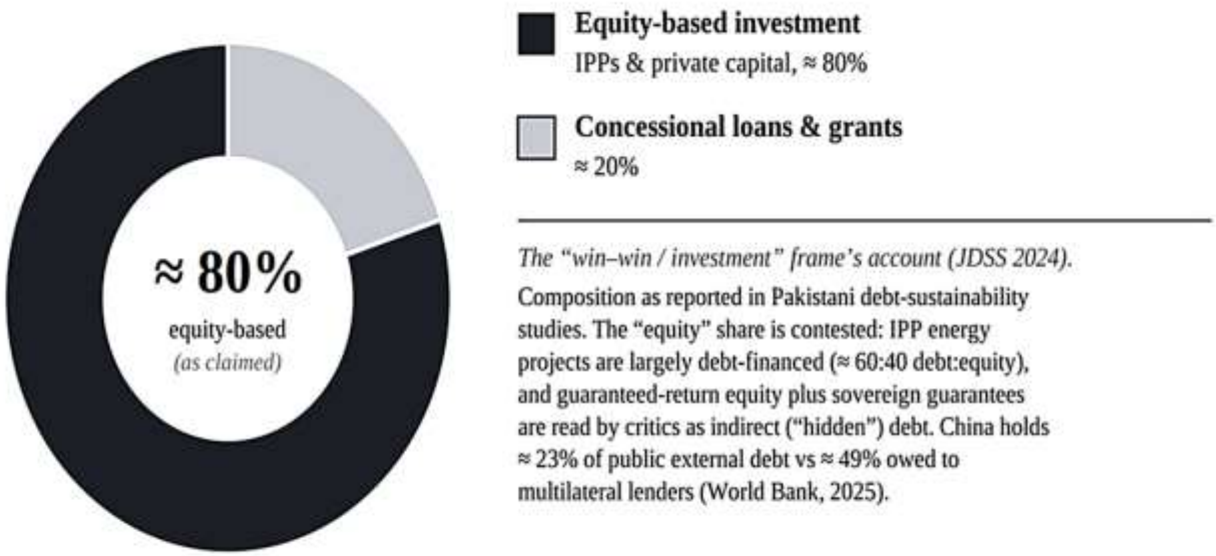
When it comes to the Pakistan's position on receiving substantial aid, maintaining a certain degree of autonomy and facing a basic level of uncertainty, most current academic literature fails to account for how Pakistan deals with this issue, and this approach is not easy to describe as one extreme or the other. It is not grounded in a single framework but instead consists of a fragmented set of perspectives. At the governmental level and among associated think tanks, CPEC is described as a developmental 'lifeline' and 'game-changer': it is seen as a way to overcome current shortages of energy and infrastructure, as well as a means of increasing geostrategic importance. This is an official representation, and it's very similar to the one in the official record known as Chinese win-win approach without copying, as state-connected organizations play an active role in the perception of this approach.

However, a clear and significant trend is emerging in the media in Pakistan and more broadly. The editorial and opinion pages are increasingly focusing on debt sustainability, the lack of transparency in contracts, the unequal distribution of benefits among the provinces, and the treatment of dissent as a security problem, especially in Baluchistan and Gwadar, where the government has repeatedly recast local opposition as part of a “counter-state” or as a threat supported by foreigners (Ahmed & Chaudhry, 2025). The Pakistani approach, irrespective of the situation, is characterized by its main focus: not on the liberal order or unity of the countries of the Global South, but on the national economy, fair treatment of the provinces, budgetary independence, and local self-sufficiency.

The notion of attributing the problem to internal factors actually relates to poor domestic administration and sustained fiscal deficits, not to Chinese influence. This perspective is in line with the academic literature which aims to downplay China's role (Jones and Hameiri, 2020). The argument that emphasizes internal matters is supported by the repeated reference to the way in which the financing of CPEC is arranged: a large proportion of the investments in the corridors are of an equity nature rather than being funded by government debt, and Chinese debt accounts for only a small portion of Pakistan's total foreign debt (Shaikh & Chen, 2021). The objective of this approach is not to reduce the risks or to refrain from taking action prematurely, but rather to promote reform, review the terms and enhance transparency. It highlights Pakistan's sovereign authority by stating that the country itself must draw up the agreement, not merely act as a passive recipient.

The lack of consensus in Pakistan is not a sign that the analysis has failed, as the various viewpoints show. The official and critical positions are not separate systems but two sides of the same national debate, one that centers on the nation and its economy: an economy free from the influence of major powers. For this reason, Pakistan's stance cannot easily be placed at either end of the spectrum. The government supports CPEC, but only on the grounds of Pakistan's own progress, not because of Chinese goodwill or solidarity with the Global South. Similarly, the critics advocate reform and renegotiation, not withdrawal or reduction of risk. The corridor is not a gift or a problem for Pakistan but something that should be managed. This goes against the idea of dominance presented by other views (Garlick, 2018).

