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The Wedge Strategy of Debt-Trap Diplomacy: Navigating Great Power Competition in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

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Abstract

This research article examines the "Debt-Trap Diplomacy" (DTD) and its impact the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) it asks whether DTD functions primarily as an objective economic diagnosis or as a discursive instrument deployed within broader geopolitical competition. Employing a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design grounded in Critical Social Science, the study triangulates the Critical Discourse Analysis of Western policy texts with thematic data from elite practitioner interviews. Findings reveal that the DTD narrative is strategically deployed as a "wedge strategy" by external actors to constrain Pakistan's foreign policy and destabilize its strategic alliance with Beijing. Furthermore, a comparative fiscal analysis demonstrates that Pakistan's debt distress stems from indigenous structural pathologies and Western multilateral conditionalities, not Chinese project finance. The study concludes that this discursive trap severely erodes Pakistan's functional sovereignty and recommends evidence-based strategic communication to reclaim economic and diplomatic autonomy in a multipolar world.

Keywords: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Debt-Trap Diplomacy, Critical Discourse Analysis. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Geopolitics of Development Finance.

Introduction

At the dawn of the twenty-first century, global relations suffered systemic changes and shifts in power from the unipolarity of the post-Cold War period to competitive global systems where new regions emerge on the basis of geo-economic and geo-strategic significance. The absence of a unipolar power to lead has resulted in systemic instability, a transformation of global relations, and a diversification in the means of political power and influence beyond traditional methods (Rashid, Ikram, & Naeem, 2023). The rise of the People's Republic of China is in the center of the reconfiguration of global geopolitics. China has focused on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as its primary tool to expand its geo-economic and political power. In addition to its infrastructure initiative, this reflects China's strategy about a new global governance framework centered on geoeconomic influence, with the purpose of integrating key trade routes, stabilizing border areas, and creating access to key markets and resources (Khan, Ijaz, & Yasmin, 2023).

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The Belt and Road Initiative has been actively debated due to the extensive nature of the ‘debt-trap diplomacy' notion, though it has professed a benign goal of ‘mutually beneficial development' and ‘shared prosperity'. The term started to become significant after the year 2017, when it was asserted that a creditor country intentionally offers loans for economically unfeasible projects in strategically important debtor countries. The ultimate goal, as those of this theory would argue, is not to make money, but to secure political leverage which can be translated into strategic assets or compliance in foreign policy if the debtor state inevitably defaults (Samaranayake, 2019).

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the flagship projects of the BRI and the most appropriate case that can be analyzed for the validity and impact of the ‘debt-trap narrative' (Naseer, Wang, & Ali, 2022). Established in 2015, with more than $60 billion spent, CPEC is all about energy production, infrastructure construction and deep sea port of Gwadar. Pakistan-China has been termed as an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership" and CPEC has been taking the partnership to a higher level to link the economic fate of the two countries (Small, 2015).

These years 2017 from 2024 are a crucial for a systemic exploration of this Debt Trap Diplomacy. In these years, Pakistan's economy was beset with a lot of problems, it was subjected to a lot of restraints from the multilateral lenders such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the geopolitical competition increased. During this time, the debt-trap narrative came into vogue in the international media and policy circles, and hence it is imperative to evaluate the impact on Pakistan's economic sovereignty and foreign policy flexibility. The objective of this study is to not just remain in the narration, but also give a realistic picture of the geopolitical implications of the CPEC financing on Pakistan-China relations.

The Origin of 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy'

The term 'debt-trap diplomacy' (DTD) helps to describe various aspects of debt trap and their character of sovereign debt vulnerability. The traditional approach to debt crises examines commercial risk, where it fails to remain sustainable due to domestic causes such as poor fiscal management, low tax to GDP ratio, corruption or structural economic paralysis (Hasan, 1999; Shah & Rafique, 2023).

The ‘debt-trap' narrative, on the contrary, adds ‘strategic trap' to the mix. Rather, it implies that lending is made with the deliberate evil intent to make the borrower dependent on the lender for good and gain; that is, for control over a strategic trade route or political leverage (Azam, 2024). It is seen that DTD brings the debate on policy to one of the failures in Pakistan's economic policy, and it is more effective just when China is engaged in foreign policy aggression.

