

**ANALYSING CHINA'S STRATEGIC  
INVESTMENTS IN TAJIKISTAN:  
*A DEVELOPMENT-SECURITY NEXUS  
PERSPECTIVE***

# **Analysing China's Strategic Investments in Tajikistan: *A Development-Security Nexus Perspective***

Sherzod Shamiev

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Author: Sherzod Shamiev

Design: Tatiana Kirgizbaeva, Studio "De\_tally"

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

China has emerged as an influential actor in international relations, including in the security-development nexus, bringing its own approach, one which has become an alternative to the Western approach. This research paper uses a security-development nexus framework to analyse China's engagement in Tajikistan, focusing on the motivations behind strategic investments, and their impact on security dynamics and socio-economic development outcomes. In the wake of geo-economic struggles, Central Asia must interact with the conventional and alternative development models at play in its various sectors. This paper highlights the motivations behind these investments and their impact on both security and development in Tajikistan. Utilizing both secondary and primary sources, including key informant interviews, this research presents localized perspectives in addition to literature review findings. These insights are important in understanding the motivations behind China's investments and their short-term benefits and long-term implications.

The research covers the theoretical underpinnings of the security-development nexus, contrasting Western conceptualizations with the Chinese approach to the framework. The paper dives deep into China's use of the nexus in Tajikistan, assessing the impact of Chinese projects on Tajikistan's economy and security.

Both the literature review and local experts acknowledge the positive macroeconomic impact of Chinese investments in Tajikistan. China's growing investments and their scale are largely seen as beneficial for the economy and for stability, particularly in improving connectivity, trade, and strengthening the borders. However, local experts have also cast a critical eye on nature of the relations, particularly in terms of excessive focus on macroeconomic indicators and extractive activities, which are misaligned with the country's long-term growth aspirations. Concerns were also raised about the trade imbalances with China and lack of economic spillover from Chinese investments.

The analysis illustrates that relations between Tajikistan and China are embedded within the security-development nexus. China's engagement in the construction of roads, extractive industries, and building of transmission lines and other infrastructure are in line with its objectives of increasing bilateral trade and BRI routes; however, these investments are not just economic ventures, but part of China's wider regional interest in ensuring that its geopolitical rivals do not dominate the region and neighbouring countries. While, previously the Chinese security-development nexus in Tajikistan was dominated by economic development, since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, China has begun slowly expanding its security footprint in the region, as China is concerned that Russia, as a traditional security guarantor, is preoccupied elsewhere. China has intensified

its security footprint in Tajikistan in recent years, donating military equipment and kits, building military buildings, and conducting military drills.

Based on the analysis, key recommendations are proposed to various stakeholders including decision-makers, donors, international organizations, and NGOs. The first recommendation advocates for a reassessment of prescriptive approaches. The checklist, or prescriptive, approach to development and security has shown limitations and failures. A shift is instead suggested from a checklist or prescriptive development and security approach to more adaptive and locally tailored development. Unproductive approaches also negatively affect the popularity and perception of donors and implementers. As a further recommendation, the paper highlights the importance of diversifying Tajikistan's economic and security partnerships. This can be a hedge against structural dependence on any one actor and acts as strategic leverage in safeguarding a country's sovereignty. Additionally, there is a need to prioritize sustainable investment that transcends mere macroeconomic growth. Investments should be channelled towards creating value chains, boosting local industrialization, and lifting living standards.

As each approach focusses on different priorities, for instance the Western approach is focussed on soft development and Chinese approaches on hard infrastructure projects, there might be room for dialogue and cooperation between different actors and models of development.

# INTRODUCTION

China's rise in international geopolitics, increasing economic power, and expanding sphere of influence are felt throughout the world, and particularly in neighbouring Central Asia. Central Asia is a region in which great power competition is not a new phenomenon, and with the renewed geopolitical and geoeconomic struggles the region is experiencing the impacts of the conventional and alternative models of development at play. This research paper aims to analyse China's engagement in Tajikistan through the security-development nexus framework, focusing on motivations behind China's strategic investments and their impact on security dynamics and socio-economic development outcomes. China's security-development policies in Central Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other regions have become an area of growing interest for researchers and policymakers, and this paper aims to expand the discussion with an analysis of China's use of the nexus in Tajikistan and its impacts on the nation's growth trajectory and security. While many studies rely heavily on secondary data, this research utilized both secondary and primary sources, incorporating key informant interviews in order to present a more grounded analysis of the localized perspectives.

The literature review covers the theoretical underpinnings of the security-development nexus, contrasting Western conceptualizations with the Chinese approach to the framework. The overview of the nexus and its key characteristics gives us insight into how it has evolved over time. The research delves into China's engagement and use of the nexus in Tajikistan, presenting the subsequent impact on economic and security dynamics. The analysis is also an attempt to connect the dots and present evidence of the interconnectedness of China's use of the security and development nexus in Tajikistan, casting light on broader country and regional implications. In order to examine economic development and the impact of Chinese projects, indicators such as infrastructure development, bilateral trade, and energy sector cooperation are reviewed. Similarly, to examine China's policies and their impact on Tajikistan's security dynamics, border security and counter-terrorism cooperation are taken as indicators.

While Chinese investments in infrastructure development, energy cooperation and bilateral trade bolster Tajikistan's economy, they also project stabilizing effects through macroeconomic benefits, connectivity, and trade. However, over-focusing on macroeconomic indicators diverts attention away from real improvement in living standards, as investments do not lead directly to the development of the business environment or creation of jobs in Tajikistan. Furthermore, the relationship is not without challenges, as concerns about debt-sustainability, imbalances in trade, and misalignment of priorities in the long-term exist.

Security cooperation between Tajikistan and China has taken on a new dimension in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. As Russia's dominance in Central Asia weakens, Tajikistan seeks additional partners like China to secure its borders against radical groups, drug trafficking, and other threats. The key aspects of Tajikistan-China cooperation are based on safeguarding borders and ensuring stability in the region.

This paper offers a comprehensive understanding of China's strategic investment in Tajikistan through additional insights and the results of seven key informant interviews with senior economists, security experts, and development specialists. The information from the key informant interviews offers a nuanced understanding of China's engagement in Tajikistan from a local point of view, along with actionable insights. This is significant as it provides a view of how international strategies operate in practice in the context of Tajikistan. This research is also an effort to understand the multifaceted motivations behind China's investment, particularly focusing on the short-term benefits and long-term implications of these engagements. The research findings are relevant to a wide range of stakeholders including international organizations, NGOs, and the private sector, as specifying areas where Chinese investments might not align with Tajikistan's long-term growth aspirations can guide the stakeholders in filling those gaps. However, it is important to note that bilateral relations between Tajikistan and China cannot be explained through a theory of security-development nexus alone.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper employs qualitative methods, primarily through an extensive literature review and key informant interviews. The research consisted of three sequential stages: first, it involved the compilation of existing information and data. Next the results of seven key informant interviews with security experts, economists, and development specialists were incorporated into the chapters of the research. Last, both the literature review and key informant interview insights are analysed, and policy recommendations are proposed.

## **I. Literature review**

The literature review incorporates a variety of sources that provide the review with depth and context. The findings of the literature review helped in framing the questions in the key informant interviews. Furthermore, the results of the literature review pose several critical questions and identify gaps which could be used in future research. The literature review is divided into the following sections:

**A comprehensive overview of the security-development nexus:** The paper embarks on a thorough review of the theoretical foundations of the security-development nexus. It begins with an assessment of the differences in interpretation between Western and Chinese perspectives. Further, the chapter identifies the distinct challenges and intricacies of realizing this nexus in geopolitical locations such as Central Asia.

**Analysis of China's Nexus Policies in Tajikistan:** This section provides an analytical assessment of China's nexus policies in Tajikistan. The chapter illustrates key motivations impacting the policies and their impact on economic development and security, as well as on the bilateral relations between Tajikistan and China.

## **II. Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)**

These chapters of the report discuss the results of seven key informant interviews, including two prominent security experts, three senior economists, and two development specialists. These primary sources are central to this research, as they capture localized perceptions and insights on how China influences both the development and security landscape in Tajikistan. The selection of the respondents was based on research indicators of the security and development nexus, such as infrastructure development, bilateral trade, and energy sector cooperation for development and border security cooperation for security dynamics. This approach took into consideration the respondents' expertise and familiarity with the context of Tajikistan. Semi-structured interviews were favoured



for security experts and development specialists, whereas for economists, a more conversational approach was employed.

### III. Policy recommendations

Based on the findings, policy recommendations are proposed which are tailored to address specific stakeholders with detailed descriptions of the suggested actions.

# SECURITY-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

Just as for other important concepts, security and development are two widely contested terms.<sup>1</sup> The definition of development and security has varied throughout time and between key actors and donors based on their policy aims and interests. According to Chandler, the merging of the two into a nexus is a paradigm shift that occurred because of the belief that such a merger will create more coherent and well managed policies in developing countries.<sup>2</sup> The International Peace Academy complements Chandler's idea with the belief that long-term development requires, and hinges upon security, and security depends upon development.<sup>3</sup> The same argument is also reinforced by Bisca's explanation of how the nexus's development interventions that shape security outcomes, which in turn determine development outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

The existing literature is in consensus with the idea that security and development are interconnected, and that their relationship is growing in light of the evolving global political landscape. Developed countries and multilateral institutions continue to commit economic resources and political effort to addressing issues within the security-development nexus. The consensus on this paradigm made it possible to design integrated approaches, which have also dominated liberal peacebuilding agendas. For instance, security policies extensively use development approaches in security sector reform and poverty reduction in the fight against terrorism.<sup>5</sup> However, implementation of the nexus has resulted in

<sup>1</sup> Viktor Johansson, "The Security and Development Nexus: A Policy Analysis", DIVA, (February 16, 2015,) retrieved August 9, 2023, from <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A784285&dswid=4329>

<sup>2</sup> David Chandler, "The Security-Development Nexus and the Rise of Anti-Foreign Policy", *Journal of International Relations and Development* 10, no. 4 (2007), 362-386, <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.jird.1800135>

<sup>3</sup> Agnes Hurwitz, "Strengthening the Security-Development Nexus: Assessing International Policy and Practice since the 1990s", GSDRC, (2004), retrieved August 10, 2023, from <https://gsdrc.org/document-library/strengthening-the-security-development-nexus-assessing-international-policy-and-practice-since-the-1990s/>, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Paul M. Bisca, "Development for Security: Lending for Peace?", Brookings, (April 20, 2018), retrieved August 10, 2023, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/development-for-security-lending-for-peace/>.