**Figure 2: Reported Structure of CPEC Financing**




*Source: Author's elaboration based on JDSS (2024), World Bank (2025).*

**6. Framing in Action: Four Discursive Episodes**

The three narratives above are articulated following the concrete developments. This section is empirically supported by the framework by mapping four episodes in which Chinese, Western and Pakistani voices engaged with the same development differently. In line with the neutrality of study, the objective is not to determine which perspective is accurate but to reveal how one development can be interpreted as three different economic-security concerns.

**6.1 The 2018 IMF-Bailout Controversy**

.In the mid-2018, the Pakistani government was looking at obtaining a large rescue package from the International Monetary Fund to cope with its serious balance of payments problem, while at the same time there was a heated debate regarding Pakistan's external debt, particularly its financial obligations to China and concerning the CPEC projects. This led to a three-way talk's session between the United States, China, and Pakistan.

The United States was concerned about Pakistan's financial relationships with China. In a July 2018 interview with CNBC, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo asserted that there was "no rationale" for using an IMF programme to pay off Chinese lenders. He also said the United States would keep a close eye on how the IMF managed the issue. David Malpass, an official at the U.S. Treasury, showed his concern that the terms of the Chinese loans to Pakistan had not been made fully public. The primary concern of the West was that Pakistan's increasing dependence on Chinese debt was giving China greater influence and leverage. The concern was that the loans could give China political leverage. There was an idea proposed by West that the IMF and the G7 demand greater transparency and more supervision of Chinese loans. This stance showed that the West advocates a rules-based international system with more financial transparency (Lawder, 2018).

Chinese interpretation was much different and characterized the CPEC-related debt as part of economic cooperation, instead of considering it as a geopolitical or security threat. It was stated by the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang that IMF deal all the issues on the basis of its own established procedures**.** Later, during a visit to Pakistan, Foreign Minister Wang Yi refuted the argument about excessive debt burden for Pakistan with respect to CPEC and emphasized that the major portion of Pakistan's debt was held by creditors such as Asian Development Bank and IMF (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Beijing framed CPEC as a development partnership and rejected Western claims by viewing them as external interference to politicize the economic cooperation. China always presented itself as a development partner committed to non-interference, while portraying the approach of United States as an attempt to bring political considerations into economic relations with other countries.

Pakistan also opposed the notion that its IMF programme should be associated with CPEC. Pakistan’s Finance Ministry described it as "misleading to connect CPEC with IMF programme" (CPEC Secretariat, 2018). Senior parliamentarian Raza Rabbani of Pakistan clearly denounced the political manipulation of economic assistance by U.S. administration and identified it as "naked politicization" of multilateral assistance (Business Recorder, 2018). The main threat for Pakistan was external pressure on its national policy autonomy and economic decision-making. Therefore, Islamabad attempted to keep its relationship with China and IMF programme separate. The preferred approach was to defend right of Pakistan to take independent economic decisions without being forced to choose between China and U.S. Pakistan thus characterized itself as an independent state pursuing its own interests rather than a representative of either side.

### 6.2 The CPEC Power-Sector (IPP) Renegotiation Dispute

The independent power producers (IPPs) developed under CPEC has been a major factor in raising Pakistan's circular debt. Majority of these projects were intended to be completed in accordance with the 2015 power policy. The contracts guaranteed fixed returns and payments to be made in U.S. dollars; thereby exacerbating Pakistan's financial difficulties (Zaidi & Sami, 2025). Since 2021, Pakistan has been attempting to renegotiate these agreements. Unlike the 2018 dispute, which mainly concerned financial costs and the terms of the contracts, the present negotiations are more focused on determining who is to be held responsible. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is also taking part, now acting as an institutional player rather than on behalf of the Western bloc.

The Government of Pakistan saw the issue in terms of the financial stability of the country. It called for the agreement's reorganization, yet also expressed a desire to have good ties with China. It was observed that half of the payments of IPPs are associated with the power projects of China, and that it is imperative to protect Pakistan’s economic interests. High tariff rates and contract conditions were the major domestic concerns. The proposed remedy was to negotiate and revise such agreements and accommodate the country's economic difficulties while ensuring that it fulfills its commitments to China (Surahio et al., 2022). In doing so, Pakistan was portrayed as a responsible state, with apprehensions about its economic stability, and as one that maintained strong relations with China.

