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THE IMPACT OF CHINA’S “BELT AND ROAD” INITIATIVE ON
UZBEKISTAN’S ECONOMIC SECURITY AND INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT
STRATEGY

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Abstract: *The study explores the complex interconnection between regional integration initiatives and Uzbekistan’s long-term economic resilience, focusing on the balance between external cooperation and internal economic security. It emphasizes the strategic management of foreign investments within the evolving geopolitical and financial context of Central Asia, where infrastructure, trade, and technological projects are increasingly influenced by global economic powers. The research highlights how effective policy coordination, investment diversification, and institutional modernization can strengthen national competitiveness while safeguarding macroeconomic stability and sustainable development goals.*

Key words: *economic security, investment management, regional integration, foreign direct investment (FDI), infrastructure development, sustainable growth, geopolitical influence, Central Asia, strategic cooperation, Uzbekistan.*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of growing global economic interdependence, Central Asia has emerged as a key region for transcontinental connectivity and strategic investment flows. Uzbekistan, as one of the region’s most dynamic economies, is actively engaging in regional and international initiatives aimed at expanding its trade networks and attracting foreign capital. The increasing involvement of major global powers in infrastructure and energy projects has made economic security a central issue for sustainable development and national resilience.

The rapid development of large-scale international projects has brought both opportunities and challenges for Uzbekistan’s investment landscape. On one hand, the influx of foreign investments facilitates modernization, technological advancement, and diversification of the national economy. On the other hand, growing financial and geopolitical dependence requires careful policy design to safeguard national interests and maintain strategic autonomy in decision-making. Therefore, investment management and institutional governance play a crucial role in balancing cooperation with economic independence.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the mechanisms through which international infrastructure and investment initiatives influence Uzbekistan’s economic security and management strategies. The study aims to identify potential risks and opportunities arising from regional cooperation, assess the effectiveness of national investment policies, and propose strategic recommendations for strengthening economic resilience and sustainable development within the broader Eurasian framework.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In an era of accelerating global connectivity and strategic infrastructure investment, Uzbekistan finds itself at a crucial juncture. With the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China in 2013, Uzbekistan’s geographic position in Central Asia has gained renewed significance. At the same time, Uzbekistan’s economic security and investment-management framework are evolving under domestic reforms aimed at modernising infrastructure, improving governance and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI).

This analysis examines how Uzbekistan’s engagement with the BRI influences its economic security and investment-management strategy. It focuses on four key dimensions: infrastructure/connectivity, investment inflows and governance, economic risks (including debt and dependency), and strategic policy responses. The goal is to provide a structured, comprehensive view of how Uzbekistan can maximise the opportunities and mitigate the risks associated with the BRI.

Infrastructure and Connectivity Gains.

One of the most immediate impacts of the BRI in Uzbekistan is improved physical connectivity. Uzbekistan, as a land-locked country in Central Asia, faces significant logistical disadvantages; the BRI’s emphasis on transport corridors presents clear potential gains.

—For example, Chinese-financed rail and road upgrades expand Uzbekistan’s access to markets and reduce transit times.

—The enhanced connectivity reduces Uzbekistan’s logistical costs and increases its position as a transit hub between China, Central Asia and Europe, thus supporting diversification of trade routes beyond traditional ones.

—From the perspective of economic security, stronger transport links help reduce vulnerability to single-route chokepoints, improve export competitiveness and enable access to new supply chains.

—However, infrastructure improvements also create dependencies: large-scale infrastructure financed or operated under foreign control may lead to asymmetric relationships, where Uzbekistan’s ability to direct its own network may be compromised.

Investment inflows, governance and institutional implications.

The BRI has brought notable Chinese investment interest into Uzbekistan, aligning with Uzbekistan’s own development strategy.

—FDI and construction financing linked to BRI initiatives provide Uzbekistan with access to capital, technology and expertise that might otherwise be unavailable.

—On the investment-management side, this requires Uzbekistan to strengthen its institutional frameworks: project appraisal, debt management, local content, environmental and social standards, monitoring and transparency become critical. As one study notes, the challenge for Uzbekistan is to secure “local ownership” of BRI projects rather than simply being a passive recipient.

