

CPEC and Pakistan's "Pivot To Africa"

Military Diplomacy & Entrepreneurial Engagement Should Form the Basis of S-CPEC+

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Last week's Africa Envoys' Conference in Islamabad saw Pakistani diplomats brainstorming the best ways for their country to pivot to the eponymous continent, with the key takeaways being to prioritize military diplomacy and entrepreneurial engagement along what could prospectively be described as S-CPEC+.

Pakistan's "Pivot To Africa"

Pakistan is getting ready to expand its influence in Africa following last week's Africa Envoys Conference in Islamabad. According to [PakTribune](#), Prime Minister Imran Khan (PMIK) told his country's dignitaries that the "promotion of relations with countries in Africa would be the new focus of Pakistan's foreign policy operations", with the outlet adding that he "regretted that ties with African countries did not get priority in Pakistan's external relations in the past because of lack of innovation and creativity in running the foreign policy." PMIK emphasized the need for "robust engagement with Africa", citing his country's Chinese and Turkish partners as examples to learn from. [Pakistan Observer](#) reported on the insight shared by one of the conference's participants, Pakistani Ambassador to Morocco Hamid Asghar Khan, who said that Pakistan should concentrate on improving political, socio-cultural, economic, and military relations with African countries. Ambassador Hamid also made some proposals for bringing this about, such as opening up new diplomatic missions, tasking them with promoting Pakistan's soft image and products, holding topical conferences, and engaging in military diplomacy.

The author published a piece back in May of this year in The Nation, one of Pakistan's leading newspapers, urging the same as soon as possible, arguing that "[CPEC Is The Perfect Opportunity For Pakistan To Pivot To Africa](#)". The article explained how [CPEC](#), the flagship project of China's [Belt & Road Initiative](#) (BRI), will improve Chinese-African trade and thus facilitate the expansion of Pakistan's ties with the continent's many countries if Islamabad has the political will and vision needed to seize the initiative, which is finally the case after last week's conference. It was preceded by one of the author's related pieces published by CGTN just days prior about how "[CPEC+ Is The Key To Achieving Regional Integration Goals](#)", which proposed the expansion of CPEC along several geographic vectors, including the southern one directed towards Africa that was described as S-CPEC+. This vision strategically frames the future of Pakistani-African relations and thus provides decision makers with a better understanding of their many opportunities. The country should take advantage of the Chinese-African trade traversing CPEC and traveling across the Afro-Asian ("Indian") Ocean in order to explore new markets for its own exports, and this could be aided through the creative practice of military diplomacy.

“Democratic Security”

To elaborate, most African governments require some degree of external security assistance, whether through training, arms exports, or the direct deployment of foreign military personnel (be they advisors, special forces, or otherwise). While eschewing the last-mentioned need, which is unnecessarily risky unless carried out under the aegis of a UN peacekeeping mission and oftentimes abused by countries like the US and France to infringe on their “partners’” sovereignty, Pakistan can work on [selling more weapons there](#) and very easily share its world-class experience in “Democratic Security” with any interested African countries. This concept refers to the effective efforts undertaken by the Pakistan Armed Forces over the years to counter [Color Revolution](#) and Unconventional Warfare (mostly terrorism in this case) threats, which collectively form the two pillars of modern-day [Hybrid War](#). Pakistan could institutionalize its “Democratic Security” knowledge-sharing services by including them as required courses for the foreign military students who attend its National Defence University (NDU), to say nothing of establishing a new department or even a think tank focused exclusively on this cutting-edge science which could then position Pakistan as a world leader in this respect.

From Military Ties To Economic Deals

This isn’t just for reasons of simple prestige either, but has an extremely practical use since it could imbue the African and other foreign students with a deeper understanding of Hybrid War dynamics which in turn would enable them to better thwart these threats through the more confident employment of “Democratic Security” strategies customized for their specific situations (which could also be included in the proposed coursework). Those countries’ military representatives need to ensure basic security like all others (though usually with comparatively less capabilities), as well as combat separatist and terrorist threats (sometimes one and the same) on top of protecting BRI projects, so they certainly have their work cut out for them and therefore urgently need as much high-quality experience-sharing as they can get. This would in principle satisfy the security requirements of S-CPEC+, which could also in turn build the trust needed between Pakistan and its state-level partners to have them actively support Islamabad’s efforts to improve trade ties between them as a step towards eventually reaching a strategic partnership that would also dovetail perfectly with China’s vision of forging what it regularly describes as a “community of shared destiny” (made possible in this case by CPEC).

The “Gwadar Gathering”

Entrepreneurial engagement can occur even without being preceded by military diplomacy or running in parallel with it, but it’s the strategic military ties fostered through the proposed “Democratic Security” training to Pakistan’s African partners that could encourage those states to actively get involved in this process by organizing trade and investment fairs, as well as assisting Pakistani businessmen in all respects so as to improve their ease of doing business there. On the other side of the coin, Pakistan should definitely host its own trade-related functions that include Africa, such as the yearly “Gwadar Gathering” that the author proposed in his January 2017 analysis about [“CPEC And The 21st-Century Convergence Of Civilizations”](#) and later shared with NDU during an event that he was invited to a few months later to share his thoughts on [“Pakistan In The 21st-Century — Perception Management”](#). As PMIK spoke about last week, Pakistan can learn a lot from the experiences of its Chinese and Turkish partners in this respect, and it’s not unforeseeable that they might also participate in these proposed events in a leading capacity. Without growing

economic engagement, Pakistan's security ties with Africa will never lead to the creation of strategic partnerships with its many countries.

Towards The Official Promulgation Of S-CPEC+

Pakistan has already acquired the hard-earned experience that can easily enable to to more than effectively practice military diplomacy with Africa, especially if it institutionalizes what it's learned over the years about "Democratic Security" and creates customized courses for NDU's African students (and others) to enroll in as part of their studies. On the economic front, PMIK's advisor on finance, Mr. Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, spoke last month about how Pakistan is [impressively opening up its economy](#) to foreign investors, [which coincides](#) with global credit ratings agency Moody's recently upgrading the country's outlook and placing it above neighboring India, which was downgraded despite its vigorous attempts over the past few years to position itself as the leading destination for foreign investment in the region. Therefore, all that's needed in order to take Pakistan's "Pivot to Africa" to the next level is to conceptualize it in a catchy way that encapsulates its vision of engagement, ergo the author's proposal for referring to it as S-CPEC+. Considering that Mr. Shaikh officially [spoke about CPEC+](#) late last month in what the author believes might have been the government's first use of this term, it's sensible then to build upon this vision by framing Pakistan's African strategy as S-CPEC+.

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