Chinese independent power producers indicated that retroactive restoration of the current contracts will create uncertainty among investors and affect the stability of the contracts. They argued that investors were expecting the returns that were originally agreed and that any changes to these will be in breach of the promises made. This was in keeping with China's overall policy on the CPEC energy partnership as a boon to both nations and not a financial burden (Sayeed, 2018). China's concern was that Pakistan failed to make its payments, and the suggested remedy was that Pakistan should stick to the original contracts. China was positioning itself as a reliable economic partner to Pakistan, which expects Pakistan to honor its commitments.

The issue was approached with the lenses of financial discipline fiscal sustainability by IMF. It was claimed that Pakistan must not only clear the pending payments to Chinese IPPs without resolving the fundamental contractual issues. Rather, it advocated for balanced burden-sharing, better transparency, and renegotiation, underscoring that "all stakeholders hare costs equitably" to reduce the concerns of circular-debt (Rana, 2022). The IMF identified the problematic and costly terms of contract and proposed reform as the key solution. Its focus on the transparency partly converged with the stance of Western, but IMF remained a separate institutional actor primarily emphasized on the economic reforms and not on the geopolitical competition.

**6.3 Gwadar and Local Grievances**

The deep-water port of Gwadar in Balochistan is significant for CPEC development, and it also remains a constant local concern. In the three frames, unlike the previous episodes, there are distinct differences in what is being protected, and the Pakistani perspective has various perceptions. The debate does not focus on foreign strategic issues, but it also concerns local development, political inclusion, and provincial rights. According to Western security and defence analysts, Gwadar is primarily a military asset of China. The U.S. Naval War College expressed concern that China may turn Gwadar into a "strategic strongpoint," and China's investment in this port is not driven only by its business profits (Kardon et al., 2020). The primary threat is the possible Chinese naval or military presence that may impact regional maritime security. The suggested solution is more oversight and transparency. The Western voice thus appears as a watchdog that is worried about balance in the region.

Beijing sees Gwadar as a good opportunity to enhance connectivity and development in the region. It has repeatedly said it will not resort to military action in the port, and according to official statements, Gwadar has been termed an "economic funnel". On these lines, Gwadar is not considered a serious threat to security but rather a business of mutual benefit for strengthening mutual relations and to achieve mutual economic benefits. China views itself as a development partner and would like to further develop cooperation but opposes overstated claims of the strategic importance of Gwadar.

There is a divide in Pakistan's opinion. Dovernment sees Gwadar as a development game-changer and strategic asset which can boost the country's position in the region. However, local and Baloch groups point out their complete lack of access to the fruits of the CPEC; the absence of jobs and security threats are taken as a matter of security. These protests have also been described as ‘anti-state’ or even alleged to have the backing of foreign powers. As a result, there are now two types concerns in Pakistan: the official viewpoint focuses on national development and strategy, while the views of local people are concerned with provincial rights, their livelihoods, and inclusion (Ullah, 2026). Hence, the solutions suggested in Pakistan vary as well; the government favors rapid development while the locals demand immediate solutions to their problems and more inclusion. What is evident is that Pakistan is not one united nation on this issue, but a country where state development initiatives are conflicting with local grievances.

**6.4 The Transparency and Composition of CPEC Financing**

The final episode deals with the extent and character of Pakistan’s financial obligations to China. In an effort to differentiate factual evidence from political claims, the discussion separates the available evidence from the way in which it is interpreted by the various actors. This is important because the same numbers are used to make different arguments about CPEC and Pakistan’s debt. Available data show that China is Pakistan’s largest bilateral creditor. However, China accounts for a minority share of Pakistan’s total public external debt, estimated at about one-fifth to one-quarter. Multilateral institutions have a larger share collectively (World Bank, 2025). The figures show the makeup of Pakistan’s debt but do not answer whether CPEC is a financial or strategic threat. Their meaning depends on the interpretation and presentation made by the different actors.

The underlying issue on the Western side is a lack of transparency, especially regarding lending conditions. David Malpass, Under Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, questioned the clarity of the terms of Chinese lending, and Alice Wells warned that CPEC could become more of a burden once the debt comes due (U.S State Department, at the Wilson Center, 2019). China, however, has not shared these apprehensions, claiming that CPEC hasn't caused Pakistan to fall into unsustainable debt. Wang Yi denies a Chinese “debt trap” and argues that a large portion of Pakistan's debt is owed to organizations such as the IMF and ADB (Gul, 2018). The official Pakistani perspective also downplays China's role, stating that the CPEC-related public debt is “less than even 10%” of the overall debt, and has long terms and low rates of interest (Pakistan Foreign Office, 2020).