<sup>5</sup> Stern and Öjendal, "Mapping the Security-Development Nexus: Conflict, Complexity, Cacophony, Convergence?", 6.

ideological divisions, interest politics, and rhetorical facades that have led to confusion and a lack of conceptual clarity.<sup>6</sup>

International relations are dominated by Western concepts, interests, and institutions. A Chinese scholar, Qin Yaqing, argues that any approach to theorizing global governance needs to be balanced and inclusive. For instance, Eastern societies think about international relations as relations or in conceptual terms as relationality, while Western societies are more rules based.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, China has its own conceptualization of the security-development nexus.

Both Western and Chinese approaches to security-development nexus policies are currently applied in Tajikistan. In this chapter we will explore the origins of both approaches to the security-development nexus, their limitations, similarities, and differences.

## The Security-Development Nexus: Western Conceptualizations

The security-development nexus emerged as a key framework of national and global policymaking after World War II. The nexus was used as a channel to deliver aid from developed countries to developing countries.<sup>8</sup> Post-conflict Europe itself was a product of the nexus through the Marshall Plan and democratization efforts in Eastern Europe. Many international actors such as the US, EU, and UK (DFID) initially focused on a development approach as a policy to prevent conflicts of various sorts.<sup>9</sup> More critical authors also take the view that, in addition to supporting fragile states, the security-development nexus is aimed at ensuring security for developed countries, as a tool to tackle poverty in developing world where poverty was viewed as a key threat that could cause instability and conflict.<sup>10</sup> Globalization made it possible that threats and instability could rapidly spill over to other regions, and this led to an intensive academic and policy discourse on the strong links between the concepts of (in)security and (under)development, as well as the way they interact in various contexts.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Chandler, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Peer Schouten, "Theory Talk #45: Qin Yaqing," Theory Talks, (November 30, 2011), retrieved August 20, 2023, from <http://www.theory-talks.org/2011/11/theory-talk-45.html>.

<sup>8</sup> Riley Barrett, "The Development-Security Nexus: An Exploitative Past and Present", E-International Relations, (July 24, 2018), retrieved August 10, 2023, from <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/07/24/the-development-security-nexus-an-exploitative-past-and-present/>.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Duffield, "The Liberal Way of Development and the Development—Security Impasse: Exploring the Global Life-Chance Divide", Security Dialogue 41, no. 1 (February 1, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010609357042>.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Matveeva, "A New Opening for EU—Central Asia Relations?", Carnegie Europe, (April 13, 2023), retrieved August 10, 2023, from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2023/04/13/new-opening-for-eu-central-asia-relations-pub-89454>.

<sup>11</sup> Maria Stern and Joakim Öjendal, "Exploring the Security Development Nexus." *The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development* (London: Anthem Press, 2012), p. 13-40.

Threats in the form of conflict, disease, crime, mass migration, etc. can easily impact developed countries through the forces of globalization. The recognition of this has led to a transformation and widening of the definition of security to include military, political, economic, environmental, and societal security.<sup>12</sup> From mere humanitarian intervention, the nexus has become a useful framework for post-war reconstruction efforts, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and the promotion of good governance with respect to human rights.<sup>13</sup>

The meaning of development has also changed over time, from being linked to industrialization to economic growth and modernization, to structural adjustment change and, later to democratization and good governance reforms. Some authors such as Koponen argue that poverty and state fragility causing conflict and armed violence led to a securitization of development.<sup>14</sup> The same argument is reinforced by Boonstra and Shapovalova who state, “linking security and development can result in the securitization of development rather than the developmentalization of security.”<sup>15</sup> A closer examination hints that attention to security was the pinnacle of much of development strategy during the colonial era, Marshall Plan era, Cold War and post-9/11.<sup>16</sup> This is also seen in the share and budget of US Official Development Assistance (ODA), which has declined considerably, while conversely the share and budget of the Department of Defense has grown exponentially.<sup>17</sup> The same tendency has also been observed in many other developed countries. A head of a development agency active in Tajikistan offered an example of how development money and approaches were channelled to the security sector there. The two projects given as examples are the EU’s Border Management in Central Asia (BOMCA) and police reforms by the US and OSCE. While BOMCA stands out as a successful initiative in strengthening border security and in reducing drug trafficking across the region, the police reforms in Tajikistan have not progressed, leading to reduced contributions and engagement from donor countries.<sup>18</sup> Another development specialist mentioned during the interview that Tajikistan has seen some success in security-development policy as development efforts after peacebuilding have made significant improvements in people’s livelihoods. That respondent has also noted several cases of failure of security-development nexus policies in countries such as Somalia, Afghanistan,

<sup>12</sup> Johansson, “The Security and Development Nexus: A Policy Analysis”

<sup>13</sup> Matveeva, “A New Opening for EU–Central Asia Relations?”

<sup>14</sup> Henni Alava, “Exploring the Security-Development Nexus: Perspectives from Nepal, Northern Uganda and ‘Sugango’”, University of Helsinki, (2010), retrieved August 14, 2023, from <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/publications/exploring-the-security-development-nexus-perspectives-from-nepal-2>.

<sup>15</sup> Jos Boonstra and Natalia Shapovalova. “Thinking Security, Doing Development? The Security-Development Nexus in European Policies towards Tajikistan”, Academia.edu, (December 4, 2015), retrieved August 25, 2023, from [https://www.academia.edu/19457675/Thinking\\_security\\_doing\\_development\\_The\\_security\\_development\\_nexus\\_in\\_European\\_policies\\_towards\\_Tajikistan\\_EUCAM\\_Working\\_Paper\\_12\\_December\\_2012\\_with\\_Jos\\_Boonstra\\_](https://www.academia.edu/19457675/Thinking_security_doing_development_The_security_development_nexus_in_European_policies_towards_Tajikistan_EUCAM_Working_Paper_12_December_2012_with_Jos_Boonstra_).

<sup>16</sup> Mark Duffield (2001) spoke of the development–security terrain in 2001. The notion of a security–development nexus was used explicitly as a distinct concept by Uvin (2002), and later discussed primarily by researchers at the International Peace Academy (2004, 2006); It has also figured in numerous other works, such as Stewart (2006); Chandler (2007); and Buur, Jensen & Stepputat (2007). For further discussion, see also Journal of International Development (2006) and Third World Quarterly (2009).

<sup>17</sup> Emily M. Morgenstern and Nick M. Brown, “Foreign Assistance: An Introduction to U.S. Programs and Policy”, Congressional Research Service, (January 10, 2022), retrieved September 25, 2023, from <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R40213>.

<sup>18</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

Columbia, and recently in the Sahel region. These cases tell us an important lesson, that there is a need to establish security and peace before development can do its work. “We can’t design and implement programs if we can’t protect its gains.”<sup>19</sup>

A local development specialist also argued that we must first distinguish between actors and their objectives in using the security-development nexus. “For instance, our neighbour China prioritizes economic interests and stability by investing in infrastructure, extractive industry, and border security. Stability is needed to ensure continuous business flow. However, excessive focus on security might come at the cost of less effort in such areas as inclusiveness and transparency, and less access to resources for some groups in society.” This respondent mentioned that mutual interests are a crucial factor in the success of the security-development nexus. The Western approach to the nexus in Tajikistan is both ideological and strategic. One of the arguments he presented was the EU’s intervention in Tajikistan, which focused on prevention of drug flows from Afghanistan to Europe. The strategic use of the nexus is seen in the very long chain of events that leads to the flow of drugs from Afghanistan, through Tajikistan and other countries to reach Europe. The EU uses a preventive strategy, minimizing the issue at the core, which exemplifies the complexity and variety of approaches to the nexus.<sup>20</sup>

Some authors argue that the nexus is double edged, as development-oriented security has also been on the rise since the definition of security has been broadened to include human security, which has to some extent “developmentalized” the security agenda.<sup>21</sup> For instance, the EU, US and UK, along with other major donors, have adopted a wide definition of security that encompasses all initiatives that promote human rights and conflict prevention, as well as post-conflict programs, which are financed under development instruments. Thus, we can assume that the nexus is double edged, as now it has created competition for funds and competences among both security and development actors. However, at a time when geopolitics and geoeconomics are rising in importance, security priorities will once again be the primary focus in the policies of many developed countries.