The historical background of the definition goes back to early 2017, when Indian geo-strategist Brahma Chellaney took these concerns and turned them into an integrated geopolitical concept (Chellaney, 2017). The idea's rhetorical foundation was the 2017 lease of Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port (Jones & Hameiri, 2020). While many scholars have documented that the lease was a desperate measure on Sri Lanka's part to get back their Western sovereign bonds, and not a debt-for-equity swap as caused by a Chinese default (Brautigam, 2020; Moramudali & Panduwawala, 2024), the "Hambantota Precedent" acted as the foundation of the global narrative. The key principles of this research opacity, strategic targeting, and asset seizure were formalized by influential western think tanks and government administrations and became a multi-faceted geopolitical weapon (Parker & Chefitz, 2018).

For Pakistan, the narrative operates as an effective form of hybrid threat. By branding the port of Gwadar as a future Chinese naval base to be bought through a "debt trap," external powers seek to warn the Global South from the devastating impact of China’s "predatory lending" on national sovereignty. The stated purpose is to delegitimize the BRI and force recipient states like Pakistan to disentangle from their relationship with Beijing, thereby constraining their policy autonomy (Shahid, 2025; Arsalan, 2025).

Theoretical Frameworks: Discussing DTD as a Discursive Weapon

In order to go beyond a purely empiricist debate about debt sustainability, this research utilizes a post-positivist approach. It argues that the "debt trap diplomacy" phenomenon is not just a financial phenomenon, but a created geopolitical reality.

Critical Discourse Analysis and 'Regimes of Truth'

In Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) language is considered as a social practice (Fairclough, 2013). Discourse isn't just a mirror of reality; it's a builder of reality. In International Relations, discourse is a tool of dominant powers to create 'regimes of truth', 'systems of power' which define what is accepted as 'true', 'rational' and 'legitimate' (Foucault, 1980). The external actors anthropomorphize state as a biological threat by calling Chinese finance "predatory" or "opaque”. This particular way of presenting the debate on the rates of economic “interest” assumes a moral dichotomy between good and evil. CDA exposes the DTD narrative as a disciplinary mechanism to police the limits of the global financial system, to make any model that challenges Western financial hegemony illegitimate.

Strategic Narratives and Foreign Policy Constraint

CDA breaks down how language works at a very micro level, but the bigger picture of geopolitical language can be seen through Strategic Narratives. For Miskimmon, O'Loughlin and Roselle (2013), strategic narratives are one way in which political actors create shared meaning and influence domestic and international actors' behavior. The DTD thesis is a System Narrative about attacking the international system by a revisionary power. In Pakistan, this poses a conundrum of two options and the reactionary state is finding itself on the losing side. Moreover, it serves as an Identity Narrative where China is portrayed as the "Predator", the West as the "Protector" and Pakistan as the "Victim". This building undermines the agency of the Pakistani state, and raises the domestic political price of accommodation with China (Khakwani & Irfan, 2025).

Framing Theory and Sovereignty

Framing Theory is able to understand and perceive the significance of the Debt Trap Diplomacy in structuring reality for certain hegemonic ends. Entman's (1993) definition of framing is to select some of the perceived reality and make it more salient in order to lead to a particular causal interpretation. The DTD frame selectively targets the danger of CPEC and systematically obscures the structural context of Pakistan's historic energy crisis and structural dependence on Western finance. The DTD frame is an attempt to bury the “lack of alternatives” and mask the ‘conditionalities’ of the IMF (Sial, Jafri & Khaliq, 2023), in Pakistan's borrowing from China is a case of irrationality. The "defense of sovereignty" advanced by the officials of the outside world, therefore, is a "defense of the current structure of the world's financial power hierarchy.

Research Methodology: A Sequential Exploratory Design

A mixed method research approach is used to portray the complex duality of the "debt-trap diplomacy" (DTD) narrative analysis, both of material facts and subjective form. In positivism, there is one, objective reality, which is subject to universal laws, and is influenced by quantifiable factors which do not bring to light the strategic motivations behind geopolitical messages. This study therefore is very much anchored in the epistemology of Critical Social Science (CSS). According to CSS, social reality is not a fixed reality but one that is actively constructed and shaped by hidden power structures and historical conditioning, and also aims to unmask the illusions that conceal the social reality of political relations. Therefore, the narrative of the DTD is not looked at as a financial indicator but as a "regime of truth" that is used as a disciplinary tool.