However, there are some who are skeptical and seeking more transparency, better audits, and renegotiations instead of believing either the position of the West or China. Competing narratives use the same financial figures for different effects. The Western voice uses them as evidence of possible concealment; China uses them as evidence that CPEC is financially manageable, and Pakistani critics use them as a reason for greater transparency and reform. The data themselves do not settle the debate; each actor determines their meaning through framing which should then be read as a framing claim about the composition of CPEC financing, and not as an independent audit of the figures.

**7. Comparative Discussion**

A bilateral analysis cannot detect one finding when compared to the two frameworks when the five dimensions are considered (Table 2). The main result is that the frameworks are not competing pictures of a common reality but are constructed around incommensurable referent objects. The Western paradigm protects the existing order and the receiver's autonomy; the Chinese paradigm pushes selective development; and the Pakistani paradigm protects the national economy as well as its regional and local aspects. Usually, the frameworks do not interact, so rather than providing different types of support for the same question in different ways, they address different questions (The Open University, 2025). This is where it has been hard to sort things out as far as competition and why it should not be judged by the success of ‘winning the argument’ (Hanrieder, 2011).

The second is causal attribution, in which their views are most divergent and most significant. The outcomes are attributed to the intentions of the Chinese in the Western world, while the Chinese view the conflict as being caused by the malevolence of the West; the Pakistani interpretation in particular considers its debt crisis primarily as a result of its own actions (Abouharb et al., 2026). It is the highest level of internal attribution because it resists both intentionalist thinking of the Western perspective and externalizing thinking of the Chinese perspective.It aligns with findings in the academic literature that have refuted prevailing views (Brautigam, 2020). The receiver is thus not a point where the frameworks of the two major powers come together, but a separate framing entity with its own reference and causal narrative.

Thirdly, when the various accounts are compared, a consistent structure underlies the different contents. In each case, the same pattern of securitization and de-securitization is followed: a threat is detected, a referent object is established, a cause is assigned, solutions are offered, and moral authority is distributed. The rivalry does not lie between framed narratives and unframed ones, but among various kinds of framing, all of which use the same communicative tools for different purposes (Mintz & Redd, 2003). This is exactly what a symmetric, securitization-informed framing analysis aims to achieve, and it is only when one particular frame is taken for granted as the neutral standard against which the others are regarded as biased that this insight is obscured. The conclusion reached from the study of economic security is important in that economic threat is not an inherent aspect of a relationship but a communicative construction which is constantly developed and discussed, and as illustrated in Figure 4, it is at times incorporated into enduring policy and legal frameworks (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

A fourth type of pattern relates to the moral-identity element, in that the competition involves a clear clash of positions. In each case, the heroes and the villains are defined: in the Western view, accountable authorities are opposed to a greedy lender; in the Chinese perspective, a true ally is facing off against overwhelming aggressors; while through the Pakistani lens, an independent body is struggling against those who want to make it into a victim or a fool. What stands out is that the key claim about identity in the Pakistani story, namely, agency, is precisely the feature the other two narratives must reject, since the debt-trap version requires a passive victim and the win-win version calls for an appreciative recipient. It is therefore not merely coincidental that the recipient demands acknowledgment of authorship, but that it contradicts both dominant power narratives, which may explain why it is so often left out of jointly authored works (Carragee & Roefs, 2004).

Table 2. Competing frames of Chinese development finance across Western, Chinese, and Pakistani discourse

| **Dimension** | **Western frame** *('de-risking / debt trap')* | **Chinese frame** *('win–win development')* | **Pakistani frame** *('lifeline / ambivalence')* |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Threat definition** | Strategic dependency via unsustainable lending | No threat; the Western narrative is the danger | Dual: opportunity and fiscal/sovereignty exposure |
| **Referent object** | Recipient sovereignty; liberal order; supply chains | Shared development; Global-South solidarity | National economy; provinces; local livelihoods |
| **Causal attribution** | Chinese strategic intent; opacity | Western containment; rivalry | Domestic mismanagement; structural deficit |
| **Proposed remedy** | De-risk, screen, condition on transparency | Deepen cooperation; reject interference | Reform, renegotiate, demand transparency |
| **Moral / identity framing** | Responsible powers vs predatory creditor | Sincere partner vs hegemonic bullies | Sovereign agent, not passive victim |

The implications of these findings go well beyond the particular situation in question. When looking at economic security, it is argued that the field's tendency to doubt the real danger posed by a particular dependency misidentifies the subject of analysis: danger is not discovered but constructed, and the fundamental question then becomes how, by whom, and with respect to what referent object it is established. In the case of public diplomacy and strategic narration, it shows that narrative competition is not simply about trying to persuade a general audience of a single idea; on the contrary, it can involve the various parties addressing different audiences with entirely different propositions, which in turn distorts traditional definitions of narrative 'success' or 'reception' (Roselle et al., 2014). The case also shows that agency is expressed not only in implementing projects but also in framing them, a point that has not been carefully examined in relation to how smaller states operate within great-power rivalry (Repnikova, 2022).

