

Security Of Chinese Citizens in Pakistan: Implications, Operational Challenges and Remedial Measures

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Abstract: *This paper describes and analyses the security arrangement of Chinese citizens currently employed In the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in the wake of the rising wave of terrorism in CPEC and non-CPEC-related projects. It studies the current security arrangement in place, organizations of state deployed at both Federal and Provincial levels and their inter-departmental coordination. It also studies the latest security SOPs of the Home Department at a place for Chinese citizen's security. It will then employ deductive reasoning out of that security arrangement that is responsible for the current shortcomings exhibited in recent terror attacks and will then give recommendations to employ corrective measures which can reduce the probability of such security breaches.*

Keywords: Security, Chinese Citizens, Pakistan, Remedial Measure, CPEC

Introduction

At a meeting of Pakistan's National Assembly Standing Committee on Planning and Development, the National Counter Terrorism Authority's (NACTA) director briefed that since 2021, 20 Chinese personnel have been killed and thirty-four injured (Khan, 2024). Such attacks pertained to both CPEC and non-CPEC projects. However, casualties pertained to non-CPEC projects (Kumar, 2024). Loss of their citizen's lives has angered Beijing, which is now pushing harder to achieve a long-standing demand to control security arrangements for its citizens through joint security measures of allowing armed private Chinese companies to operate in Pakistan alongside Pakistan's security forces similar to that of Djibouti, Africa (Shahzad, 2024). Our foreign office has termed such demands as "speculative" and "agenda-driven" with no probability of occurring in the near future (Shahzad, 2024). This has further escalated the tensions between the two countries, leading to various ministries in Pakistan revising their security Special Operation Procedures(SOPs).

Statement of the Problem

China's investment through CPEC is crucial right now to the economy of Pakistan, where the Government is already grappling with political and economic instability and a looming debt crisis. So far, it has created 155,000 jobs and has brought much-needed infrastructure to Pakistan. Any delay in CPEC projects due to security situation can further delay investment and bring international workers from other countries as well, especially UAE. While Beijing is unlikely to abandon CPEC completely, in the wake of such security breaches, there is a strong likelihood, as enunciated by Chinese President Xi Jinping in December 2024, that it can push Beijing to diversify its regional relationships (Ahmad, 2024). Pakistan cannot afford to lose Chinese investments due to its security turmoil. Moreover, China is a strategic ally, and its geopolitical backing is crucial for Pakistan.

This paper aims to study what security protocols Pakistan already have and further what it can adopt to minimize the probability of such attacks and if any example can be drawn from related African countries and Bangladesh, which grapples with security situations and is already employing armed Chinese private security agencies for Chinese citizens and infrastructure protection.

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Research Questions

- a) What are the primary challenges limiting the effectiveness of the security protocol of our security agencies for Chinese citizens?
- b) What infrastructure, bureaucratic and logistic changes are required to improve Chinese citizen security?
- c) What dilemma limits Chinese private companies to operate in Pakistan?

Scope

The scope of this paper will be limited to Pakistan. This paper will rely qualitatively on primary information from interviews with Ministry of Interior officials and officers of armed forces who have either been in the past involved in designing the current security arrangement or are currently at the helm of affairs on the given issue. It will also depend on secondary data (e.g., government reports, news, and academic articles) to gather information. The limitation of this research is the secrecy of current SOPs in practice for Chinese Citizens' security detail, which cannot be highlighted in this paper due to confidentiality. However, a generic description of the SOPs in place is elaborated. Recommendations are also made solely for informed policy decisions and are operational in characteristics and aetiology. Since this paper is coming from the primary source, it holistically describes in one place the current security machinery employed in the scenario and their shortcomings parallel to which research has not been found so far in the literature reviewed.

