

## **Explainer: Understanding the growing trend of attacks on Chinese Nationals in Pakistan**

Pakistan and China have entered into a significant partnership that is altering the geopolitical dynamics of the region. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a crucial element of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), stands as one of the most substantial infrastructural and economic collaborations in South Asia. However, this alliance has not come without repercussions: there has been a troubling increase in targeted assaults on Chinese nationals in Pakistan, particularly from separatist and insurgent factions in Balochistan. These violent incidents have disrupted the security landscape of the area and raised questions regarding the long-term viability of CPEC initiatives. During Chinese Premier Li Qiang's visit to Pakistan in 2024—the first by a Chinese premier in over a decade—officials from both nations committed to bolstering security measures for Chinese personnel and their projects. Despite these diplomatic assurances, attacks on Chinese citizens persist, with nearly 100 fatalities reported in recent years. This article explores the roots and motivations behind these assaults, highlighting recent occurrences, critical statistics, and the wider implications for regional security.

### **The Strategic Importance of CPEC**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents a monumental infrastructure initiative valued at \$62 billion, aimed at linking China's Xinjiang province to Pakistan's Gwadar port in Balochistan. Spanning over 3,000 kilometres, this corridor includes an extensive network of highways, railways, power generation facilities, and the strategically significant Gwadar Port, which grants China access to the Arabian Sea. CPEC is conceptualised as a modern "Silk Road," designed to reduce trading distances between China and the Middle East while offering Pakistan substantial economic advantages. The strategic relevance of this project is profound; for China, it provides an alternative trade route that circumvents the vulnerable Strait of Malacca, while Pakistan stands to gain from job creation, industrial advancement, and infrastructural improvements. However, despite these economic opportunities, CPEC has become a focal point for local discontent, particularly in resource-abundant yet underdeveloped areas like Balochistan, where many residents feel alienated and deprived of the benefits associated with such large-scale projects.

## Rise in Attacks: Separatist Groups and Their Motives

The increase in assaults on Chinese nationals, primarily executed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and other insurgent factions, is rooted in longstanding historical, political, and economic issues. Balochistan, the largest province in Pakistan, is inhabited by the Baloch ethnic minority, who have long accused the Pakistani government of exploiting the region's abundant mineral and energy resources while neglecting to provide essential services and infrastructure to its residents. The BLA has claimed responsibility for numerous high-profile attacks targeting Chinese individuals and infrastructure. The group perceives Chinese initiatives, such as CPEC, as instruments of exploitation in collusion with the Pakistani government. Their ultimate objective is to establish an independent Baloch state.

*Table 1: Timeline of Major Attacks on Chinese Nationals in Pakistan (2014-2024)*

Date	Location	Incident	Perpetrators	Casualties
August 2024	Karachi	Suicide car bomb targeting a convoy of Chinese engineers	BLA	2 Chinese killed
March 2024	Balochistan	Bomb attack on convoy of Chinese engineers	Linked to Pakistani Taliban	5 Chinese killed
April 2023	Gwadar, Balochistan	Attack on a hotel popular among Chinese nationals	BLA	4 killed
August 2021	Dasu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Suicide bombing targeting a bus carrying Chinese engineers working on a hydropower project	Pakistani Taliban	9 Chinese killed
May 2017	Quetta, Balochistan	Abduction and subsequent execution of two Chinese nationals	ISIS affiliate	2 Chinese killed
June 2014	Karachi	Attack on Chinese engineers in an expressway project	BLA	3 Chinese killed

**Source:** Rehman, A., & Mingjin, W. (2024). *Internal and External Threats to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*. *BTTN Journal*, 3(1), 88–107. <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v3i1.99>

## Impact of the Attacks: Disruptions and Economic Consequences

The assaults on Chinese nationals have significantly impacted Pakistan's economy and its diplomatic relations with China. Given that China is a crucial investor and strategic partner for Pakistan, the targeting of Chinese individuals poses a risk not only to the advancement of CPEC projects but also to the wider economic collaboration between the two nations. These incidents threaten to undermine the mutual benefits expected from this partnership, potentially jeopardising future investments and cooperative efforts.

