

# Islamabad's Response to Shangla Tragedy

written by Ms Zarka Khan | April 1, 2024



The tragic incident in Shangla District, northwestern Pakistan, where a suicide bomber targeted a vehicle carrying five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver, underscores the ongoing and significant security challenges confronting international personnel in Pakistan. This recent attack is particularly disconcerting for stakeholders of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The targeted individuals were en route to a pivotal hydropower project, underscoring the essential nature of their contribution to the region's energy and infrastructure development. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated incident but part of a disturbing trend of attacks that have targeted CPEC projects and personnel in recent years.

The history of attacks on CPEC-related targets is alarming. In 2018, an attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi by militants resulted in the death of four people, though consulate staff were spared. The attack was a bold statement against Chinese presence and investment in Pakistan. In another significant incident in 2020, militants stormed the Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi, a symbol of economic collaboration between China and Pakistan, leading to numerous fatalities. These incidents, coupled with the latest tragedy in Shangla, have cast a long shadow over the security measures in place for protecting the people integral to these infrastructural projects. In response to these recurring security breaches, Pakistan has taken several measures to reassess and reinforce the safety protocols for CPEC projects. The meeting between Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi and a Chinese investigative team following the Shangla attack highlights the concerted efforts to not just address immediate security concerns but also to devise long-term strategies to mitigate such risks. These discussions reflect a deep-seated commitment to safeguarding the interests of foreign nationals working on these critical projects and maintaining strong international partnerships. CPEC, with its promise of over \$65 billion in Chinese investment, is pivotal for

Pakistan's economic revitalization and modernization. Spanning from Gwadar Port in the south to the northern borders, these projects aim to revolutionize connectivity within Pakistan and extend it to China, opening new avenues for trade and economic growth. However, the recurring threat from insurgent groups like the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and others, who view these projects as encroachments on local rights or as exploitative, presents a significant challenge. The strategic importance of these projects, coupled with the security threats they face, calls for a robust and multifaceted security strategy. This not only involves bilateral cooperation between China and Pakistan but also necessitates broader regional cooperation, potentially under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO, with its focus on regional security, counter-terrorism, and fostering economic cooperation among member states, is well-positioned to play a vital role in enhancing the security landscape around CPEC projects. Enhanced collaboration within the SCO framework, leveraging intelligence sharing, joint counter-terrorism efforts, and regional stability initiatives, could provide a critical bolster to securing CPEC initiatives. This multilateral approach, complemented by bilateral security measures, is essential for mitigating the risks posed by non-state actors and insurgent groups.



The pattern of attacks targeting CPEC underscores the complex security dynamics in the region and the imperative for comprehensive, integrated security measures. Ensuring the safety of international personnel and securing the infrastructure under CPEC are paramount for the success of the Belt and Road Initiative and, by extension, for the socio-economic prosperity of the region. Collaborative efforts between China and Pakistan, bolstered by support from international and regional entities like the SCO, are critical in navigating the challenges posed by terrorism and separatism. Through a concerted commitment to security, collaboration, and development, the vision of a prosperous, interconnected region can be realized, mitigating the threats that have overshadowed these projects in the past. This ongoing commitment to enhancing security protocols and fostering a safe environment for all involved in CPEC projects is not just essential for the immediate success of these initiatives but also for the long-term

stability and economic development of the region.