Situation Overview

Historical Importance of CPEC

China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a geo-strategically significant project for both China and Pakistan. (Niaz, 2023). It will empower China to free itself from the Malacca dilemma, and for Pakistan, CPEC is crucial in the prevalent tough geo-economic environment. The estimated cost of CPEC is \$62 billion from 2015 to 2030. Areas of CPEC projects include investment in the energy sector, transportation infrastructure, i.e., roads and railways, development of Gwadar Port and city, Fiber Optics infrastructure and establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and industrial parks. Pakistan has entered phase–III of CPEC, i.e., completion of SEZs, Gwadar City and Port and Subsequent rail and Road infrastructure with it (Niaz, 2023). Where political instability has impacted the pace of the project, numerous attacks by terrorists and deteriorating security situation, especially in the year 2024, have adversely affected the pace of the project. Recent terrorist attacks have also put in question the vitality and viability of CPEC 2.0, whose MOUs were signed in January 2025. In such a scenario for a project of such immense importance, its security is tantamount to our national security. A brief overview of the security arrangement currently in place is given below:

Security Protocols in Place for Chinese Citizen's Security in Pakistan

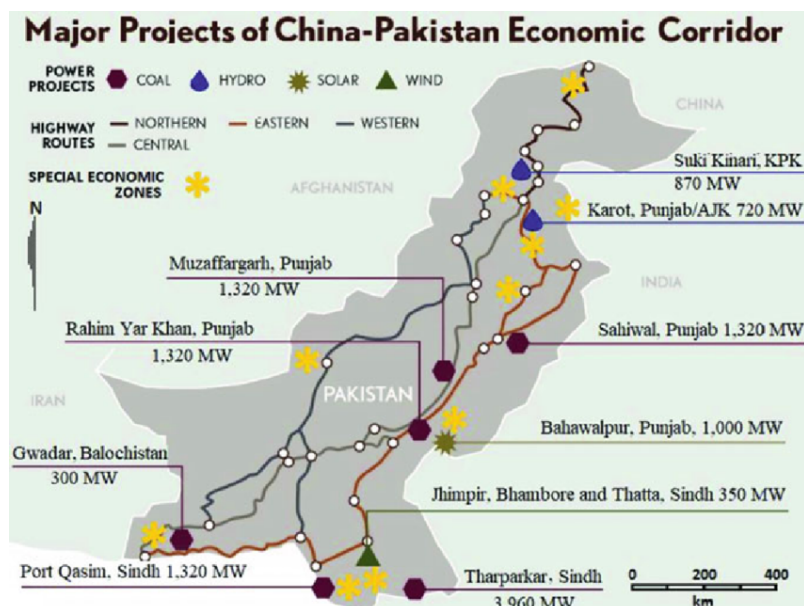
In the broader category, the security of all CPEC and non-CPEC-related projects is given to the armed forces of Pakistan. It forms an umbrella over other security organizations, e.g. Police, Intelligence agencies, in policy-making and operational issues. Since the expanse of the CPEC projects is spread across the whole length and breadth of the country, two special Divisions were raised under a two-star Major general. SSD North was raised in the year 2017, followed by SSD South. However, though primarily a CPEC security arrangement with the definite logo of "no Foreign Boots on Ground", the issue of security of non-CPEC Chinese citizens was highlighted in the following years. SOPs for both were formulated in the year 2022 with a wide array of civil and military security agencies coordination and are updated in September 2024. A brief overview of security arrangements in place is given below:

Security Arrangements for CPEC Projects Special Security Division (SSD) North

A Special Security Division of the Pakistan Army has been raised exclusively for the security of Chinese and other foreigners working on CPEC projects in the country in 2017. Its area of responsibility is from Gilgit Baltistan in the North, KPK to Rahim Yar Khan (Punjab) in the South. Its headquarters is in Rawalpindi. It has 15000 troops and 800 civil armed personnel. It was the first Division to be formed for CPEC security.

