

Pakistan's Foreign Policy

UYGHUR CRISIS

Pakistan's Policy:

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeated his country's support for the Chinese government regarding its policies in the Muslim-majority Xinjiang province, while also praising the country's one-party system as offering a better model for societies compared with electoral democracy. In 2015 under Chinese pressure, Pakistani police broke into Khan's Uyghur language school in Islamabad and destroyed thousands of dollars' worth of computers, textbooks, and other teaching material.

Pakistani authorities are under huge pressure from China owing to CPEC, the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, a \$62 billion (about £44 billion) economic project consisting of multiple loans from China to be used for infrastructure, power plants, telecommunications, and schools. CPEC is the flagship project of the \$8 trillion One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, an ambitious re-imagining of the historical silk road trade networks connecting China to the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. Even though Pakistan is the only country in the world created as a Muslim nation, the promise of Chinese money seemingly overpowers the desire to stop what is happening to Uyghur Muslims.

Economic Reasons and Implications:

China is arguably Pakistan's closest ally, and Islamabad depends heavily on Beijing for economic and political support. Pakistan simply cannot afford to antagonise Beijing by calling it out. The Muslim world limits its criticism of China to avoid jeopardizing critical trade and investment opportunities. In some cases, it has even lent its support: In 2019, members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a global body comprising nearly 50 Muslim-majority states, released one statement praising Beijing's treatment of Muslims and another agreeing with China's claim that detaining Uighurs is an effective counterterrorism tactic. Since then, the organization has been publicly silent on the issue.

Sentiment in Pakistan:

Pakistani men, whose wives come from Xinjiang, have filed complaints with the Pakistani embassy in Beijing, saying their wives and their families have been detained and not allowed to get in touch with them. Some of the couples have been married for over 20 years. The same men gathered a huge following for their cause within many cities of Pakistan and carried out peaceful protests. The protests were also joined by thousands from other regions and many Pakistanis took to social media to voice their concerns about the human rights abuses taking place within reeducation camps situated in the People's Republic of China.