—Good governance of foreign investment contributes to economic security: it means avoiding “investment mercantilism” where large inflows simply bolster foreign firms without enhancing local capacity, and instead building domestic institutional capacity, linking projects to Uzbekistan’s strategic development goals.

Risks and challenges to economic security.

While opportunities abound, the BRI also brings clear risks to Uzbekistan’s economic security and investment-management strategy:

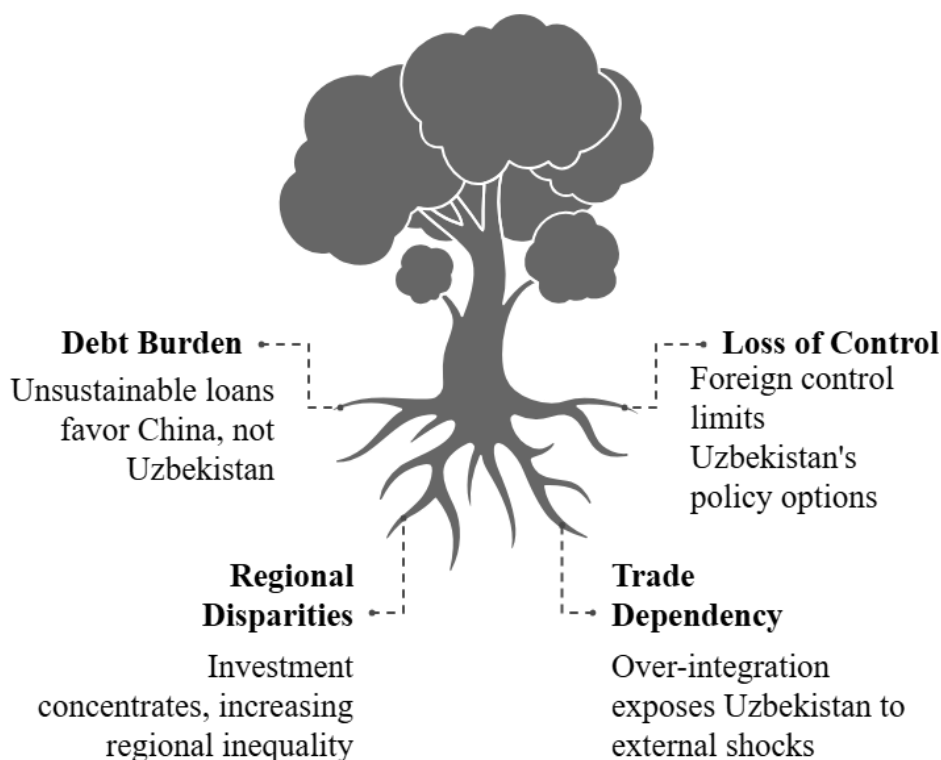


Figure 2. Uzbekistan’s economic vulnerability due to Chinese investment.

—Debt and dependency: Large-scale projects financed by concessional loans from China or Chinese institutions raise questions about debt sustainability. Some literature suggests that benefits may be skewed toward China or large investors, rather than the host country.

—Sovereignty and strategic autonomy: Heavy reliance on foreign infrastructure or capital can limit Uzbekistan’s policy manoeuvrability. For instance, if key infrastructure is tied to foreign control or if contractual terms disadvantage Uzbekistan, then economic security may be undermined.

—Uneven distribution and governance risks: Infrastructure and investment may concentrate in particular corridors or regions, leaving others behind, thereby exacerbating

regional imbalances. Also, issues of transparency, labour standards and environmental impacts accompany many projects.

—Trade and export structure risks: If Uzbekistan becomes overly integrated into value chains dominated by China, it risks being locked into low-value segments or being exposed to external demand shocks. Also, the export of primary goods without sufficient domestic value-addition undermines long-term resilience.

Strategic responses and investment-management strategy for Uzbekistan.