The concepts of both security and development have undergone significant change since the aftermath of September 11, 2001, as security once again became a priority. Overwhelming reliance on security measures meant that short-term security considerations of rich and powerful states overrode the long-term development challenges of poorer regions. Many questions arise from this, such as Barry Buzan’s “whose security” and “whose development” the nexus is concerned with.<sup>22</sup> This approach was also criticized by development

<sup>19</sup> Key informant interview – Development specialist 1, August 22, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

<sup>21</sup> UNDP. “Human Development Report 2005: International Cooperation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Unequal World.” *Choice Reviews Online* 43, no. 06 (January 1, 2005), retrieved September 3, 2023, from [hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2005](https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2005)

<sup>22</sup> Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and De Jaap Wilde, “Security: A New Framework for Analysis”, *International Journal*, Vol. 53,

experts as it interfered with long-term plans which were seen as a requirement for the achievement of sustainable peace,<sup>23</sup> SDG goals, and an overall positive development trajectory. Furthermore, excessively military and interventionist approaches through the use of special operations, drone missions, and other modern tools of hard security further complicated and exacerbated the conflicts and their root causes, resulting in exactly opposite of what was.

The narrow focus on development and security did not address the root causes and failed to end violent conflicts around the world. The failure to alleviate poverty and dubious results of structural adjustments came to be known as a development impasse.<sup>24</sup> It seems that the limits of prescriptive and linear models of development and failures to use adaptive approaches are still insufficiently acknowledged today, as we observe the same prescriptions used in other regions, including in Central Asia. The nexus has not delivered the expected results, and it is partly due to the securitization of development and an inability to capture local complexities relating to context, culture, history, religion, and system of societal organization.

The ideas of Maria Stern and Joakim Öjendal provide several frameworks for understanding the nexus in its various articulations. One of the frameworks describes the security-development nexus as a technique of governmentality. This technique is aimed at regulating life through politics of aid, “humanitarian assistance,” and good governance agendas to shape the behaviour and policies of developing countries. Duffield further explains development and underdevelopment bio-politically “in terms of how life is to be supported and maintained, and how people are expected to live.”<sup>25</sup> A security expert interviewed for this paper highlighted that the EU and US use this approach in Tajikistan, and are characterized by their attention towards the promotion of democratic reforms and human rights, which is reflected in the 2019 Central Asia strategy of EU.<sup>26</sup> A local development specialist’s idea is similar, emphasizing the Western policy focus on governance, civil society, and rule of law attached to their aid packages. He also notes that China does not take this soft development approach, as their model is more capitalistic, prioritizing value for money and economic return on investment. They lack the ideological component, as exporting communist ideology is not appealing to most countries.<sup>27</sup>

The security-development nexus as discussed in the text has not fulfilled its expectations to alleviate poverty according to many authors, nor has it adequately addressed the root causes of insecurity in developing countries. A very puzzling question to ask is, how, in so many decades of development policy and with

No. 4 (January 1, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.2307/40203739>.

<sup>23</sup> Ramses Amer, Ashok Swain, and Joakim Öjendal, eds., *The Security-Development Nexus: Peace, Conflict and Development*, Google Books (London: Anthem Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>24</sup> Stern and Öjendal, “Mapping the Security—Development Nexus: Conflict, Complexity, Cacophony, Convergence?”

<sup>25</sup> Stern and Öjendal, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.

<sup>27</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

such comprehensive accumulated knowledge of the nexus through both theory and implementation in developing countries, have efforts remained insufficient, disjointed, and inadequate? Contemporary experiences are filled with policy failures, and there is a clear need to focus international efforts on more effectively addressing systemic disparities.

## The Chinese Approach to the Security-Development Nexus

China has emerged as an influential actor in international relations, including in the development and security nexus. China's security-development policies have become an alternative to Western conceptualizations of the nexus, with China positioning itself as an operator in a South-South cooperations framework where relations play an important role. While the Western security-development nexus is based on liberal peace theory and has conditionalities embedded in it, China's nexus claims that it is based on economic peace with an emphasis on respect for national sovereignty, political stability, and infrastructure-led economic development.<sup>28</sup>

China's version of the security-development nexus and narrative has accumulated momentum as more and more developing countries have embraced it around the world, especially within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>29</sup> For instance, this year's BRI Summit hosted 130 countries from across the world.<sup>30</sup> The narrative positioning China as a fellow developing country which is ready to support its partners has allowed it to play a role in international peace and security.<sup>31</sup> Part of the Chinese narrative portrays the current world order as unjust and rooted in economic, scientific, and technological inequalities between the North and South. In China's view the hegemonic approach, colonial mentality of exploiting natural resources, and power politics are serious threats to sovereignty and the interests of developing countries. In his speech Jiang Zemin held these practices by developed countries responsible for poverty and backwardness in the developing world, and stated that, in turn, these cause conflicts and instability.<sup>32</sup> The Chinese approach is also accompanied by alternative global governance ideas and the image of China as a responsible major power that is taking an active role in reforming and developing a more just global governance system.<sup>33</sup> During their interview, a prominent Tajik security expert also acknowledged that, although

<sup>28</sup> Hameiri, Jones & Zou, (2019), pp. 473-474, or alternatively, Kuo (2012).

<sup>29</sup> Matveeva, "A New Opening for EU-Central Asia Relations?"

<sup>30</sup> Silk Road Briefing, "Ten Years of China's Belt and Road Initiative: Highlights, Challenges and A Case Study - Silk Road Briefing," Silk Road Briefing, (October 17, 2023), retrieved October 1, 2023, from <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/10/17/ten-years-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-highlights-challenges-and-a-case-study/>.

<sup>31</sup> Lina Benabdallah and Daniel Large, "China's Development-Security in Practice: The Case of Mali", SAIS China-Africa Research Initiative, (2020), p. 7. Retrieved September 15, 2023, from <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/248227/1/sais-cari-pb48.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Jiang, Zemin. 2000. China and Africa-Usher in the New Century Together. <http://www.focac.org/eng/ltada/dyjbzjhy/SP12009/t606804.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Benabdallah and Large, "China's Development-Security in Practice: The Case of Mali", p. 7.

there is active and visible support from Western donors in Tajikistan, this has still not addressed systemic issues within the country. The primary focus of this aid has been on governance reforms, rule of law, health, and social sectors, with limited focus on security. In contrast China's approach seems to originate from the needs of the government for investments with the focus on infrastructure projects, such as building roads, bridges, mines, etc. The respondent highlighted the minimal conditionalities attached to China's loans as more attractive for many developing countries.<sup>34</sup>

In China's work to become a dominant power it refers back to analogies of its past glory during the Qing dynasty. In many ways China has begun to take on the characteristics of its past, reflecting a time when the region was dominated by Sinocentric Order. One example is in the policy of non-interference in domestic politics of the partner countries. The Sinocentric Order held similar non-interference policies in its vassal states; however, the Chinese emperor was positioned at the top of the power hierarchy, with other kings paying tribute. In today's reality, where China is competing with US, it will be increasingly challenging for China to uphold the policy concepts of sovereignty and non-interference, especially in neighbouring Central Asia. While historical analogies could offer insights, they often misinterpret and oversimplify the current realities, and we should not be guided purely by such analogies.

China's domestic experience in achieving security through development has shaped the conceptualization of its own security-development nexus.<sup>35</sup> A primary example is its achievement of a big leap in development during Deng Xiaoping's "Open Door Policy" reforms. The economic growth and development progress, which increased living standards and reduced the poverty rates, contributed to improving internal security and peace.<sup>36</sup> This approach has also been used in China's underdeveloped regions, which were considered a security risk, especially Xinjiang and Tibet, where sizable ethnic minorities live. State-led development agendas were able to pacify social unrest to some degree by encouraging local governments to increase economic growth through trade with neighbouring counties in Central Asia and beyond.<sup>37</sup> Because of the effectiveness and the legitimacy this brought to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the security-development nexus now lies at the heart of China's policies, both internal and external. Subsequent Chinese leaders followed analogous policies focusing on development and security. Jian Zemin for instance emphasized Chinese culture and people as driving forces of development, while Hu Jintao introduced the concept of scientific development. Xi Jinping has developed an idea of the Chinese Dream that places economic development as a focus of the party.<sup>38</sup> Xi Jinping

<sup>34</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 1, September 28, 2023.

<sup>35</sup> Lina Benabdallah, "China's Peace and Security Strategies in Africa: Building Capacity Is Building Peace?," *African Studies Quarterly*, vol. 16, no 3-4, (December 2016), p. 20. Retrieved September 15, 2023, from [https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/v16a3.Lina\\_HD.pdf](https://asq.africa.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/168/v16a3.Lina_HD.pdf).

<sup>36</sup> Benabdallah, "China's Peace and Security Strategies in Africa: Building Capacity Is Building Peace?," p. 20

<sup>37</sup> Peter Cai, "Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative." Lowy Institute, (March 22, 2017), retrieved September 18, 2023 from <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/understanding-china-s-belt-road-initiative>.

<sup>38</sup> Benabdallah, "China's Peace and Security Strategies in Africa: Building Capacity Is Building Peace?," p. 20

has explicitly referred to the security-development nexus on many occasions, one being during the Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia:

*“Sustainable security means that we need to focus on both development and security so that security would be durable. As a Chinese saying goes, for a tree to grow tall, a strong and solid root is required; for a river to reach far, an unimpeded source is necessary. Development is the foundation of security, and security is a precondition for development. The tree of peace does not grow on barren land while the fruit of development is not produced amidst flames of war.”<sup>39</sup>*

The BRI is also based on a comparable framework and ideas that cross-border trade and improved development outcomes help countries manage security issues and prevent insecurity, which is manifested in the BRI's official framing.<sup>40</sup> The construction of infrastructure and investments in developing countries is framed as a show of China's commitment to peace and stability.<sup>41</sup> Just as in the original conceptualizations of the security-development nexus, China views economic development as central to minimizing armed conflict and maintaining peace.<sup>42</sup> It seems that China's perspective appeals to the Global South over the good governance approach. The lack of focus on governance is an evident shortcoming; however, it positions China's loans as more accessible, because of lower loan rates and minimal conditionalities.