This is to be investigated systematically using a Sequential Exploratory Mixed-Methods Design. This scheme is realized in two complimentary phases:

- Phase 1: “In-depth Qualitative Exploration and Discourse Mapping” involved systematic retrieval and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of secondary data comprising macroeconomic archives of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), records from the Ministry of Finance and institutional reports of Western banks, as well as official foreign policy statements from 2017 to 2024.
- Phase 2: Structured Expert Elicitation: Primary data was gathered in the form of asynchronous structured qualitative interviews with the 12 subject matter experts that make up the elite panel, building upon the discursive patterns identified during Phase 1. The target population, which was limited to practicing Geopolitical Analysts, Economists and Academic Scholars specializing in Pakistan-China relations and global development finance, was selected through purposive sampling technique which is a suitable method for identifying certain types of cases for further investigation of a complex social problem.

Primary data was analyzed using a comprehensive thematic analysis framework consisting of six steps, resulting in the final analytical categories that spanned the macroeconomic realities with geopolitical framing of the narrative. The triangulation of secondary text discourse with the text of the elite practitioner insures the high internal validity and confirmability.

Descriptive Analysis and Research Findings

In order to understand how a strategic narrative limits state actions it is important to examine how it becomes hegemonic. The results of the primary expert data thematic analysis support this and demonstrate that DTD was not identified through empirical economic data but was instead purposely created as a discursive instrument. The narrative transformed quickly and aggressively, with the deliberate removal of economic texture and setting to serve as a blunt political tool in the context of other Indo pacific strategy frameworks.

The strategic weaponization of the Sri Lankan Hambantota Port case is at the heart of this narrative institutionalization. Despite major differences in the financial architectures, expert consensus indicates a huge disconnect between the economic reality and geopolitical framing: Hambantota is an emotional lodestone, and a 'symbolic reference point influencing global perceptions' of CPEC.

Hambantota was essentially a sovereign commercial loan with limited potential for revenue generation, while CPEC is a huge and diversified portfolio of concessional loans, government to government agreements and private sector investments in energy projects under Independent Power Producer (IPP) contracts. However, the world's view of the 99-year Hambantota lease was sold as indisputable evidence of strategic asset theft. Taking CPEC for Hambantota, external actors managed to sidestep the need to actually demonstrate that the loans were predatory and thus succeeded in building the DTD narrative as a political creation. Hambantota acts more as a "perception precedent" not as a structural analogue to CPEC.

Structural Reality vs. Discursive Illusion: Deconstructing the Economic Trap

The success of the DTD is based on a fear of the loss of sovereignty, that is, the fear of a foreign creditor taking over your territory. But when Pakistan's real fiscal framework is put under the lens of economist forensic, it becomes clear that Pakistan's fiscal problems stem from endogenous structural pathologies, and not from external Chinese lending.

It is often suggested that Pakistan was "fooled" by China into taking on bad debt in 2015 due to the DTD theory. Often it's suggested that the Pakistani economy was "lured" by China to take on bad debt by the theory of DTD in 2015. But history has a different story to tell as macro-economic data has been clearly found to be in a state of collapse even before the commencement of the CPEC. Historically, Pakistan has been plagued by a chronic "twin deficit" pathology: budget deficits, which have not been matched with GDP growth, despite the level of taxes which has remained stagnant at around 9-10% of GDP for the last 20 years, and current account deficits, which have been caused by the failure to diversify exports.

Moreover, the so called ‘circular debt' in energy sector, which is often confused with liabilities under CPEC in the public discourse, was born in 2006 and had swelled to Rs. By 2013, a year before CPEC was signed, it is estimated that 480 billion would be reached. All these are local factors such as transmission and distribution losses, inefficiency in recovery of bills, and lack of government budgeting for subsidy.

China's bilateral debt is approximately 22% of the country's external debt stock (around $134 billion in 2025), while the rest of the external debt is held by global organizations, Western allies, and private commercial markets. According to those experts, the Pakistanis are playing a game of their own design and that "trap" is not the primary cause of Pakistan's debt problem, as other contributors, such as the country's mismanagement over decades, also play a role, as the experts in the study affirmed.