To harness the positive effects of BRI while safeguarding economic security, Uzbekistan needs to take deliberate strategic and institutional steps:

—Alignment with national development strategy: Uzbekistan must ensure that BRI-linked projects are not just “foreign projects in Uzbekistan” but fully aligned with its own long-term development goals — for example, diversification of exports (beyond cotton/commodities), strengthening agro-processing, logistics clusters, value-addition and digital infrastructure.

—Strengthened institutional capacity: This involves establishing rigorous project appraisal (economic, financial, social, environmental), debt management frameworks, local-content policies, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and transparency platforms. Such governance strengthens Uzbekistan’s ability to manage risks and capture value.

—Investment diversification and domestication: Instead of relying solely on Chinese financing or firms, Uzbekistan may promote co-financing, joint ventures, local small and medium enterprise (SME) involvement, and link infrastructure investments to domestic industrial development (for example agro-processing, logistics, transit services).

—Risk-mitigation and strategic autonomy: Uzbekistan should negotiate terms to maintain control of key assets, ensure open access to infrastructure, avoid lock-in, manage debt prudently, and balance China-centric projects with other partner engagements (multilateral institutions, other foreign investors) to avoid dependency.

—Sustainability and inclusive growth: Investment management must ensure that infrastructure brings inclusive benefits (regional spread, employment, local enterprise involvement), and respects environmental and social standards. This safeguards the broader concept of economic security (not only macro-fiscal but also social and ecological).

Implications for Uzbekistan’s economic security.

The interplay between infrastructure/investment, governance, risk mitigation and strategic response has clear implications for Uzbekistan’s economic security in multiple dimensions:

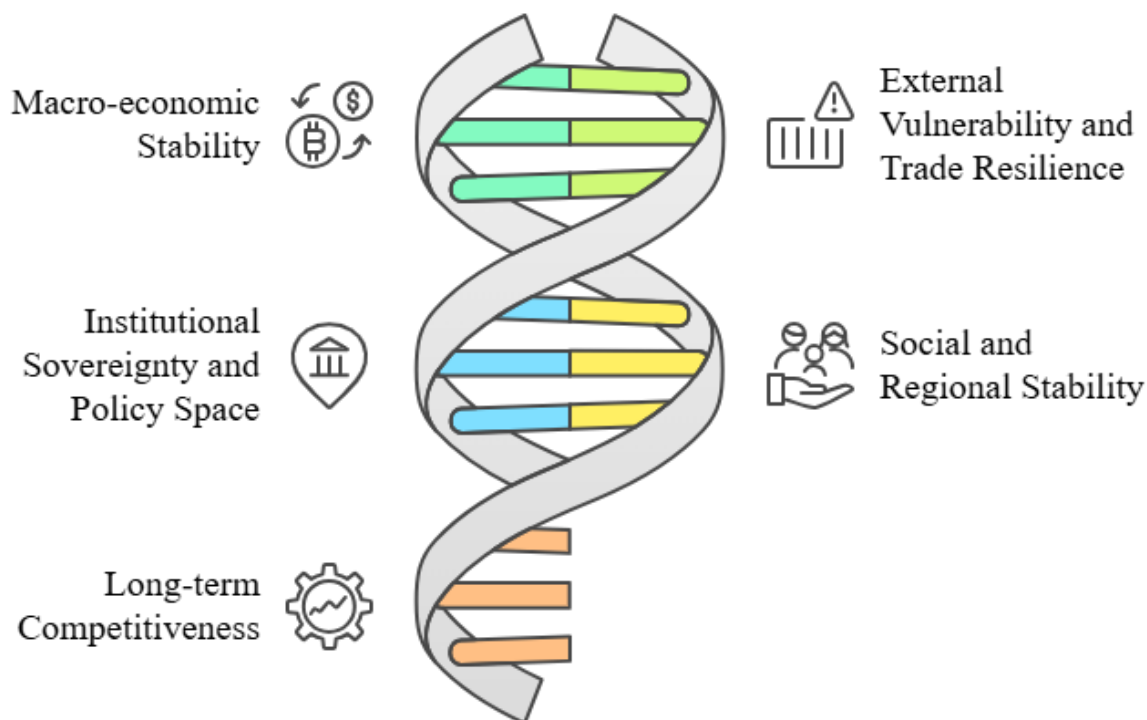


Figure 1. Foundations of Uzbekistan’s economic security.