## 8. Conclusion

The study shows how the Western, Chinese, and Pakistani parties present CPEC as an economic-security necessity and what this rivalry reveals about how threats are addressed. The key finding of this research is that these positions should not be regarded as three views on one issue, but rather as three separate questions, each rooted in a different referent object, the recipient state adding a further third perspective, this being internally divided between a wish to support development and worry regarding its sovereignty, and unlike either of the great powers, often blaming its own problems on itself.

This result cannot be taken as a reason to adopt any particular viewpoint. The purpose of a symmetric analysis is not to excuse Chinese lending, to endorse the Western critique, or to idealize the recipient's own perception, but rather to show that all three of these are constructions which serve political purposes and are best understood by applying the same analytical standards. The recipient's perspective has attracted sustained attention because it has been so largely ignored, not because it is accurate; when examined by the same criteria, it also reveals its omissions, especially in the way it deals with the views of marginalized and non-elite groups, whose opposition is reinterpreted in the official narrative as a threat.

The paper consists of three parts. It restores the framing power of the Global-South recipient, a group whose position is ignored in the main two-handed body of literature, by offering a systematic three-stage account of how economic-security threats are formulated in a largely ignored context. Theoretically, it redefines economic security as a competitively conveyed achievement rather than a fixed attribute. It shows the advantages of combining an analysis of securitization and framing with a commitment to impartiality and balance. It also includes a five-dimensional coding framework which can be applied to different corridors, lenders, and beneficiaries. However, methodology does have limitations since it looks at the construction rather than at the reception of the discourse and places a preference on elite, English-language speech, pointing to the next logical steps: studies of audience reception to see how the public interacts with these frameworks and a closer examination of the recipient's voice in its full diversity. The study reveals that threats are built, not found, and that in the field of economic security politics, all perspectives, even those typically overlooked, are essential to consider.

**References**


Abouharb, M. R., Reinsberg, B., & Heinkelmann-Wild, T. (2026). The scapegoating hypothesis revisited: Unpacking blame attribution toward the International Monetary Fund. *Global Studies Quarterly, 6*(1), 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksag010

Ahmed, Z. S., & Chaudhry, A. K. (2025). The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor and narrative projection: The role of Pakistani think tanks. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 54*(3), 448–465. https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026251355961

Baele, S. J., & Jalea, D. (2022). Twenty-five years of securitization theory: A corpus-based review. *Political Studies Review, 21*(2). https://doi.org/10.1177/14789299211069499

Balzacq, T. (2005). The three faces of securitization: Political agency, audience and context. *European Journal of International Relations, 11*(2), 171–201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052960

Balzacq, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Securitization theory: How security problems emerge and dissolve*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203868508

Balzacq, T., Léonard, S., & Ruzicka, J. (2016). "Securitization" revisited: Theory and cases. *Security Dialogue, 47*(4), 415–429. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117815596590

Beeson, M., & Crawford, C. (2022). Putting the BRI in perspective: History, hegemony and geoeconomics. *Chinese Political Science Review, 8*, 45–62. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41111-022-00210-y

Benford, R. D., & Snow, D. A. (2000). Framing processes and social movements: An overview and assessment. *Annual Review of Sociology, 26*, 611–639. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.26.1.611

Blanchard, J. F., & Ripsman, N. M. (2008). A political theory of economic statecraft. *Foreign Policy Analysis, 4*(4), 371–398. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2008.00076.x

Boni, F. (2019). *Sino-Pakistani relations: Politics, military and regional dynamics*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429431982

Brautigam, D. (2020). A critical look at Chinese "debt-trap diplomacy": The rise of a meme. *Area Development and Policy, 5*(1), 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2019.1689828

Brautigam, D., & Rithmire, M. (2021). The Chinese "debt trap" is a myth. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2021/02/china-debt-trap-diplomacy/617953/

Budd, K., Kelsey, D., Mueller, F., & Whittle, A. (2019). Metaphor, morality and legitimacy: A critical discourse analysis of the media framing of the payday loan industry. *Discourse & Society, 26*(6), 741–758. https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508418812569

Business Recorder. (2018, August 5). *Rabbani denounces IMF's politicisation by US administration*. https://www.brecorder.com/news/4623719/rabbani-denounces-imfs-politicisation-by-us-administration-20180805396660

Buzan, B. (1983). *People, states and fear: The national security problem in international relations*. Wheatsheaf.

Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1997). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781685853808

Callahan, W. A. (2016). China's "Asia dream": The Belt Road Initiative and the new regional order. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics, 1*(3), 226–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891116647806

Carragee, K. M., & Roefs, W. (2004). The neglect of power in recent framing research. *Journal of Communication, 54*(2), 214–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02625.x

Chellaney, B. (2017). China's debt-trap diplomacy. *Project Syndicate*. https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-one-belt-one-road-loans-debt-by-brahma-chellaney-2017-01

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Secretariat. (2018). *Clarification in response to Washington Post article on 28 August 2018*. https://cpec.gov.pk/news/113

Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing theory. *Annual Review of Political Science, 10*, 103–126. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.10.072805.103054

Dardis, F. E. (2007). The role of issue-framing functions in affecting beliefs and opinions about a sociopolitical issue. *Communication Quarterly, 55*(2), 247–265. https://doi.org/10.1080/01463370701290525

D'Hooghe, I. (2015). *China's public diplomacy*. Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004283954

Drezner, D. W., Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (Eds.). (2021). *The uses and abuses of weaponized interdependence*. Brookings Institution Press. https://www.brookings.edu/books/the-uses-and-abuses-of-weaponized-interdependence/

Durak, G. (2024). Contribution of the Copenhagen School to security studies. *Ordu Üniversitesi SBE SBA Dergisi, 14*(1), 336–350. https://doi.org/10.48146/odusobiad.1265851

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication, 43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

European Commission. (2023). *Joint communication on "European economic security strategy"* (JOIN(2023) 20 final). EUR-Lex. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52023JC0020

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.

Farrell, H., & Newman, A. L. (2019). Weaponized interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion. *International Security, 44*(1), 42–79. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00351

García-Herrero, A., & Xu, J. (2019). Countries' perceptions of China's Belt and Road Initiative: A big data analysis. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3430318

Garlick, J. (2018). Deconstructing the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor: Pipe dreams versus geopolitical realities. *Journal of Contemporary China, 27*(112), 519–533. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2018.1433483

Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.

Guan, B., & Cai, Y. (2015). Interests and political participation in urban China: The case of residents' committee elections. *China Review, 15*(1), 95–116. https://doi.org/10.2307/24291930

Gul, A. (2018, September 8). China rejects criticism it's pushing Pakistan into "debt trap." *Voice of America*. https://www.voanews.com/a/china-rejects-criticism-it-s-pushing-pakistan-into-debt-trap/4563096.html

Gupta, P. (2025). *Bigger, smarter: BRI 2.0 after the Third Belt and Road Forum* (ORF Issue Brief No. 834). Observer Research Foundation. https://www.orfonline.org/research/bigger-smarter-bri-2-0-after-the-third-belt-and-road-forum

Hall, S. (Ed.). (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. Sage.

Hameed, M. (2018). The politics of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Palgrave Communications, 4*(1), Article 64. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0115-7

Hameiri, S., & Jones, L. (2015). *Governing borderless threats: Non-traditional security and the politics of state transformation*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316275535

Hanrieder, T. (2011). The false promise of the better argument. *International Theory, 3*(3), 390–415. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1752971911000182

Hansen, L. (2006). *Security as practice: Discourse analysis and the Bosnian war*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203236338

Hillman, J. E. (2025). *The rise of economic security*. Council on Foreign Relations. https://www.cfr.org/articles/rise-economic-security

Hillman, J. E., & McCalpin, M. (2020). *The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor at five*. Center for Strategic and International Studies. https://www.csis.org/analysis/china-pakistan-economic-corridor-five

Himmer, M., & Rod, Z. (2023). Chinese debt trap diplomacy: Reality or myth? *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region, 18*(3), 250–272. https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2023.2195280

Hu, C. (2023). A corpus-based study on the cognitive construction of security in discourse. *Frontiers in Psychology, 13*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1069896

Jones, L., & Hameiri, S. (2020). *Debunking the myth of "debt-trap diplomacy": How recipient countries shape China's Belt and Road Initiative*. Chatham House. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/08/debunking-myth-debt-trap-diplomacy

Kardon, I. B., Kennedy, C. M., & Dutton, P. A. (2020). *Gwadar: China's potential strategic strongpoint in Pakistan* (China Maritime Report No. 7). U.S. Naval War College, China Maritime Studies Institute. https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=cmsi-maritime-reports

Karyotis, G., Paterson, I., & Judge, A. (2020). Understanding securitization success: A new analytical framework. *International Studies Review, 27*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viaf006

Kiesel, C., & Dannenberg, P. (2023). Special economic zones in the Global South: Between integrated spaces and enclaves – A literature review. *DIE ERDE – Journal of the Geographical Society of Berlin, 154*(1), 5–19. https://doi.org/10.12854/erde-2023-606

Kratz, A., & Mingey, M. (2019). *New data on the "debt trap" question*. Rhodium Group. https://rhg.com/research/new-data-on-the-debt-trap-question/

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Kurlantzick, J. (2007). *Charm offensive: How China's soft power is transforming the world*. Yale University Press.