A prominent security expert in Tajikistan and a development specialist shared what they thought about the security-development approaches. The development specialist thought that “at the core, the Chinese and Western approaches to the security-development nexus are similar, but distinctions arise when we delve deeper. The Chinese approach is more quid pro quo and focuses on development for elites. China doesn't emphasize public political participation, which could have long-term implications.” That respondent also stressed that the West focussed on political reforms and poverty reduction, whereas China adopts a more transactional approach, where elite relationships and broader economic partnership matters. China also uses a broader view of development, in which the private sector and businesses, which are active in Tajikistan, also work as development actors.<sup>43</sup> The security expert on the other hand highlighted the pragmatic aspect of China's approach, as it aims to protect its investments, including factories, roads, and infrastructure. He also mentioned that a significant difference lies in the conditionalities used by China, as they are seen to be less formal, with a focus on deepening political ties and supporting China's global initiatives. However, the lack of transparency makes it challenging to evaluate their exact nature.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Jinping Xi, “New Asian Security Concept for New Progress in Security Cooperation.” (Shanghai, China, May 21, 2014), retrieved September 29, 2023, from [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjdt\\_665385/zyjh\\_665391/201405/t20140527\\_678163.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/201405/t20140527_678163.html).

<sup>40</sup> Cai, “Understanding China's Belt and Road Initiative”, p.7

<sup>41</sup> Lina Benabdallah and Daniel Large, “China's Development-Security in Practice: The Case of Mali”, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Lina Benabdallah and Daniel Large, *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Key informant interview – Development specialist 1, August 22, 2023.

<sup>44</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.



# CHINA'S PRIMARY MOTIVATIONS FOR INVESTMENT IN TAJIKISTAN

China's expanding footprint in Tajikistan has been the subject of many discussions. Within the BRI, Central Asia has received heightened significance. The multifaceted engagement of China raises questions of the primary motivations and interests driving its work in Tajikistan. In this section we will draw on the insights of prominent Tajik security experts and development specialists.

The first security expert highlighted that Tajikistan is of particular interest for China due to its proximity to Afghanistan and its strategic location as a transportation hub. Not only can it serve as a transportation hub, but it is also a source of mineral and energy resources. China aims to connect Tajikistan with the so-called Middle Transport Corridor, which traverses Central Asia to reach the Caspian Sea and Europe. With the evolving security situation in Afghanistan, it is likely that new trends will emerge in this regard. For this to be implemented, stability is crucial. The respondent also noted that China has expanded its role in the security sector of the country.<sup>45</sup>

Security expert number two resonates with the first, underscoring the importance of Tajikistan as a logistical checkpoint. Based on this, the expert concludes that China invests in infrastructure in Tajikistan to ensure the movement of goods. Infrastructure and logistics need to be protected; therefore, Tajikistan has become the most important security partner for China in Central Asia. China has put heightened importance on the stability and security of the countries to build effective and long-term partnerships.<sup>46</sup>

The development specialists, on the other hand, offer a more economic-centric perspective. For instance, development specialist one states that China's motivations to invest are straight forward. The Chinese want to trade to the benefit of China. In Tajikistan these investments that have enhanced the connectivity and facilitate trade are focused on hard infrastructure projects such as roads, tunnels, and mining.<sup>47</sup> Development specialist two provided a more structured response,

<sup>45</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 1, September 28, 2023.

<sup>46</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.

<sup>47</sup> Key informant interview – Development specialist 1, August 22, 2023.

dividing the motivations to invest in Tajikistan into three key components. “First, China perceives Tajikistan as a resource material hub, although future investments might be influenced by potential resource access in Afghanistan. The second motivation is connected to the security concerns, particularly regarding underground Islamic groups. China is cautious of the spillover effects of sleeper cells. The third interest of China in Tajikistan is geopolitical considerations. For China it is important that its geopolitical rivals do not dominate the region and neighbouring countries.”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

# ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The Chinese development-security nexus has manifested itself through numerous avenues in Tajikistan, including the Belt and Road Initiative, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and China-Central Asia Cooperation mechanism. Recently, Tajikistan has also supported the ideas of the Global Security Initiative, Global Development Initiative, and Global Civilization Initiative proposed by China.<sup>49</sup>

Tajikistan's independence in 1992 marked the establishment of political, economic, and security cooperation with China. Shared borders, the economic rise of China, and its heightened interest in Central Asia have made Tajikistan an inevitable part of a multidimensional economic partnership.<sup>50</sup> Tajikistan became a part of the ambitious BRI in 2018, the SCO in 2001, and many other bilateral projects since.<sup>51</sup>

## Trade and FDI

Tajikistan-China economic relations are based on the following documents: The Agreement on the Encouragement and Mutual Protection of Investment (effective January 1994)<sup>52</sup>, the Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation and the Prevention of Fiscal Evasion concerning Taxes on Income and Capital (March 2009), and the establishment of Strategic Partnership (August 2017).<sup>53</sup> These agreements simplify the work of investors and prevent double taxation, and serve as the cornerstone for Chinese investment inflow to Tajikistan.

The BRI was launched later in 2013, and Tajikistan lies on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran section, which is connected to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).<sup>54</sup> Essentially, China supports the development of

<sup>49</sup> "Xi Jinping Holds Talks with President Emomali Rahmon of Tajikistan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, (May 18, 2023), retrieved October 10, 2023 from [https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx\\_662805/202305/t20230521\\_11080808.html](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202305/t20230521_11080808.html).

<sup>50</sup> Dante Schulz, "China-Tajikistan Bilateral Relations." Caspian Policy Center, (March 22, 2022), Retrieved October 6, 2023, from <https://www.caspianpolicy.org/research/security-and-politics-program-spp/china-tajikistan-bilateral-relations>.

<sup>51</sup> Irna Hofman, "Tajikistan." The People's Map of Global China, (January 17, 2022), retrieved October 10, 2023 from <https://thepeoplesmap.net/country/tajikistan/>.

<sup>52</sup> Edit, "China - Tajikistan BIT (1993) - Electronic Database of Investment Treaties (EDIT)", n.d., retrieved September 28, 2023, from <https://edit.wti.org/document/show/a2a41950-267e-4d9c-a3e3-cce8ccea450e>.

<sup>53</sup> China Briefing, "China-Tajikistan: Bilateral Investment and Trade Ties." China Briefing News, (September 6, 2021), retrieved October 2, 2023, from <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-tajikistan-bilateral-investment-and-trade-ties/>.

<sup>54</sup> Silk Road Briefing, "Tajikistan's Opportunities and Development Progress within The Belt & Road Initiative - Silk Road Briefing." Silk Road Briefing, (February 28, 2023), retrieved October 2, 2023, from <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/>

Tajikistan's infrastructure logistics and transportation to create opportunities for trade, expansion of markets, and the development of industry and technology via BRI channels. This also includes the development of the energy sector and the import/export of goods.<sup>55</sup>

Currently, China is leading Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) contributions in Tajikistan.<sup>56</sup> According to the data of the National Bank of Tajikistan, China's share of the country's FDI was 74% in 2020 (see Figure 1). During the 2007-2021 period, approximately 4.85 billion USD of FDI was attracted to Tajikistan, where 2.1 billion USD was from China. More than 550 Chinese businesses were registered in the country as of 15 January 2020, primarily in the mining industry, energy, production of building materials, and agriculture.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, in 2020, China's public investment was 480 million USD, ranked in 4th place after the Asia Development Bank, World Bank, and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.<sup>58</sup> During the interview with the senior economist representing one of the international financial institutions, the respondent mentioned that China is by far the leader on FDI, accounting for over 37 percent of the country's GDP. Also, factors around the Russia-Ukraine conflict have pushed Tajikistan to cooperate with China even more closely, especially on trade routes.<sup>59</sup>

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[news/2023/02/28/tajikistans-opportunities-and-development-progress-within-the-belt-road-initiative/](https://www.silkroadinitiative.org/news/2023/02/28/tajikistans-opportunities-and-development-progress-within-the-belt-road-initiative/).

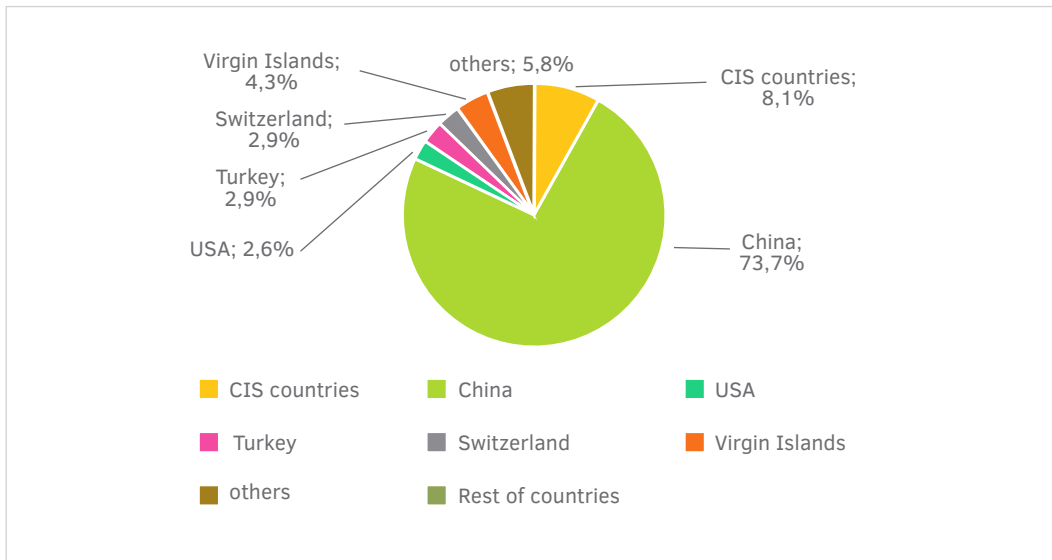
<sup>55</sup> Silk Road Briefing, "Tajikistan's Opportunities and Development Progress within The Belt & Road Initiative - Silk Road Briefing"

<sup>56</sup> The World Bank, "Tajikistan Economic Update- World Bank", The World Bank, (Summer 2023), p. 65, retrieved October 2, 2023, from <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/46328951bdfc3b29c26b4aa8255ea773-0080012023/original/Tajikistan-Economic-Update-2023-ENG.pdf>.