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Legislative Conditionality vs. Commercial Binding

The study made a comparative analysis of two financial architectures, one from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which is based on a multilateral "conditionality" approach and the other from China, which is based on the bilateral "project finance" approach to identify the real threats on Pakistan's functional sovereignty.

According to the experts, there is a clear choice between project finance and structural forceSDAdness by the State. The Chinese CPEC loans are mainly revenue-backed infrastructure loans and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) based on IPP policy, which do not include any direct governance restructuring clauses. The main limitation of CPEC is the "commercial binding" which means that contracts for procurement and construction are given to Chinese state owned enterprises, thereby reducing the potential of local industrial multiplier effects, but without taking over the state's macroeconomic policy.

By contrast, Western multilateral lending is based on "legislative conditionality" which stipulates that, before providing liquidity, macroeconomic structures must be altered, subsidies must be phased out, and fiscal reform must be implemented. IMF conditions often impose conditions including the privatization of state-owned enterprises as well as domestic social contracts, including the sharp rise in electricity prices. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Amendment Act 2021 was the most significant amendment to the functional sovereignty of the state in the context of the IMF model. The Act, passed under harsh IMF pressure under the label of "prior action" for the revival of bailout, had given absolute autonomy to the central bank, thereby blocking the Pakistani government's ability to develop the country without the aid of the IMF.

The irony of this data is that the Western discourse in this case accuses Chinese funding of breaching Pakistan's territorial sovereignty yet, the Bretton Woods institutions, the Western dominated ones, blatantly demand and enact legislative and macro-economic surrender. Western finance is still in a "trap," commercial and diplomatic finance in China is still in "trap.

The "Wedge Strategy" and Conversational Pressure

After identifying the constructed nature of the “debt-trap diplomacy” (DTD) narrative, it is necessary to explore how it has been strategically used. The presence of primary data gathered from the elite practitioners clearly substantiates the weaponization and use of DTD politics as a "wedge strategy" by the external actors to create rift between Pakistan and China in the context of “all-weather strategic cooperative partnership”.

The strategy is implemented via three main channels:

- Elite Signaling: Indirect approach towards trying to sway the policymakers with respect to alarming the loss of the country's sovereignty.
- Public Opinion Shaping: To boost the media narratives that CPEC is a neo-colonial effort instead of a developmental initiative, to create doubt and seeds of doubt among the locals about China's intentions.
- Strategic Alignment Pressure: Making economic cooperation with China an irreconcilable conflict with western financial cooperation.

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This wedge approach would also be effective because it would give the utility to force a hostile state to a defensive posture without the military force or direct economic sanction. The story creates enormous “conversational pressure,” limiting diplomatic latitude. When deepening Chinese involvement is directly tied to the issue of debt sustainability, the international community increases the reputational risk of China's greater engagement. It creates a hard "balancing dilemma" for Islamabad, who must constantly try to balance its strategic relationship with Beijing with its important ties to Western financial institutions. The discourse is also a "siege narrative" in which the international media and power centers narrative Pakistan's domestic issues in a simplified manner so as to deliberately restrict its agency in international relations. In the overall equation, external actors are able to shape the dynamics of the diplomatic dialogue by constantly framing Pakistan's diplomacy in terms of the "trap".

Results and Conclusion

A strategic narrative's ultimate goal is to change the behavior of the material it is designed to alter. The relentless need to rebut DTD charges has created extreme bureaucratic tension between both countries and pushed the Pakistani state apparatus into a defensive position.

Through the thematic analysis of practitioner testimonies, it is found that this defensive stance appears in extreme forms of material obstacles: increased bureaucratic apprehension, delayed approvals, greater transparency requirements to satisfy external critics and decreased investor confidence. The defensive diplomacy has created an environment of hesitation to communicate openly, and a lack of expansion of bold project planning, due to the focus on highly advanced aspects of CPEC Phase II, including industrial cooperation, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and agriculture.