Lawder, D. (2018, November 28). Pakistan likely to pay back IMF before Chinese debt—U.S. Treasury official. *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-pakistan-imf-china/pakistan-likely-to-pay-back-imf-before-chinese-debt-us-treasury-official-idUSKCN1NX0CI/

Lin-Greenberg, E. (2023). Evaluating escalation: Conceptualizing escalation in an era of emerging military technologies. *The Journal of Politics, 85*(3), 1151–1155. https://doi.org/10.1086/723974

Liu, K. (2023). The Chinese debt trap diplomacy narrative: An empirical analysis. *Statistics, Politics and Policy, 14*(1), 19–44. https://doi.org/10.1515/spp-2022-0017

Manan, S. A. (2017). The glocalization of English in the Pakistan linguistic landscape. *World Englishes, 36*(4), 645–665. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12213

Mandon, P., & Woldemichael, M. T. (2023). *Has Chinese aid benefited recipient countries?* Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/has-chinese-aid-benefited-recipient-countries/

Manor, I. (2019). *The digitalization of public diplomacy*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-04405-3

Markey, D. S. (2020). *China's western horizon: Beijing and the new geopolitics of Eurasia*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190680190.001.0001

McDonald, M. (2008). Securitization and the construction of security. *European Journal of International Relations, 14*(4), 563–587. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066108097553

Miller, T. (2017). *China's Asian dream: Empire building along the new Silk Road*. Zed Books.

Minatti, W. (2024). Legitimate governance in international politics: Towards a relational theory of legitimation. *Review of International Studies, 50*(4), 662–681. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210524000111

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. (2019). *Joint press release between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*. https://mofa.gov.pk/joint-press-release-between-the-peoples-republic-of-china-and-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-on-the-conclusion-of-state-councilor-and-foreign-minister-mr-wang-yis-visit-to-pakistan-7-8-septemb

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan. (2020). *CPEC's beneficial contribution to Pakistan's economy*. https://staging.mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/cpecs-beneficial-contribution-to-pakistans-economy

Mintz, A., & Redd, S. B. (2003). Framing effects in international relations. *Synthese, 135*(2), 193–213. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1023460923628

Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2013). *Strategic narratives: Communication power and the new world order*. Routledge.

Miskimmon, A., O'Loughlin, B., & Roselle, L. (2018). Strategic narrative: 21st century diplomatic statecraft. *Revista Mexicana de Política Exterior, 113*, 1–19. https://re.sre.gob.mx/rmpe/index.php/rmpe/article/view/265

Norris, W. J. (2021). China's post-Cold War economic statecraft: A periodization. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs, 50*(3), 294–316. https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026211058186

Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs.

Nye, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 616*(1), 94–109. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699

Pan, C. (1999). Understanding Chinese identity in international relations: A critique of Western approaches. *Political Science, 51*(2), 135–148. https://doi.org/10.1177/003231879905100203

Pan, C. (2018). Toward a new relational ontology in global politics: China's rise as holographic transition. *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific, 18*(3), 339–367. https://doi.org/10.1093/irap/lcy010

Pearson, M. M., Rithmire, M., & Tsai, K. S. (2022). China's party-state capitalism and international backlash: From interdependence to insecurity. *International Security, 47*(2), 135–176. https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00447

Petry, J. (2023). Beyond ports, roads and railways: Chinese economic statecraft, the Belt and Road Initiative and the politics of financial infrastructures. *Review of International Political Economy, 29*(2), 319–351. https://doi.org/10.1177/13540661221126615

Rana, S. (2021, May 1). *Pakistan to seek debt restructuring of CPEC power projects*. The Express Tribune. [URL requires correction — link provided points to a Reuters article on a different story.]