<sup>57</sup> Rustam Aminjonov and Matin Kholmatov, "The BRI in Central Asia: A View from Tajikistan - Emerging Markets Forum", Emerging Market Forum, (July 2022), retrieved October 13, 2023, from <https://www.emergingmarketsforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/The-BRI-in-Central-Asia-A-View-from-Tajikistan.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> The People's Map of Global China, "Tajikistan - The People's Map of Global China."

<sup>59</sup> Key informant interview – economist 1, September 12, 2023.

**Figure 1. Leading source countries for FDI inflows, 2020<sup>60</sup>**

Economic cooperation has also led to increased debt to China. For 2022, the overall amount of debt for Tajikistan was approximately 3.3 billion USD, and the bulk of the sum is owed to China's Export-Import bank (Eximbank).<sup>61</sup> It is estimated that almost 1.2 billion USD of external debt is owed to Eximbank.<sup>62</sup> In their interview, a senior economist in Tajikistan assessed the external debt to GDP ratio at 28.5 percent, which he thinks is manageable as most of the loans are long-term. About 45 percent of the external debt is owed to Eximbank.<sup>63</sup> According to a report of the Navo Analytical Centre, by the beginning of 2022, 18 loan agreements were signed in the sectors of energy (9 loans), transport (7 loans) and industry (2 loans), amounting to 1.5 billion USD in total.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, according to the World Bank, public debt volume declined from 46.5% of GDP in 2020 to 38.8% in 2022, which is a significant decrease in debt burden. However, the country is at high risk of debt distress because it must pay Eurobonds in 2025-2027.<sup>65</sup> Eurobonds in the amount of 500 million USD were issued for the construction of the Rogun Dam and constitute 15.5% of the public debt of Tajikistan.<sup>66</sup> Another senior economist from Tajikistan noted that he is not worried about debt-sustainability, as Chinese loans were provided at a lower interest rate (3 percent to 3.5 percent). The economist was more worried about the Eurobonds, which were loaned under seven percent interest rates and which

<sup>60</sup> The World Bank, "Tajikistan Economic Update- World Bank", p.65

<sup>61</sup> Silk Road Briefing, "Tajikistan's Opportunities and Development Progress within The Belt & Road Initiative- Silk Road Briefing"

<sup>62</sup> Eurasianet, "China Debt: A Problem for Tajikistan — CPEC Wire." CPEC Wire, (July 22, 2022), retrieved October 7, 2023, from <https://cpecwire.com/connectivity/belt-road-bri/china-debt-tajikistan/>.

<sup>63</sup> Key informant interview – economist 1, September 12, 2023.

<sup>64</sup> Rustam Aminjonov and Matin Kholmatov, "The BRI in Central Asia: A View from Tajikistan- Emerging Markets Forum."

<sup>65</sup> The World Bank, "Tajikistan Economic Update- World Bank", p. 8.

<sup>66</sup> The World Bank, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

are nearing maturity. The government is looking for different ways to refinance part of the Eurobonds. It should be noted, however, that, although there is an increased inflow of Chinese funds and investments, these are not having the spillover effects on the economy.<sup>67</sup>

Tajikistan-China trade turnover during the past decades has also developed with a huge trade deficit for Tajikistan. During the 1995-2021 period, China's exports to Tajikistan increased from \$14.6 million to \$1.62 billion USD. On the other hand, Tajikistan's exports to China during the aforementioned period increased from 8.6 to 159 million USD.<sup>68</sup> This negative trade balance is making Tajikistan dependent on Chinese goods. Tajikistan has mainly exported gold (74% of the exported amount) and raw materials such as cotton, animal skins and minerals.<sup>69</sup> Economist number three also mentioned the increasing trade deficit with China, accompanied by more demand for Central Asian products.<sup>70</sup> According to China's General Administration of Customs' data, in the first half of 2023, trade turnover with Tajikistan increased to 2.11 billion USD and export to the country hit 1.96 billion and import 152 million USD in comparison with the same period in 2022.<sup>71</sup> Overall, as of May 2023, China has exported about 26.4 billion USD in goods to Central Asia and 13.5 billion USD in imports, according to the same source. According to the president of Kazakhstan, Kasym-Zhomart Tokayev, there are conditions existing to increase region's trade with China up to 100 billion USD by 2030 via the BRI.<sup>72</sup>

## Infrastructure Development

Over the last two decades, China's investments and financial support have primarily targeted the infrastructure, trade, and energy sectors in Tajikistan.<sup>73</sup> A prominent security expert in Tajikistan characterizes China's engagement in the country through a focus on hard infrastructure projects, such as building roads, bridges, cement production, etc.<sup>74</sup> These sectors align with Tajikistan's goals of promoting economic growth and modernization, and ensuring economic stability and sustainability. Simultaneously, these areas are in line with China's broader objectives of fostering prosperous and stable neighbouring countries that

<sup>67</sup> Key informant interview – economist 3, September 14, 2023.

<sup>68</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Tajikistan/China", (n.d.) retrieved October 9, 2023, from <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/tjk/partner/chn?redirect=true>.

<sup>69</sup> The Observatory of Economic Complexity, "Tajikistan/China."

<sup>70</sup> Key informant interview – economist 3, September 14, 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Justin Burke, "Central Asia: Trade with China Registers Strong Growth during First Half of 2023", Eurasianet, (July 26, 2023,) retrieved October 16, 2023, from <https://eurasianet.org/central-asia-trade-with-china-registers-strong-growth-during-first-half-of-2023>.

<sup>72</sup> Silk Road Briefing, "China-Central Asia Summit Results in Xi'an Declaration and Regional Trade & Investment Advances - Silk Road Briefing", (May 22, 2023), retrieved October 9, 2023. <https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2023/05/22/china-central-asia-summit-results-in-xian-declaration-and-regional-trade-investment-advances/>.

<sup>73</sup> Aminjonov and Kholmatov, "The BRI in Central Asia: A View from Tajikistan- Emerging Markets Forum."

<sup>74</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 1, September 28, 2023.

contribute to the economic viability of the BRI by serving as integral components of its trade routes. As shown in Table 1, a significant portion of the loans has been channelled into infrastructure, energy, and transportation projects, encompassing both the revitalization of existing assets and the construction of new infrastructure.<sup>75</sup>

Notably, a substantial \$603 million loan in 2006 was allocated for various projects, including the rehabilitation of the Dushanbe-Khujand-Chanak highway, encompassing the construction of key components such as the Shahrstan Tunnel and power lines.<sup>76</sup> Ventures such as Sinzyan Inkhai, initiated in 2012, marked the beginning of Chinese investments in agriculture. These ventures benefited from loans provided by the Agricultural Bank of China and the China Development Bank, though their socio-economic impact within Tajikistan remains limited.<sup>77</sup>

China's significant presence is also evident in the mining sector, where Chinese companies have taken over mining rights from previous foreign operators. One example is the Pakrut goldmine in the Vahdat district, originally owned by a New Zealand-based company. Chinese capital rescued this venture in 2008, leading to its official takeover by China Nonferrous Gold Limited in 2012.<sup>78</sup> It is best not to delve deeper into the gold processing as it has been widely covered in other works.

Furthermore, infrastructure development in Tajikistan received a boost in 2023, with the signing of an agreement between the Ministry of Transport of Tajikistan and the China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) under the Central Asia Regional Links Program. Projects included the construction of a bridge in Khorog, an avalanche gallery rehabilitation, and the development of trade-enhancing infrastructure in Shugnan district.<sup>79</sup> The cost of the project is estimated to be 31 million USD and it is aimed at improving cross-border trade and connectivity in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBO). Additionally, discussions were held to secure funding for the rehabilitation and construction of a 256-kilometer section of the Dushanbe-Kulma highway, with a \$200 million USD loan from China already allocated for a different section of the highway.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Aminjonov and Kholmatov, "The BRI in Central Asia: A View from Tajikistan- Emerging Markets Forum."

<sup>76</sup> Hofman, "Tajikistan- The People's Map of Global China."

<sup>77</sup> Hofman, "Tajikistan- The People's Map of Global China."

<sup>78</sup> Hofman, "Tajikistan- The People's Map of Global China."

<sup>79</sup> Asia-Plus, "Chinese Company to Improve Road Infrastructure in GBO", (March 28, 2023), retrieved October 14, 2023 from <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20230328/chinese-company-to-improve-road-infrastructure-in-gbao>.

<sup>80</sup> Asia-Plus, "Tajikistan, China Agree on Rehabilitation of Remaining Sections of Dushanbe-Kulma Highway", (April 14, 2023), retrieved October 10, 2023, from <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20230414/tajikistan-china-agree-on-rehabilitation-of-remaining-sections-of-dushanbe-kulma-highway>.

