

Escalating Tensions: Chinese Interests in Pakistan Under Siege

On 26 Mar 2024, an incident unfolded in Shangla, where a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Chinese engineers en route to the Dasu Hydropower Project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. This tragic event resulted in the deaths of five Chinese and one Pakistani citizen, echoing the disturbing patterns of the 2021 attack aimed at Chinese nationals. The Shangla attack signifies a worrying trend as it marks the third major assault on Chinese interests in Pakistan within a single week.

- **The Motives Behind the Attacks:** These assaults are orchestrated by a mix of separatist and Islamist factions, each with distinct motives but united in their opposition to China's economic ventures in Pakistan. The overarching aim is to destabilize and obstruct China's economic ambitions, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a crucial component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
- **Government's Swift Response:** In response to the escalating threats, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif promptly called for a joint investigation on 27 Mar 2024, underscoring the critical need for cooperation between Pakistan and China to address and mitigate these security challenges.
- **Potential Perpetrators:** The ambiguity surrounding the perpetrators adds to the security dilemma, with groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) being prime suspects. These organizations are not only intent on halting CPEC's progress but also seek to challenge China's broader geopolitical influence.
- **A Historical Pattern of Hostility:** Since 2004, Pakistan has witnessed a series of attacks targeting Chinese interests, ranging from attempted kidnappings of Chinese diplomats to bombings at key Chinese-affiliated sites. These incidents highlight a persistent threat to China's presence in the region.
- **Global Surge in Militancy:** The rise in attacks on Chinese interests in Pakistan is part of a larger global trend, with militant groups expanding their operational scope. This includes the recent activities of Hamas in the Middle East and the Islamic State-Khorasan Province's (ISKAP) assaults in Russia, signalling a broader shift in terror tactics.
- **Implications for China's Economic Plans:** The recurring attacks pose significant risks to China's economic projects in Pakistan. However, China's track record of resilience and protective measures may help safeguard its interests and ensure the continuation of its economic agenda.