Figure 1

Span of CPEC Projects in Pakistan

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1877910>**Special Security Division (SSD) South**

Another division of the Pak Army, namely the 44th Division, is providing security to the CPEC projects in Sindh and Baluchistan provinces. Their area of responsibility is from Rahim Yar Khan to Gwadar. It was raised in 2018. Its headquarters is at Gwadar, but its central command also lies in GHQ Rawalpindi. It has three brigades and also 15000 troops, and 800 civil armed forces personnel.

Security Arrangements for Non-CPEC Projects

The Ministry of Interior is a coordination forum for ensuring the provision of security to non-CPEC projects and Chinese nationals. It works in liaison with the Chinese contractors and the Embassy of China through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with active participation of the Armed Forces, Civil Armed Forces, Provincial Home Departments/Provincial Police, and Intelligence Agencies. Special Protection Units (SPUs) of police for Chinese/CPEC security and other foreigners have been raised in Punjab and Sindh. At the same time, the raising and recruitment in other provinces is underway. Police under provincial setups through Special Security Units (SSUs) provide security to ensure the safety and security of CPEC, Non-CPEC projects and Chinese nationals there. It is an example of Integrated Security Management. There are newly constructed Chinese Citizens Dashboards deployed in DPO offices in every district. However, the dashboards, unlike Hotel Eye software, are not interlinked with Immigration controls at airports. e.g. one DPO interviewed explained that his dashboard shows 5 Chinese citizens for the past 3 months; however, their information from other sources says that 25 Chinese citizens entered and exited his district in one week only. Though a very good advancement in security systems, the real-time link of these dashboards with security enablers can greatly empower security agencies to check the real-time movements of Chinese citizens. Security enablers are mentioned in recent SOPs of the Ministry of Interiors, but they are not deployed in real-time as well.

Security Provision to The Visiting Chinese Delegations

Ministry of Interior, in coordination with provincial Home Departments, Police and other LEAs, ensure security provisions to every Chinese delegation visiting Pakistan.

Invisible Security

Intelligence Agencies, i.e. ISI & IB, act as the outermost cordon of security to CPEC projects. Intelligence/survey reports and alerts regarding security issues are generated by them and are shared with the Ministry of Interior for further necessary actions when required.

Ministry of Interior makes SOPs for non-CPEC and scattered Chinese. Those relating to CPEC are seen by the Military itself. The SOPs for the Security of Chinese Nationals working on non-CPEC projects were formulated in July 2022. These SOPs were revised in September 2023 and 2024.

SOPs for Foreigners Working on Non-CPEC Projects

Non-CPEC Projects include public sector-sponsored projects, Private sector/Chamber of Commerce Sponsored Projects and Foreign Nationals pursuing individual personnel and business interests (Interior, Ministry of, 2024). Comprehensive SOPs have been laid out by the Ministry of the Interior, Islamabad, with the Federal Command Centre under NACTA and implementation committees at the District level. From their stationed securities at Project sites to external movements, geotagging is used. Security enablers, e.g. deployment of armoured vehicles at high-security projects with more than five foreign nationals, CCTV cameras both at hotels and Project sites, are duly connected to District Police Officers Foreign Data Management Dashboards. Cost is borne by the project, and 1 % of the total project cost goes to the security of the project. Foreigners are not allowed night movements except to the airport or hospital.

SOPs for Scattered Foreigners Working or Visiting Pakistan

These Sop's applies Diplomats and Officials, Tourists, Foreigners Visiting Private Sponsored Projects, journalists, students, transit tourists, volunteer tourists, sportsmen, foreigners visiting Pakistan for personal and business interests, sportsmen, long-term employed foreigners and Religious pilgrims (Ministry of Interior, 2024). Companies and Ministries sponsoring them are also responsible for bearing their security cost with local or Joint Ventured Security Companies and coordinating with Law Enforcement Agencies(LEAs). Security enablers are Mandatory to be deployed at hotels, residences and their workplaces. They will be duly briefed at airports by FIA. Their areas of residence have to be marked safe by DPO beforehand. Audit on a yearly basis will be conducted by special branches. Punitive measures for local security providers in case of negligence are also listed. However, this area is a high-security risk area due to non-compliance by foreigners, system glitches, and scattered Chinese pose the most security threat to the system.