**Table 1. Directions of soft loans received from China<sup>81</sup>**

Year of project agreement	Project title	Project amount (million USD)
2006	Rehabilitation of Tajikistan - Uzbekistan highway (Dushanbe-Chanak)	281
2006	Construction of a 500 kV South-North power transmission line	267
2006	Construction of the 220 kV Lolazor-Khatlon power transmission line	55
2009	Construction of an additional 500 kV South-North and 220 Lolazor-Khatlon power transmission lines	51
2009	Repair and restoration of the first part of Phase 1 of Dushanbe-Kulma highway (Tajikistan - the border of China), Dushanbe-kV Dangara section	49
2010	Repair and restoration of the second part of Phase 1 of Dushanbe - Kulma highway (Tajikistan - the border of China), Dushanbe-Dangara section	144
2010	Construction of a 220 kV high-voltage power transmission line Khujand-Ayni	35
2011	The project of organizing a unified electric network of the north of Tajikistan	27
2012	Repair and restoration of the third part of Phase 1 of Dushanbe - Kulma highway (Tajikistan - the border of China), Dushanbe - Dangara section	51
2013	Repair and restoration of Regar electric substation - 500 kV	35
2013	Implementation of a transport management system in Dushanbe - "Safe City"	21
2014	Construction of the second phase of the Dushanbe-2 TPP (two agreements)	179 151
2014	Construction of Dushanbe - Kurghonteppa railway, section Vahdat-Yovon (two agreements)	37 322
2014	Construction of an enterprise for the production of cryolite and aluminium fluoride - as part of the modernization of TALCO (two agreements)	48 40
2017	Rehabilitation and construction of a high-voltage power transmission line (500 kV) in the districts of central subordination	83

*Prepared by the Navo Analytical Centre, Source: Ministry of Finance of Tajikistan*

During the China – Central Asia Summit in May 2023, Xi Jinping stressed the importance of a stable, prosperous, and interconnected Central Asia.<sup>82</sup> He stressed that it is vital to develop economic, trade, energy, and green cooperation, supported by security and peace in the region against external actors and non-traditional threats. He further indicated that this should be done by strengthening the institution-building mechanisms proposed by China. This was the first Central Asia-China summit symbolically held in Xi'an city of China.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Rustam Aminjonov and Matin Kholmatov, "The BRI in Central Asia: A View from Tajikistan- Emerging Markets Forum."

<sup>82</sup> Xi, Jinping, "Working Together for a China-Central Asia Community with a Shared Future Featuring Mutual Assistance, Common Development, Universal Security, and Everlasting Friendship." Embassy of PRC in the Kingdom of Sweden, (May 19, 2023), retrieved October 12, 2023, from [http://se.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxw\\_0/202305/t20230519\\_11079941.htm](http://se.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxw_0/202305/t20230519_11079941.htm).

<sup>83</sup> IISS, "The First China-Central Asia Summit", (October 2023), retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.iiss.org/>



## Energy Cooperation

Energy security in Tajikistan holds paramount importance, as a staggering 95% of its energy is dependent on hydropower.<sup>84</sup> With the strategic ambition of achieving energy independence by 2030, Tajikistan aims to develop highly efficient, sustainable, and climate-resilient energy capacities. The nation grapples with electricity shortages, especially in its peripheral regions. Hence, strengthening its energy infrastructure emerges as a crucial need.<sup>85</sup> Tajik security expert number two, during their interview, mentioned that China is interested in energy cooperation and in the extraction of raw materials. Just recently, China has built an oil refinery in Tajikistan and invested in hydroelectric power plants (the Zerafshan and Roghun Dams), and it also owns exclusive rights for some of local deposits of minerals and rare earth materials.<sup>86</sup>

A significant step was the construction of the Dushanbe-2 Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant; a project realized with the support of a loan from the Export-Import Bank of China. The overall expenditure of the venture was reportedly 349 million USD, complemented by 17.4 million USD from the Tajik government.<sup>87</sup> Cumulatively, the plant produces nearly 1.4 billion kWh of electricity and 411,000 giga calories of heat every year.<sup>88</sup> Situated in Dushanbe, it stands as Tajikistan's most substantial and modern thermal power facility.

In 2014, Tajikistan became part of China's expansive energy initiative by participating in the construction plans of the 400 km Tajik Section D of the Central Asia-China gas pipeline.<sup>89</sup> The project is estimated to inject 5.5 billion USD into Tajikistan's economy over a span of 32 years. In return, China has secured a lease on 144 hectares in Tajikistan for 49 years.<sup>90</sup> Building of the pipeline implies the construction of 42 tunnels in the country (64 km in total), which contributes to the overall connectivity between the regions of the country and interstate trade. Work on the Section D gas pipeline was suspended in 2016 from the Uzbekistan side due to technical reasons; however, negotiations are underway to continue the construction and drilling.<sup>91</sup>

[publications/strategic-comments/2023/the-first-china-central-asia-summit/](#)

<sup>84</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan, "The Energy Sector of the Republic of Tajikistan", (July 6, 2019), retrieved October 13, 2023, from <https://mfa.tj/en/main/view/185/the-energy-sector-of-the-republic-of-tajikistan#:~:text=Tajik%20energy%20basis%20is%20hydropower%20%E2%80%93%20over%2095%20percent>.

<sup>85</sup> IHA Sustainability, "Driving Sustainability in Tajikistan and Central Asia." Hydropower Sustainability Council. (n.d.), retrieved October 13, 2023, from <https://www.hydropower.org/capacity-building-tajikistan>.

<sup>86</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.

<sup>87</sup> Asia-Plus, "Dushanbe-2 CHP Plant Directs Generated Electricity to the Country's Power Grid", (January 19, 2021), retrieved October 18, 2023, from <https://asiaplus.tj/info/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20210119/dushanbe-2-chp-plant-directs-generated-electricity-to-the-countrys-power-grid>.

<sup>88</sup> Asia-Plus, "Dushanbe-2 CHP Plant Directs Generated Electricity to the Country's Power Grid."

<sup>89</sup> Hofman, "Tajikistan- The People's Map of Global China."

<sup>90</sup> Farkhod Aminjonov et al., "BRI in Central Asia: Energy Connectivity Projects", OSCE Academy, (2019), retrieved October 19, 2023, from <https://osce-academy.net/en/tree/print/id/458#:~:text=The%20largest%20number%20of%20BRI,of%20the%20Central%20Asian%20states>.

<sup>91</sup> Hofman, "Tajikistan- The People's Map of Global China."

## Impacts of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on Trade Dynamics in Tajikistan

The Russia-Ukraine conflict had major ramifications for Tajikistan's economy. Key economic drivers, such as FDI, trade routes, partnerships, and remittances have undergone significant changes. As this issue impacts the economy and development trajectory of Tajikistan, three senior economists were asked how the conflict had impacted the economy of Tajikistan and what role China has played in navigating this complex economic landscape.

The first economist highlighted the initial economic disruptions in Tajikistan due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, particularly issues with liquidity and the temporary halt in the visa payment system as correspondent banks were mostly in Russia. Interestingly, the Chinese Union pay system remained functional. There was a notable dip in remittances from Tajik migrants in 2022, largely attributed to the depreciating Russian Ruble. An Asia Development Bank survey on migrants revealed that over half of Tajik migrants considered relocating from Russia for better job opportunities if they found them. Due to war-related disruptions, Tajikistan has been broadening its trade ties with other countries, particularly with China.

The second economist shed light on the shifting trade dynamics post 2022. European goods, particularly luxury products, saw declining demand as they were primarily routed through Russia. This decline was due to a combination of sanctions and logistical challenges. As a result, Tajik buyers depended more heavily on Chinese imports, making China a dominant trade route and partner. In 2022, Tajikistan's leading trade partners were Kazakhstan (25%), followed by China (23.9%), then Uzbekistan, Russia, and Turkey. Due to trade disruptions, Tajikistan sourced essential goods like wheat, sugar, and oil from alternative partners. One unique challenge highlighted was the temporary halt in gold sales necessitated by the need for certification proving non-Russian origins of the gold.

The third economist offered an optimistic view, noting that Tajikistan has not only navigated the economic challenges of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, but also achieved a current account surplus in 2022. This was credited to the increased inflow of remittances, which was almost 50 percent of the country's GDP, the appreciation of the Ruble, and to a lesser extent increased gold sales. The respondent pointed out that, while international financial institutions had a pessimistic view, the government's economic forecast was largely accurate. However, due to the Ruble's sharp depreciation in 2023, growth projections for the end of 2023 and 2024 might have to be negatively adjusted. Concerns were also raised about the trade imbalances with China and lack of economic spillover from Chinese investments.

The responses of the economists reveal the complexity of the economic situation in Tajikistan, with varying perspectives on debt-sustainability, the impact of the conflict, increasing trade dynamics with China, and macro-economic indicators. Common themes that all three economists agreed on are the economic impact of the war, which has turned out to be positive for Tajikistan in the short run, resulting in diversified trade routes and opening the way for new partnerships. The overreliance of the country on Russia is seen to be decreasing; however, reliance on China is increasing at a fast pace.

# SECURITY CHALLENGES AND COOPERATION BETWEEN TAJIKISTAN AND CHINA

The interviews offer interesting insights into Tajikistan's security challenges, mainly shaped by the evolving external security landscape. Security expert one, for instance, highlights the interconnectedness of security and development challenges and how external factors such as situation in neighbouring Afghanistan can impact the country. Two external factors that have significantly impacted Tajikistan are the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and the Russia-Ukraine conflict which have changed both the economic and security situations around Tajikistan. The presence of NATO forces on the other side of the border was a stabilizing factor, and after the withdrawal of NATO border security poses a great threat to Tajikistan as radical militants and groups gain more influence in northern Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup>

A development specialist also highlighted that a major security challenge for Tajikistan comes from Afghanistan as the countries were caught up in exchanging threats and deploying additional forces along their borders. The second key security challenge comes from the paramilitary forces, which Tajikistan unable to defeat alone. A further issue is the funding cuts from donor countries, which is ironic in the face of the increased challenges resulting from the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan as these used to control some parts of the border from the other side of the river. The respondent also thought that good cooperation between Central Asian states on Afghanistan prevented spillover effects to the wider region. In the face of both internal and external challenges, we can observe growing cooperation with China, which has led to an increase in security cooperation.<sup>93</sup>

China's security cooperation with Tajikistan holds significant importance due to their geographic proximity, shared borders, and border with Afghanistan. Since Tajikistan gained independence, Central Asian security has traditionally been under Russia's sphere of interest. China was primarily focused on economic cooperation and utilized the SCO to address non-traditional threats. The primary

<sup>92</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 1, September 28, 2023.