Rana, S. (2022). IMF asks govt to reopen CPEC deals. *The Express Tribune*. https://tribune.com.pk/story/2360714/imf-asks-govt-to-reopen-cpec-deals

Repnikova, M. (2022). *Chinese soft power*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108874700

Roberts, A., & Lamp, N. (2023). Navigating complexity: Globalization narratives in China and the West. *China International Strategy Review, 4*(2), 351–366. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42533-022-00113-2

Rolland, N. (2017). *China's Eurasian century? Political and strategic implications of the Belt and Road Initiative*. National Bureau of Asian Research. https://www.nbr.org/publication/chinas-eurasian-century-political-and-strategic-implications-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative/

Roselle, L., Miskimmon, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2014). Strategic narrative: A new means to understand soft power. *Media, War & Conflict, 7*(1), 70–84. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696

Samad, Y. (2025). The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor: The politics of development. *Critical Pakistan Studies*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1017/cps.2025.10001

Scheufele, D. A. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication, 49*(1), 103–122. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1999.tb02784.x

Schrøder, K. C. (1998). [Review of the book *Media discourse*, by N. Fairclough]. *European Journal of Cultural Studies, 1*(2), 285–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/136754949800100209

Shaikh, R., & Chen, C. (2021). China's debt trap in Pakistan? A case study of the CPEC project. *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics, 41*(3), 399–414. https://doi.org/10.1177/02627280211040650

Sidaway, J. D., & Woon, C. Y. (2017). Chinese narratives on "One Belt, One Road" in geopolitical and imperial contexts. *The Professional Geographer, 69*(4), 591–603. https://doi.org/10.1080/00330124.2017.1288576

Small, A. (2015). *The China–Pakistan axis: Asia's new geopolitics*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190210755.001.0001

Stritzel, H. (2014). *Security in translation: Securitization theory and the localization of threat*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137307576

Surahio, M. K., Gu, S., Mahesar, H. A., & Soomro, M. M. (2022). China–Pakistan Economic Corridor: Macro environmental factors and security challenges. *SAGE Open, 12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079821

The Open University. (2025). Summarising IR theories. In *Introducing international relations*. OpenLearn. https://www.open.edu/openlearn/society-politics-law/introducing-international-relations/content-section-7.2.5

Tran Sautedé, E., & Mo, F. V. (2025). Digital diplomacy with Chinese characteristics: Evolving narratives, strategies and global impact. *Journal of Chinese Political Science, 22*(1), 3–7. https://doi.org/10.1177/17427665251340222

Ullah, S. (2025). China's strategic narratives on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), 2015–2020. *Journal of Pakistan-China Studies, 6*(1), 120–130. https://jpcs.cscp.edu.pk/index.php/jpcs/article/view/102

United States Department of State. (2019). *A conversation with Ambassador Alice Wells on the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor*. The Wilson Center. https://2017-2021.state.gov/a-conversation-with-ambassador-alice-wells-on-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/

Ullah, H. (2026). CPEC through the lens of locals: A study of Gwadar. *International Journal of Emerging Multidisciplinaries: Social Science, 5*(3), 176–203. https://doi.org/10.54938/ijemdss.2026.05.3.744

Van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.

Van Noort, C., & Colley, T. (2021). How do strategic narratives shape policy adoption? Responses to China's Belt and Road Initiative. *Review of International Studies, 47*(1), 39–63. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210520000388

Wæver, O. (1995). Securitization and desecuritization. In R. D. Lipschutz (Ed.), *On security* (pp. 46–86). Columbia University Press.

Wæver, O. (2011). Politics, security, theory. *Security Dialogue, 42*(4–5), 465–480. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010611418718

Watson, S. D. (2012). "Framing" the Copenhagen School: Integrating the literature on threat construction. *Millennium: Journal of International Studies, 40*(2), 279–301. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829811425889

Wilkinson, C. (2007). The Copenhagen School on tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe? *Security Dialogue, 38*(1), 5–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010607075964

Williams, M. C. (2003). Words, images, enemies: Securitization and international politics. *International Studies Quarterly, 47*(4), 511–531. https://doi.org/10.1046/j.0020-8833.2003.00277.x

Wodak, R., & Meyer, M. (Eds.). (2016). *Methods of critical discourse studies* (3rd ed.). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781036235192

Wolf, S. O. (2020). *The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative: Concept, context and assessment*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16198-9

World Bank. (2025). *International debt report 2025*. https://doi.org/10.1596/978-1-4648-2262-9

Zaidi, S. M. S., & Sami, W. (2025, September). CPEC: Debt trap diplomacy or a mismanaged opportunity? *The Diplomat*. https://thediplomat.com/2025/09/cpec-debt-trap-diplomacy-or-a-mismanaged-opportunity/

Zheng, J., Du, Y. R., & Xu, M. (2024). "China threat" agenda in American media and public perception of China: A large-scale content analysis from 1999 to 2019. *International Communication Gazette, 87*(6), 539–560. https://doi.org/10.1177/17480485241296682