The repeated criticism forces Pakistani policymakers to explain CPEC over and over again, which makes them reluctant to do projects because of that. The story does much to ease the pressure on the pace of economic integration between Islamabad and Beijing, which can be used to lessen the emphasis on the execution of projects and more on 'debunking debt-trap diplomacy' accusations. This self-imposed restriction is indicative of the fact that the strategic narrative does a job as good as direct sanctions do restricts the administrative momentum of a large-scale geoeconomic project.

The Erosion of Independent Economic Decision-Making

In the 21st century, sovereignty is not (usually) violated by territorial conquest but by the strong constraint on policy options. The distinction between Westphalian (territorial) sovereignty and interdependence (functional) sovereignty is found in the empirical data which shows that Pakistan's formal territorial sovereignty is intact, but its functional sovereignty is being undermined by the DTD narrative frame.

The geopolitical use of the debt trap rhetoric is itself an invisible tie. The narrative is used by external actors to enforce quantitative restrictions on Pakistan, and to weaponize reputational risk and the structural dominance of western financial institutions. This continuous international pressure puts autonomous economic judgment under pressure, and forces Pakistan to change its own domestic fiscal and monetary policies, popular perception, and conform to the expectations of the western donors, even if the policies are not in the best interests of Pakistan's economy to avoid any censure.

A strong CPEC demonstration of the interaction of financial systems of the West and East took place during the economy crisis of Pakistan in 2023-2024. While Pakistan was going for an IMF bailout to avert default, the IMF put a crucial condition – renegotiating power purchase agreements (PPAs) to cut the circular debt – particularly pressuring Pakistan to focus on Chinese IPPs and cut the dollar indexed returns for CPEC. This put Pakistan in a "sovereignty vice". The IMF hinted that it would suspend bailout funds if the contracts of the energy sector were not fulfilled and China said that contracts are sacrosanct thereby threatening to cancel CPEC Phase II. In the end, Pakistan's only solution to stay afloat was to roll over its debt with China for $2 billion to buy time from the IMF.

This episode reveals the very essence of the DTD narrative, which is that the West is the main driver of sovereignty issues when in fact it was the IMF imposing energy policy regulations on Pakistan, forcing breach of sovereign contracts, and China being the one that saved the country from default. The "trap" that Pakistan has fallen into is not that Chinese assets are being taken over but that the Pakistani economy is being so extensively managed by the IMF that it was not able to honor commitments to its strategic partner without Western approval. The discursive trap has been effective in sidetracking the attention from the actual, contemporary appropriation of Pakistan's economic sovereignty by the Bretton Woods institutions, essentially accepting the fact that in the age of Great Power politics coercion takes place through discourse and sovereignty is lost through narrative entrapment.

Reframing the Discourse: The Geopolitical Myth Exposed

In the twenty first century, there has been a giant shift from the unipolar American hegemony to multipole geoeconomic reality. The main driver of this change is China's Belt and Road Initiative and its flagship component, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). At the same time, the narrative of “debt-trap diplomacy” (DTD) has been spreading with aggression on the global scene. The aim of this study was to systematically deconstruct the DTD narrative, and to question this as an objective economic diagnosis.

Empirical triangulation of Secondary Data Analysis with Primary Textual Data from elite practitioners clearly unravels the economic disguise of the DTD narrative. The results corroborate the political nature of the discourse of DTD, as opposed to its being an economically observable model. The idea, which started out as local criticism in 2017, was then institutionalized and disseminated into a world policy framework by western state departments and think tanks, while emphasizing the symbolic and out-of-context weaponization of the Hambantota Port case. This "narrative" virality managed to replace empirical proof with geopolitical fear.

Moreover, it is important to note that the structural analysis of Pakistan's macroeconomic realities shows that its fiscal woes have historical roots in indigenous vulnerabilities (inclusive of a consistently weak tax base and the high level of circular debt in the energy sector) and a continued reliance on Western multilateral loans. Lending for CPEC infrastructure projects is not the primary factor of Pakistan's sovereign insolvency. Most crucially, this discursive trap has its

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material costs, which are revealed by the data. The sovereignty of territories is intact, but Pakistan has lost functional sovereignty to an unprecedented level. The continuous international pressure has compelled the Pakistani bureaucratic machinery to adopt a defensive posture, thus reducing the pace of CPEC Phase II and severely limiting the autonomy of the Pakistani government in multilateral financial negotiations. Pakistan is not in a Chinese economic trap, but is rather in a western discursive trap—a kind of regime of truth to penalize the state and restrict its geoeconomic freedom.