Operational Challenges in the Above SOPs

An interview conducted with five police personnel deployed at security at the operational level in Punjab referred to logistic and functional glitches in the system as well as non-compliance from the foreigners's side. System slowdown due to poor internet speed was termed a serious concern, as well as poor geo-positioning tracking. Also, the lack of training of local PSCs deployed and their non-cooperation were also sided as major impediments.

History of Chinese Security Companies Deployed in Pakistan

Pakistan has stringent rules for PSCs operating within Pakistan territory after an incident in 2011 involving a CIA agent shooting two locals in Lahore. PSCs are of three kinds in Pakistan registered with SECP law 2017 (Interior, Ministry of, 2024). Whole local PSC, Joint Venture PSC, and foreign-controlled local PSC. Foreign-controlled and armed PSCs are not allowed to be deployed inside Pakistan. Three Chinese PSCs are known to have operated in Pakistan on an ad-hoc and non-permanent basis, namely Frontier Service Group(FSG), a Hong Kong-based PSC formerly run by Blackwater founder Eric Prince which executed a security MOU in 2018 with Daewoo Gac and China National Chemical Engineering Construction Company(CNEC), China oversees security group and Hanwei international security services (Sukhankin, 2023). They only provided the technological and operational services while gun-holding personnel were Pakistani citizens. China has long helped Pakistan with the "safe city project" and establishing drone surveillance. However, armed PSC deployment is negatively viewed in Pakistan due to US-Pakistan ties, as it will tend to complicate matters with Western allies. Also, the security of those armed personnel is an added question.

Chinese PSCS An Overview in the BRI Region

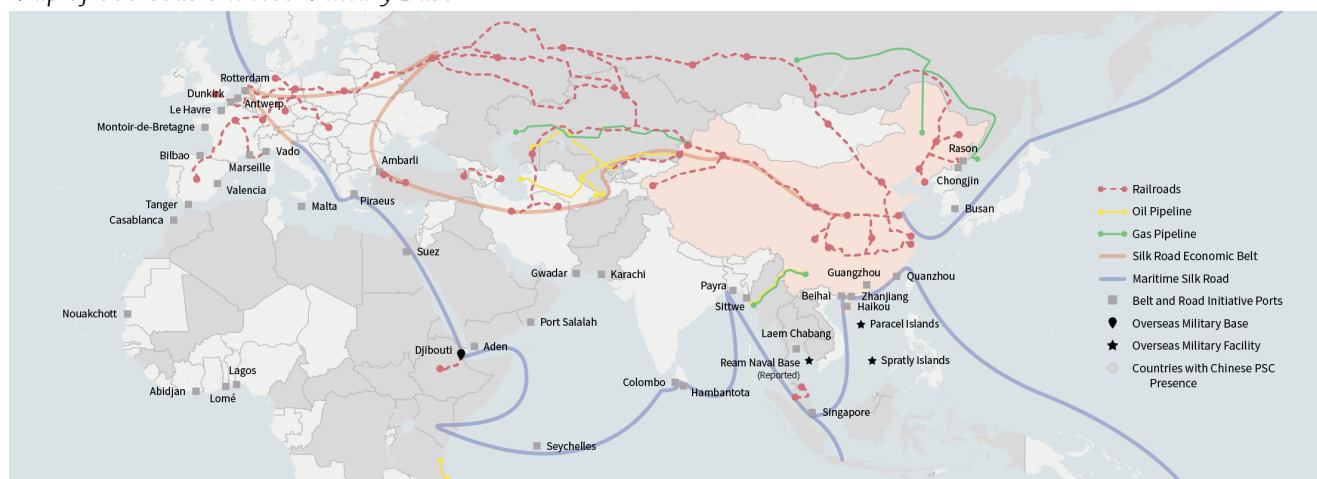
China's Belt and Road initiative naturally and by default spans countries mostly troubled with law-and-order situations or in the wake of complex civil wars or insurgencies, e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle

East, and Central Asia. The security of Chinese citizens is an overall issue for Beijing in various forms, as most of these nations suffer from a tragic colonial past that is giving rise to "Sinophobia".

