

Pakistan-China Strategic Interdependence: Post-9/11 Imperatives

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Abstract

To understand Pakistan-China relations, it is necessary to discuss the evolution and development of their long term bilateral relations including factors and the environment that led to the consolidation of their strategic interdependence. The two countries initiated their bilateral relations by forging diplomatic ties and become close partners. They further engaged and consolidated their strategic interdependence and termed it as 'Iron Brothers.' This paper analyses basis of comprehensive cooperation under the different phases of Pakistan-China relations and the imperatives of interdependence between the two countries. It focuses on China's importance and engagement in the emerging dynamics of South Asia, especially India's efforts for regional superiority and its partnerships with major powers, particularly with the US. The outcome of discussion reflects that in the post 9/11 period, the imperatives of regional security, especially the growing Indo-US cooperation, added new dimensions to the Pakistan-China relationship.

Keywords: Pakistan-China Strategic Cooperation, Indo-US Defence and Nuclear Cooperation, CPEC, Pakistan, China.

Introduction

Pakistan-China relationship is a success story with a great deal of potential to meet the imperatives of the changing global and regional geo-strategic and geo-economic scenarios. The promising cooperation between the two countries is often described, by both the countries, as 'all-weather friendship' and 'all-round cooperation.'¹ The development of Pakistan-China relations reflects a smooth upward trajectory. Based on mutual interests, Pakistan-China relations have their own dynamics and are poised

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¹ "Pakistan an All-weather Strategic Partner of Cooperation: China," *Daily Times*, May 20, 2016.

to continue to grow. Both countries are strategically important for each other.

Development of Pakistan-China Strategic Relations

Pakistan-China's strategic cooperation is an ever-lasting relationship in the region.² This cooperation is continuously progressing and getting stronger especially in an era that is witnessing several changes at the regional and international levels. In order to gain a better understanding of the process of bilateral development, it would be useful to briefly discuss the factors behind the consolidation of Pakistan-China strategic relations in the Cold War, post-Cold War and the post-9/11 phases.

Cold War Phase

Based on common interests, the 1962 Sino-Indian war became an opportunity for developing relations.³ In the next phase of their relationship (1963 to 1988), both countries consolidated their relations and attained the status of good friends and good partners. Realising each other's importance to neutralise the Indian threat, Pakistan and China became strategic partners. This geo-strategic environment facilitated them in negotiating an agreement on the demarcation of their common border, which they signed in March 1963. The agreement was a win-win situation for both countries.⁴ To avoid any fallout of this agreement on Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan and China agreed that after the resolution of the dispute, both countries would renegotiate the boundary agreement. India did not recognise the agreement.⁵

In addition to the border agreement, both the countries also signed two other important agreements — air service agreement and trade agreement. Pakistan played a critical role in ending the isolation of China by signing the

² "Pakistan-China Friendship Guarantees Regional Development, Stability: President," *APP*, February 15, 2018.

³ Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, "China's Peaceful Rise and South Asia," *IPRI Paper* 13 (August 2008).

⁴ Manzoor Khan Afridi and Abdul Zahoor Khan, "Pak-China Boundary Agreement: Factors and Indian Reactions," *International Journal of Social Science Studies* 4, no.2 (December 16, 2015), <http://ijsss.redfame.com>.

⁵ "Pakistan-China Boundary Agreement 1962," *History Pakistan*, August 6, 2014, <http://historypak.com/pakistan-china-boundary-agreement-1962/>

air service agreement in August 1963 that enabled Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), in 1964, to facilitate travel of the Chinese leaders to Europe and Africa via Karachi. It also provided a link to China with other Muslim countries.⁶ Under this agreement, Pakistani planes were allowed to land in Canton and Shanghai. In reciprocity, Pakistan allowed the Chinese jets to use the Dhaka airport. The US was not pleased over such development. According to the US State Department, this agreement was “an unfortunate breach of the free world solidarity and subsequently resulted in postponement of the grant of a loan of US\$4.3 million for improvement of the Dhaka airport.”⁷

In February 1964, the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou Enlai, visited Pakistan. Pakistan reciprocated with the visit of President General Ayub Khan to China in December 1964. Pakistan also played a pivotal role in normalisation Sino-US relations in the early 1970s, which included secret interactions between the two sides, especially the visit of the then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to China in July 1971, followed by President Richard Nixon’s visit to China in 1972.