<sup>93</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

impetus for China-Central Asia security cooperation since the 1990s has been Beijing's interest in curbing any surge in Uyghur independence sentiments. This interest later evolved into a broader campaign against terrorism, separatism, and radicalism. Non-traditional threats from Afghanistan to Tajikistan were also an important issue due to the inability of the Afghan government to fully control the territory. The withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan further exacerbated the concerns over non-traditional threats.<sup>94</sup>

Since the 1990s, China and Tajikistan have held 53 bilateral security meetings, some of them on the East Turkistan Movement. Later, the partnership expanded to include military equipment, building of outposts and barracks, and joint military trainings.<sup>95</sup> On 31 August 2017, the cooperation evolved to include the establishment of a comprehensive strategic partnership, aimed at jointly combatting terrorism, separatism, religious extremism, international criminal groups, and drug trafficking. This involved deepening professional intelligence exchanges and bolstering communication in defence, security, and lately, law enforcement. This partnership illustrates the growing security relations between the two nations and may signal China's emerging role in Tajikistan's security domain.<sup>96</sup> Despite this, Russia continues to hold its dominant position in the region as the main security guarantor. China is hesitant to take over the role, but it is prepared to do so in case of incidents.

According to security expert two, another recent incidence of security cooperation has been focused on role of digital infrastructure and technological advancements in the context of security and development in Tajikistan. The overall implementation of digital infrastructure has been actively promoted by the government and many other donors. This expert thinks that the use of AI for security purposes is not a long way away as this technology could be useful in facial recognition, registration of IMEI numbers, etc. Tajikistan will likely work closely with both Chinese and Western companies that have developed such technologies.<sup>97</sup>

## Counterterrorism Cooperation

China interacts with Tajikistan bilaterally and via the SCO. The SCO was established in 2001 with the following initial members: China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The organization serves as the platform for cooperation between Russia and China on security matters in Central Asia and mainly concentrates on the struggle against non-state actors, or what China

<sup>94</sup> The Associated Press, "The Taliban Is Celebrating Its Takeover Now That The U.S. Withdrawal Is Complete." NPR, (August 31, 2021), retrieved October 5, 2023, from <https://www.npr.org/2021/08/30/103266612/taliban-afghanistan-american-forces-withdrawal>.

<sup>95</sup> Niva Yau, "China's Security Management towards Central Asia - Foreign Policy Research Institute." Foreign Policy Research Institute, (April 1, 2022), retrieved October 5, 2023, from <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/04/chinas-security-management-towards-central-asia/>.

<sup>96</sup> China Briefing, "China-Tajikistan: Bilateral Investment and Trade Ties", September 6, 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.

calls the three evils: terrorism, extremism, and religious extremism. Member states actively organize military exercises with scenarios aimed at combatting international terrorists and border-crossing cases and rotate the host country for each exercise.<sup>98</sup>

China has intensified its security footprint in Tajikistan in recent years, donating military equipment and kits, building military buildings, and conducting military drills. Since both countries are eager to fight against the three evils, it is worth looking at the dynamics of counterterrorism cooperation over the last year. It should be noted that China resorts to both multilateral and bilateral instruments to securitize and address threats from non-state actors and makes efforts to support Tajikistan in preventing any type of possible destabilization. Tajikistan and China have conducted only a few military exercises bilaterally, mainly with an agenda against terrorism and criminal groups (see Table 2). Nevertheless, the dynamic are changing and, in November of 2022, both countries agreed to conduct anti-terrorism military exercises at least once every two years.<sup>99</sup>

**Table 2. Joint Security exercises of China and Tajikistan 2002-2020<sup>100</sup>**

Tajikistan	China	Date	Location	Size (in personnel)	Agenda
Armed Forces	People's Liberation Army	August 2019	GBAO	1200 (580 Chinese)	Jointly eliminate armed terrorist group hiding in mountains
Armed Forces	People's Liberation Army	October 2016	GBAO	414	Jointly eliminate armed terrorist group
Special Police Force	Qiannan Special Police Force	June 2015	Dushanbe	(20 Chinese)	Jointly eliminate armed transnational criminal group
Armed Forces P	People's Liberation Army	September 2006	Khatlon region	450 (150 Chinese)	Terrorist captured Chinese workers in Tajikistan scenario

*Source: Table prepared by Niva Yau for Foreign Policy Research Institute*

<sup>98</sup> Alison J. K. Bailes and Pal Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," JSTOR, (2007), 1-2, retrieved October 5, 2023, from [www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep19208.7.pdf](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep19208.7.pdf).

<sup>99</sup> Asia-Plus, "Tajikistan, China Sign an Agreement on Conducting Joint Counter-Terrorism Drills," (October 13, 2023), retrieved October 16, 2023 from <https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/security/20231013/tajikistan-china-sign-an-agreement-on-conducting-joint-counter-terrorism-drills>.

<sup>100</sup> Niva Yau, "China's Security Management towards Central Asia- Foreign Policy Research Institute." p.51

## Border Security Cooperation

Border security cooperation has seen a recent spike, which has included the training of Tajik border troops; donation of equipment, arms, and vehicles; building of border facilities; and organization of joint trainings. In 2016 activities included the building of apartments for military personnel, military academies, and four border posts on the border area with Afghanistan.<sup>101</sup> In addition, China equipped its own border with Tajikistan (XUAR) with surveillance systems.<sup>102</sup>

The Tajik border with Afghanistan is considered to be the primary line which is potentially under threat by terrorists and radical groups from Afghanistan. China is concerned that, in the case of such scenario in Tajikistan, there is a threat to its Western borders. Moreover, the stability of the region is important for China's BRI plans. Tajik-Chinese border cooperation was given a special attention after a rumour that a military outpost was built in Murghab.<sup>103</sup> However, during an interview with one of the security experts, our respondent mention that it was planned via trilateral coordination between Tajikistan, China and Afghanistan and built in 2014 to deter waves of terrorists who had tried to access China from Afghanistan. Since the Taliban seized power, only Tajik and Chinese personnel are stationed in the outpost, with the outpost being entirely under control of Tajikistan with only lower rank Chinese officers.

In terms of arms transfers and sales, Russia still dominates and remains the main partner within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) framework.<sup>104</sup> According to SIPRI, within the 1991-2022 period China had arms transfers in 4 Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) while Russia had these in 144.<sup>105</sup> TIV is the common unit of the SIPRI's methodology for measuring the volume of deliveries of major conventional weapons and components, and is based upon military potential, rather than financial value.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, China has donated patrol vehicles (2018) and military kits and equipment to Tajikistan.<sup>107</sup> On the other hand, this border security cooperation is a contribution to China's infrastructure project safety (see Figure 5).

<sup>101</sup> Gerry Shih, "In Central Asia's Forbidding Highlands, a Quiet Newcomer: Chinese Troops", *Washington Post*, (February 19, 2019), retrieved October 15, 2023, from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/in-central-asias-forbidding-highlands-a-quiet-newcomer-chinese-troops/2019/02/18/78d4a8d0-1e62-11e9-a759-2b8541bbbe20_story.html).

<sup>102</sup> 中国与塔吉克斯坦边防军人联合巡逻·在边境布设多重传感器\_澎湃防务\_澎湃新闻. *The Paper*, accessed October 11, 2023, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_1799172](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1799172)

<sup>103</sup> Eurasianet, "Tajikistan: Secret Chinese Base Becomes Slightly Less Secret", (September 23, 2020), retrieved October 12, 2023, from <https://eurasianet.org/tajikistan-secret-chinese-base-becomes-slightly-less-secret>.

<sup>104</sup> Bradley Jardine, and Edward Lemon, "Kennan Cable No. 52: In Russia's Shadow: China's Rising Security Presence in Central Asia." *Wilson Center*, (May 2020). retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/kennan-cable-no-52-russias-shadow-chinas-rising-security-presence-central-asia>.

<sup>105</sup> SIPRI, "Importer/Exporter TIV Tables", (N.d.), retrieved October 15, 2023, from <https://armstrade.sipri.org/armstrade/page/values.php>.

<sup>106</sup> The SIPRI methodology is a system for measuring the volume of deliveries of major conventional weapons and components using a common unit – the trend indicator value (TIV), which is intended to reflect its military potential rather than its financial value.

<sup>107</sup> Jardine, and Lemon, "Kennan Cable No. 52: In Russia's Shadow: China's Rising Security Presence in Central Asia."

**Figure 5. The Pamir Highway<sup>108</sup>**

Source: Map by The Third Pole

<sup>108</sup> The Third Pole, "Pamir Highway Upgrade in Tajikistan a Test of Green BRI Guidelines." The Third Pole, (September 26, 2022), retrieved October 12, 2023, from <https://www.thethirdpole.net/en/regional-cooperation/pamir-highway-upgrade-tajikistan-test-green-bri-guidelines/>.



# IMPACT OF CHINESE INVESTMENTS IN THE SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF TAJIKISTAN

Chinese investments in Tajikistan's economic and security spheres as presented in previous chapters are increasingly playing a role in the country's sustainable growth and stability. To incorporate local perspectives on this issue, the insights of Tajik development and security experts are presented and used to discuss the impacts of bilateral relations and investments.