However, it is pertinent to note that by law, Chinese PSCs have a limited level of expertise and operation capacity. They are limited to basic security and protocol services of Chinese nationals and have limited technical expertise to expedite that. They cannot perform armed sophisticated operations in complex security environments. The Communist Party in China is reluctant to make legislative changes to expand its niche as it is cognizant of the fact that partner countries and stakeholders of BRI should not be enraged and feel the loss of sovereignty by their presence. China's first naval base in Africa, Djibouti, is a technological and manpower enhancement of already placed forces there. Similar protection has been given in past to Gwadar in conjunction with the Pakistan army. However, the operations of all the above PSCs mentioned in Pakistan were limited and were ad hoc in nature, and were deployed on a need basis.

Figure 2

Map of Overseas Chinese Military Base



Source. Sukhankin, S. (2023, July 14). Chinese PSCs in South Asia: Case of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Sino-Pak relations are above the phase of "all-weather Friendship". Chinese demand of deploying their security personnel in Pakistan on the pretext of precedence in Africa and Bangladesh can not be met and should not be met on two accounts, i.e., Pakistan takes it as its sole responsibility to provide security to Chinese citizens in Pakistan; Secondly, any such adventure has the potential to run against our sovereignty. However, Primary challenges limiting the effectiveness of the security protocol of our security elements should be addressed, for which this paper provides operational recommendations as below.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis, the following recommendations are proposed to address the challenges facing foreigners' security for Sino -Pak Paradigm:

Capacity Building of our Foreign Security Cells

We need to ensure capacity building of our national and provincial level security apparatus for the foreigners' security. We have National Foreigners' Security Cell (NFSC), Provincial Foreigners' Security Cell (PFSC) and District Foreigners' Security Cell (DFSC). They are responsible for monitoring the foreigners' activities and movements. These cells are facing capacity and orientation issues; consequently, they are not performing as per their mandate. The Chinese citizens are roaming at will in Pakistan without GIS tracking. Conversely, in Pakistan, there are major voids in our security mechanism. Our security cells need to be updated with the latest technological advancements, and in them, we can take Chinese help for joint technological and infrastructure updates. Also, with as many as over 33 security agencies with very weak inter-departmental coordination exhibiting system inefficiencies and deficiencies, it is a big reason

for security failure. Improved integrated real-time dashboards and the use of the latest machine learning in security arrangements can effectively improve inter-departmental coordination.

GIS Training Like India and China of LEA's

Authorities in India and China, on the airport arrival of sensitive citizens, put GIS tracking SIM in their mobiles connected with their LEA. Foreigners are further only allowed to use Software like V-Chat for calls and make cashless transactions. This highly facilitates LEAs to put a tag on them. Furthermore, to implement such a system, rigorous training of Pakistani LEA personnel would have to be conducted.

Limited Visas

India has a policy to give restricted Visas pertaining to specific cities automated with local DPO offices for Pakistani personnel. While the reciprocal practice is true for Indians in Pakistan, it should be made for Chinese citizens temporarily as well due to the security situation. It would help LEAs track them over limited space. Also, strict penalties and deportation rules in case of non-compliance of foreigners with security protocols should also be in place.

Acceptance of Sop's Both by Security Agencies and Chinese

NACTA SOPs elaborate on the security of foreigners. The problem is that these SOPs are not fully implemented, and our Police and other LEAs grapple with capacity issues, too. Chinese citizens, at times, do not respect the security instructions/advisories and display non-compliance, which causes security incidents/casualties for the Chinese. Penalties for failure to both sides should be devised to minimize the probability of noncompliance.

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