—Macro-economic stability: Proper management of foreign-financed investment helps prevent fiscal or external imbalances, reducing exposure to external shocks.

—External vulnerability and trade resilience: Improving connectivity and integration into diversified supply chains strengthens resilience, but over-dependence or single-partner dominance increases vulnerability.

—Institutional sovereignty and policy space: Retaining effective control over investment decisions and infrastructure management preserves Uzbekistan’s ability to set priorities and react to changes.

—Social and regional stability: Ensuring that projects benefit all regions, integrate local workforces and respect rights and standards helps strengthen social cohesion, which is a component of economic security.

—Long-term competitiveness: By linking infrastructure and investment to value-adding sectors (e.g., agro-processing, logistics, manufacturing, services) Uzbekistan enhances its economic security by upgrading its productive base rather than being a mere transit or resource supplier.

Table 1

**Analytical Summary of the Impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on
Uzbekistan’s Economic Security and Investment Management Strategy**

Analytical Dimension	Positive Effects	Risks & Challenges	Strategic Responses for Uzbekistan
1. Infrastructure and Connectivity	Enhanced trade routes, reduced logistics costs, regional integration, and improved access to global markets.	Dependence on foreign-controlled infrastructure, possible strategic vulnerability.	Diversify transport partners, ensure domestic control over key logistics assets, and link infrastructure to local industries.
2. Investment Inflows and Capital Access	Increased FDI, technology transfer, and job creation; modernization of key sectors.	Risk of debt accumulation, unequal benefit distribution, and weak local participation.	Strengthen debt management systems, promote co-financing and joint ventures, increase SME involvement in projects.
3. Governance and Institutional Framework	Opportunity to reform investment laws, enhance transparency, and improve project evaluation standards.	Corruption risks, institutional weakness, limited monitoring capacity.	Establish strict project evaluation, transparency tools, and public accountability mechanisms.
4. Economic Security and Sovereignty	Improved macro-economic stability through diversification and trade expansion.	Rising external dependence and reduced policy autonomy.	Maintain strategic autonomy through balanced partnerships and domestic value-creation policies.
5. Regional and Social Development	Better infrastructure connectivity fosters inclusive regional growth and employment.	Uneven regional benefits and social inequality.	Implement inclusive development programs ensuring balanced regional benefits and social safeguards.
6. Sustainability and	Potential for green infrastructure and sustainable growth	Environmental degradation and lack of sustainability	Enforce environmental regulations, promote

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Analytical Dimension	Positive Effects	Risks & Challenges	Strategic Responses for Uzbekistan
Environmental Aspects	alignment.	standards.	renewable and low-carbon infrastructure projects.

The table illustrates that the Belt and Road Initiative brings Uzbekistan both transformative opportunities and structural challenges. While enhanced connectivity, capital inflows, and modernization strengthen economic security, unmanaged risks such as debt, dependency, and governance gaps could undermine long-term resilience. Therefore, Uzbekistan’s success depends on strategic policy alignment, institutional reforms, and sustainable investment management that balance cooperation with sovereignty and inclusive growth objectives.

CONCLUSION

Uzbekistan’s participation in China’s Belt and Road Initiative presents a mix of substantial opportunities and notable risks. On the positive side, improved connectivity, access to capital and stronger trade links can significantly enhance the country’s economic security and investment-management outcomes. At the same time, risks related to debt, dependency, governance and asymmetric benefit flows cannot be ignored. The ultimate outcome will depend on how effectively Uzbekistan aligns BRI projects with its national strategy, strengthens its investment-management and institutional frameworks, diversifies its partnerships and safeguards its sovereignty and inclusive development. Through proactive strategic responses, Uzbekistan can transform the BRI engagement into a platform for sustainable economic security and long-term growth.

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