Policy Recommendations: Breaking the Discursive Trap

Because the DTD narrative operates as a tool of statecraft rather than a reflection of economic reality, Pakistan must reorient its own statecraft accordingly. To reclaim discursive and functional sovereignty, Pakistan's foreign policy must prioritize strategic international public relations and break the narrative tether through evidence-based countermeasures.

- **Strategic Communication and Evidence-Based Counternarratives:** The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the CPEC Authority must shift from reactive mitigation to proactive narrative engineering. It is recommended that the Ministry of Finance publish an annual, highly publicized "Comparative Sovereign Debt Report". This document should explicitly compare the terms, interest rates, and conditions of CPEC infrastructure loans with those of the Paris Club and the International Monetary Fund. By providing transparent, empirical evidence that highlights the structural rigor of Western multilateral financing versus Chinese project-specific financing, Pakistan can scientifically dismantle the DTD narrative on the global stage.

- **Institutionalizing the Counternarrative:** Pakistan must harness its academic and think-tank resources to generate peer-reviewed literature that challenges Western hegemonic discourse. The Higher Education Commission should sponsor joint Sino-Pakistani research consortiums dedicated to South-South economic cooperation frameworks, aiming to gradually shift the academic paradigm away from Washington-centric concepts of development finance.

- **Enhancing Financial Autonomy and Diversification:** To immunize itself structurally against conversational pressure in multilateral negotiations, Pakistan must decrease its absolute dependence on Bretton Woods institutions. The state must proactively engage with emerging multipolar financial systems, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank. By diversifying its lenders of last resort, Pakistan can significantly limit the leverage Western institutions hold over its foreign policy.

- **Domestic Governance and Fiscal Resilience:** External narratives only gain traction when internal weaknesses persist. Pakistan must radically reform its domestic governance to address its structural economic paradoxes. Closing vulnerabilities, such as the crippling circular debt and the low tax-to-GDP ratiois essential. Furthermore, as CPEC Phase II focuses on industrial cooperation and Special Economic Zones, the CPEC Authority must operate with complete autonomy. Approvals must be based on technocratic viability, insulated from domestic political turmoil and the necessity for defensive diplomatic posturing.

Scholarly Contribution and Future Research

The research challenges the current epistemological consensus on Chinese development finance in South Asia in an active manner. It combines the fields of International Relations, Critical Discourse Analysis and Macroeconomics, thereby bringing in a paradigm shift in the CPEC discourse, which used to oscillate between the tired arguments of "economic game-changer" versus "debt trap".

As a theoretical approach, the concept of “discursive sovereignty” offers a much-needed new framework of analysis for scholars of the Global South. It is a model of the way "narrative warfare" works today as a tool of neo-colonial subservient reliance, showing the limitations imposed on developing nations in a multipolar global world. Furthermore, this research contributes to the development of critical geopolitical theory since it offers empirical evidence of the “wedge strategy” in strategic communication, which involves an intervention by allied states to sow domestic doubt and diplomatic tensions within a conventional strong bilateral relationship.

As in all critical social science inquiries, the constraints of this inquiry must shape further scholarly pursuits. The purposive sampling of elite practitioners was useful for the identification of theoretical saturation in respect to state level behaviors, but it would not reflect the sociological effects of the DTD on the general Pakistani populace. Future work should more fully operationalize the large-scale quantitative surveys to quantify the extent to which strategic communications from outside have infiltrated political behavior at the grass-roots level. Furthermore, comparative case studies of other Global South countries (such as Sri Lanka, Kenya, or Bangladesh) need to be developed to make sure that the wedge is universalistic in terms of its application.

Pakistan is going through a historic change at the geopolitical and geoeconomic junction of a new multi-polar world order. In this age of Great Power competition, the State has to understand that today's wars are not fought only over territory and capital, but over the building of reality. If Pakistan recognizes the debt-trap discourse as a discursive trick, it can regain its policy autonomy, safeguard its geopolitical alliances and protect its sovereign developmental choices

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