*Table 2: Impact of Attacks on CPEC Projects (2017-2024)*

Year	Total Investment in CPEC (USD)	Number of Attacks on Chinese Nationals	Projects Disrupted/Delayed	Total Loss in USD
2017	15 billion	3	2	500 million
2018	17 billion	2	1	300 million
2019	19 billion	4	3	800 million
2020	21 billion	2	1	250 million
2021	23 billion	5	4	1 billion
2022	26 billion	3	2	600 million
2023	29 billion	4	3	700 million
2024	31 billion	3	2	450 million

**Source:** Rehman, A., & Mingjin, W. (2024). *Internal and External Threats to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*. *BTTN Journal*, 3(1), 88–107. <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v3i1.99>

As illustrated in Table 2, the period from 2017 to 2024 witnessed a notable escalation in attacks on Chinese nationals, resulting in significant disruptions and delays in major CPEC projects. The total estimated financial impact, encompassing delays in investment, heightened security expenses, and infrastructure

damage, amounts to several billion dollars. Furthermore, the ongoing violence has generated uncertainty regarding the long-term feasibility of certain CPEC initiatives, particularly within Balochistan. This situation raises concerns about the sustainability of these projects and their potential to deliver promised economic benefits.

**Counterinsurgency Measures: Pakistan’s Response**

In response to the escalating attacks, Pakistan has implemented various measures to enhance the security of Chinese nationals. One significant initiative is the establishment of a dedicated security force known as the Special Security Division (SSD), comprising 15,000 troops specifically assigned to safeguard Chinese personnel and CPEC projects. Despite these initiatives, the intricate security environment in Pakistan, especially in regions such as Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, complicates efforts to entirely eradicate the threat. The BLA and other insurgent groups persist in their activities in these areas, frequently employing asymmetric tactics like suicide bombings and targeted killings to undermine the effectiveness of security forces.

**Table 3: Pakistan’s Security Measures for CPEC (2017-2024)**

Year	Number of Troops Deployed	Key Security Initiatives	Estimated Cost in USD
2017	5,000	Special Security Division (SSD) formed	200 million
2018	7,500	Expanded intelligence-sharing with China	300 million
2019	10,000	Increased surveillance and use of drones in Balochistan	400 million
2020	12,000	Implementation of checkpoints and fortified perimeters	500 million
2021	13,500	Joint military operations with China in sensitive areas	600 million
2022	15,000	Enhanced training for counterinsurgency operations	700 million
2023	15,000	Establishment of rapid-response units to address insurgent threats	750 million
2024	15,000	Joint exercises with China to counter emerging threats	800 million

**Source:** Rehman, A., & Mingjin, W. (2024). *Internal and External Threats to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor*. *BTTN Journal*, 3(1), 88–107. <https://doi.org/10.61732/bj.v3i1.99>

The increasing instability in Balochistan and the strengthening of the Pakistan-China nexus pose significant threats to India's national interests. India has long been concerned about the exploitation of the Baloch community under CPEC, viewing it as a continuation of Pakistan's historical neglect and oppression of this ethnic group. The Baloch people have consistently accused the Pakistani government of misappropriating their region's rich resources while failing to provide adequate services or development opportunities. This exploitation not only exacerbates local tensions but also threatens broader regional stability.

Moreover, India's apprehensions are compounded by the geopolitical implications of CPEC. The corridor enhances China's influence in South Asia, potentially altering power dynamics in a way that could disadvantage India. The ongoing violence and instability in Balochistan serve as a reminder of the fragility inherent in large-scale infrastructure projects situated in politically volatile regions. For China, these attacks highlight the risks associated with its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and may prompt Beijing to seek more robust security guarantees while also exploring mechanisms to ensure that local populations derive tangible benefits from CPEC projects.