On this question both security experts acknowledge the positive macroeconomic impacts of Chinese investments in Tajikistan. However, they also highlight the limitations, particularly in terms of microeconomic development and the long-term alignment of interests between China and Tajikistan. Security expert one assesses Chinese investments and security cooperation as overall positive in the short-term. However, this respondent thinks that Tajikistan's plans to build large industrial projects to drive industrialization might be difficult to accomplish. While the short-term goals of both countries align, in the long term they might sharply diverge as China needs to maintain Tajikistan as a market where it can sell its goods and as a continued source of raw materials. The long-term priorities of both countries would better align if China would invest in improving the private sector of Tajikistan to create jobs and to make it more competitive. While China and Tajikistan are primarily focussed on macroeconomics, Chinese investments are not significantly contributing to living standards or private sector development.<sup>109</sup>

Security expert two thinks that China's investment in security and overall political rapprochement in some sense has boosted the diversification of Tajikistan's security-related ties with other countries. China, as part of its "wolf warrior" policy, is promoting its image as a global contender taking part in resolving international security crises in the Middle East, Ukraine, and Africa. Tajikistan itself, now having several options for security cooperation, can capitalize on diverse sources of military aid and expertise.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 1, September 28, 2023.

<sup>110</sup> Key informant interview – security expert 2, October 5, 2023.

The development specialists provide a contrasting view on the impact of Chinese investments in Tajikistan. While the first development specialist sees China as largely beneficial, development specialist number two casts a more critical eye, focusing on the nature of the implications of these investments on Tajikistan's long-term economic growth. The first development specialist thinks that overall China's growing investments in Tajikistan, especially in the areas of connectivity, trade, and strengthening of borders, have been largely beneficial, and that the scale of investment has played crucial role in positively transforming aspects of Tajikistan's economic and security landscape.<sup>111</sup>

The second development specialist sees Chinese investments in Tajikistan as misaligned with the country's long-term growth aspirations. In the short-term the cooperation is beneficial as China is building up the connectivity of the landlocked Tajikistan and receiving a share of the extractive industry. These investments are primarily extractive and do not create value chains or production facilities which aid the aspirations of Tajikistan to industrialize its economy. Moreover, the indebtedness is also a concern, as the majority of Chinese investments come in the form of credits and loans rather than FDI, which would have been a more sustainable and beneficial model for the country.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Key informant interview – Development specialist 1, August 22, 2023.

<sup>112</sup> Key informant interview- Development specialist 2, August 31, 2023.

# CONCLUSION

The paper touched upon many important topics concerning the security and development of Tajikistan, the motivations behind China's investments, the nature of economic cooperation and security challenges, and the impact of the investments. Each of these chapters could be a dedicated research topic, and the chapters and interviews have been condensed to fit the themes into the discussion. As China's security-development nexus policies are a topic of interest and discussion for policy makers, think tanks and international organizations, this paper was an effort to bring an example from Central Asia through localized perspectives.

In the first chapter we explored the nexus between security and development, emphasizing their changing definitions and roles in shaping global policy. Both the concepts of security and development are undergoing transformations as new and old challenges need to be resolved. Security-development nexus policies, as discussed in the chapter, have not fulfilled their stated objectives to alleviate poverty, nor have they adequately address the root causes of insecurity in developing countries.

Many developed countries are still using checklist/prescriptive approaches to development and security, which is not rational and has led to many policy failures affecting populations. The use of the nexus as biopolitical approach where a donor dictates how life should be lived does not work in today's context, as policy failures, which left countries in difficult circumstances, indicate even through recent events in Afghanistan and the Sahel region. Instead, a mix of proven technical and adaptive approaches should be used in Central Asia, with considerations made for local cultural norms, identities, religions, and societal structures, in order to increase the success of development and security efforts. In the present, with the return of the role played by geoeconomics, a donor's best tools are their soft power and adaptiveness, as unproductive approaches will negatively affect the popularity and perception of the security-development approach and donor countries implementing it.

China has emerged as a prominent actor in the security-development nexus, offering an alternative to the Western model through its South-South cooperation framework and BRI. Just as in the Western conceptualization of the security-development nexus, China views economic development as central to minimizing armed conflict and maintaining peace. However, China has adopted a flexible approach, and does not export communism, as it understands that it is not appealing to most developing countries. Instead, it has offered infrastructure development, trade, and economic development as keys to ensuring security. One of the reasons why China's approach has been possible is because of the narrative

of the North exploiting the South, with China highlighting the gaps and offering aid with fewer conditionalities. However, the relationship with China as a donor is not without challenges, as concerns about debt-sustainability, imbalances in trade, and misalignment of the priorities in the long term exist. Also, China's analogy of the BRI with the Sinocentric Order poses several serious challenges in the form of heightened geopolitical tensions threatening the autonomy of neighbours and increasing fears of becoming too dependent on China. While historical analogies could offer insights, they often misinterpret and oversimplify the current realities.

In Tajikistan, China's strategic interests intersect with the regional security considerations, economic development, and connectivity. The relationship between Tajikistan and China has reached the level of strategic partnership, and now covers a diverse spectrum of areas including political, economic, security cooperation, and social spheres. While previously the Chinese security-development nexus in Tajikistan was dominated by development, since the Russia-Ukraine war China has been slowly expanding its security footprint in the region as it is concerned that Russia, as the traditional security guarantor, is preoccupied elsewhere.

Local experts provided valuable insights on the primary motivations behind China's investments in Tajikistan. China's increasing engagement in Tajikistan is driven by a complex interplay of strategic, economic, and geopolitical considerations. The significance of Tajikistan as a logistical hub was highlighted, and the growing focus on infrastructure development noted as a sign that China is interested in the flow of goods, extraction of resources, and regional stability. Furthermore, the country's support for and accession to numerous China-led initiatives is driven by deepening economic interdependence and the critical role of Tajikistan in regional security.

This analysis has illustrated that the relationship between Tajikistan and China is deeply embedded within the security-development nexus. China's engagement in the construction of roads, extractive industry, power transmission lines, and other infrastructure is not just an economic venture, but part of its wider regional and geopolitical initiatives. For Tajikistan it is an opportunity to resolve its bottlenecks in infrastructure such as roads, energy, and mining to improve its economic productivity, expand trade, and address basic needs in order to create higher quality of life in the country. The recent Central Asia-China Summit in Xi'an further expanded the commitments with new projects to enhance cross-border trade. In this case structural dependence of the strategic sectors such as mining are under heightened risk, and diversification of the stakeholders in the sector could offset these concerns. Additionally, the Russia-Ukraine conflict has impacted Tajikistan's economy, triggering a shift in trade routes, FDI, and exports and imports. This chain of events has increased dependence of Tajikistan on China even more.

The security experts interviewed named two significant changes in security around Tajikistan influenced by external developments: the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which forced Tajikistan to diversify its security cooperation, seeking assurances from Iran and China. Although Russia remains the main security guarantor in Tajikistan, its position has been weakened as it is primarily focused on Ukraine. As China is interested in regional stability, it has been actively increasing military collaboration and contributions. Additionally, China's diplomatic efforts and willingness to invest in Afghanistan is a contributing factor in easing tensions and deterring disruptions along the BRI.

Both the literature and local experts acknowledge the positive macroeconomic impacts of Chinese investments in Tajikistan. China's growing investments and their scale, especially in terms of connectivity, trade, and strengthening borders, are largely seen as beneficial for the economic and security dynamics. However, local experts have also cast a critical eye on the nature of the relations, particularly in terms of their excessive focus on macroeconomic indicators and extractive activities, which are misaligned with the country's long-term growth aspirations as the investments do not create value chains and boost the industrialization of the economy of Tajikistan.

## Policy Recommendations

1. **Reassess the use of prescriptive approaches:** Given the evolving nature of security and development, there is a pressing need to adopt a mixed method of proven successful technical and adaptive approaches. The checklist or prescriptive approach to development and security have shown limitations and failures. Strategies should be tailored to specific local contexts, recognizing existing local norms, identities, religions, and societal structures. During times of escalating geoeconomic competition, a developed country's best tools are its soft power and adaptiveness, as unproductive approaches will negatively affect the popularity of the security-development approach and the donor country implementing it.
2. **Diversify economic and security ties:** Tajikistan is on the right path of diversifying its economic and security partnerships. This can hedge against structural dependence on China in the mining sector and against overreliance on single partner in other sectors. This establishes a multi-vector approach and strategic leverage in safeguarding county's sovereignty and autonomy.
3. **Prioritize sustainable investments:** Rather than focusing predominantly on macroeconomic indicators, investments should also be diverted to more inclusive avenues of development, such as the creation of new

value chains and jobs, boosting local industrialization, and improving living standards. Recognizing the short-term benefits and long-term implications of these engagements will enable decision-makers to assess and craft more informed partnerships, with consideration for immediate needs and long-term aspirations. For example, in addition to focusing on the extraction of raw materials, investments should also be aimed at building capacity to process minerals locally before export.

4. **Create room for cooperation:** Tajikistan, as a country where both development models are currently being used, is benefiting by not aligning with one or the other. In fact, the differences between the development focusses of the Western (soft development) and Chinese approaches (hard infrastructure projects) creates room for dialogue and cooperation between different actors and models of development.
5. **Strengthen Regional Collaboration:** In the light of recent geopolitical changes, more intensified regional collaboration should be pursued, especially on security, trade, and infrastructure development. This would prepare the regional actors for potential shifts in geopolitical dynamics and reduce their vulnerability to external shocks.

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