



China's Pak. investments take a military turn

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China's Pak. investments take a military turn-A host of defence projects, from making military jets to deepening ties in space, were designated as part of Belt and Road

- When U.S. President Donald Trump started the new year by suspending billions of dollars of security aid to Pakistan, one theory was that it would scare the Pakistani military into cooperating better with its U.S. allies.
- The reality was that Pakistan already had a replacement sponsor lined up. Just two weeks later, the Pakistani Air Force and Chinese officials were putting the final touches on a secret proposal to expand Pakistan's building of Chinese military jets, weaponry and other hardware.
- The confidential plan would also deepen the cooperation between China and Pakistan in space.

BRI-Military Ambitions

- All those military projects were designated as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a chain of infrastructure development programmes stretching across some 70 countries, built and financed by Beijing.
- Chinese officials have repeatedly said the Belt and Road is purely an economic project with peaceful intent.
- But with its plan for Pakistan, China is for the first time explicitly tying a Belt and Road proposal to its military ambitions.
- Since the beginning of the BRI in 2013, Pakistan has been the programme's flagship site, with some \$62 billion in projects planned in the so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).
- Even before the revelation of the new Chinese-Pakistani military cooperation, some of China's biggest projects in Pakistan had clear strategic implications.

Strategic card

- A Chinese-built seaport and special economic zone in the Pakistani town of Gwadar is rooted in trade, giving China a quicker route to get goods to the Arabian Sea.
- But it also gives Beijing a strategic card to play against India and the U.S. if tensions worsen to the point of naval blockades as the two powers increasingly confront each other at sea.
- A less scrutinised component of BRI is the central role Pakistan plays in China's Beidou satellite navigation system. Pakistan is the only other country that has been granted access to the system's military service, allowing more precise guidance for missiles, ships and aircraft.
- Military analysts predict that China could use Gwadar to expand the naval footprint of its attack submarines, after agreeing in 2015 to sell eight submarines to Pakistan in a deal worth up to \$6 billion.
- China could use the equipment it sells to the South Asian country to refuel its own submarines, extending its Navy's global reach.

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