The normalisation of Sino-US relations was not taken well in India and in the former Soviet Union.⁸ The US-Pakistan-China strategic triangle prompted India to sign a treaty of peace, friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union on August 9, 1971. The treaty was signed by Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Andrei Andreyevich Gromyko, and Minister of External Affairs of India, Swaran Singh. It was termed as a security treaty, because the Article IX of the treaty stipulated that in “the event of either party being subject to an attack or threat thereof, the high contracting parties shall immediately enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and security of their countries.”⁹

China supported Pakistan against India in the critical times during and after the 1965 and 1971 wars by providing military and economic

⁶ Afridi and Khan, “Pak-China Boundary Agreement.”

⁷ G. J Lerski, “The Pakistan-American Alliance: A Re-evaluation of the Past Decade,” *Asian Survey* 8, no. 5 (1968): 400-415.

⁸ Rehman, “Pakistan’s Evolving Relations.”

⁹ “Treaty in Operation,” http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/396/10/10_chapter%204.pdf

assistance. In 1974, the Indian nuclear weapon test gave further impetus to Pakistan-China defence cooperation. With the cooperation of China, the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) was started in 1959 and it was completed in 1978. It was inaugurated on June 8, 1978 by the Pakistani President, General Zia-ul-Haq, and the Chinese vice Premier, Kang Piao. The KKH is a landmark for enhancing Pakistan-China trade and people-to-people contact. It has also great value for promotion of tourism between the two countries.¹⁰

General Zia-ul-Haq paid an official visit to China in 1980. The visit was followed by the visit of the Chinese President, Li Xiannian, to Pakistan in 1984. It was President Xiannian's administration, which brought major reforms in the Chinese foreign policy, and both countries signed a comprehensive nuclear cooperation agreement in 1986.¹¹ Subsequently, China provided Pakistan with a variety of nuclear products and services such as research and technical support for uranium enrichment, as well as power reactors.¹² In 1979, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan not only posed a threat to regional peace and stability but for the rest of the world. Pakistan and China worked together to deal with the Afghan situation. During the Afghan War (1979-89), China not only extended political support to Pakistan at international level but also contributed military supplies worth US\$200 million annually to the Afghan resistance groups.¹³ Throughout 1980s and 1990s, China also helped Pakistan in the development of its ballistic missile programme, which enhanced its strength in the South Asian strategic calculus.¹⁴

¹⁰ "The Karakoram Highway: A Friendship Channel," *Pakistan-China Institute*, April 19, 2018, <http://www.pakistan-china.com/mn-backgrounders-detail.php?id=MQ==&pageid=news>

¹¹ "Chinese President Li Xiannian Begins an Historic, 10-day Visit," *UPI*, July 20, 1985, <https://www.upi.com/Archives/1985/07/20/Chinese-President-Li-Xiannian-begins-an-historic-10-day-visit/7199490680000/>.

¹² "China's Nuclear Exports and Assistance to Pakistan," Centre for Non-proliferation Studies, Monterey Institute of International Studies, August 1999, http://cns.miis.edu/archive/country_india/china/npakpos.htm

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lisa Curtis, "China's Military and Security Relationship with Pakistan," *Heritage Foundation*, May 26, 2009, <https://www.heritage.org/testimony/chinas-military-and-security-relationship-pakistan>

Post Cold War Phase

During 1990s, Pakistan-China relations continued to grow and Pakistan did not maintain any reservations upon growing Sino-Indian relations.¹⁵ The improvement of Indo-China relations was considered positive in Pakistan and there was no such impression that it would detriment the Pakistan-China friendship. It was perceived that such growing ties between China and India would fetter the escalating Indian intrusion in Kashmir.¹⁶ China had already changed its stance from neutrality to supporting Pakistan's perspective. Since the early 1990s, China adopted a definitive position over Kashmir issue and advocated the peaceful resolution of the Kashmir conflict.¹⁷ To reciprocate, Pakistan always extended its full support to China over issues, which were vital to the Chinese national interests, whether it was the issue of sovereignty over Tibet, Hong Kong or Taiwan.¹⁸

As a result of 1985 Pressler Amendment, sanctions against Pakistan were imposed in October 1990.¹⁹ Pakistan lost US\$564 million US assistance lined up for the fiscal year of 1991 and the US aid completely dried up by 1993 and the military assistance was completely restricted throughout 1990s.²⁰ That was a time when China's cooperation with Pakistan enhanced.

During the post Cold War phase, Pakistan-China bilateral relations witnessed exchange of high-level visits. In 1989, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Benazir Bhutto, visited China and later in the year, the Chinese Prime Minister, Li Peng, reciprocated the visit. To further strengthen their bilateral ties, the Chinese President, Yang Shangkun, also visited Pakistan in 1991.

¹⁵ Riaz Mohammad Khan, Former Foreign Secretary, Interview conducted by the author, April 5, 2016.

¹⁶ Gulshan, "Improvement in China-India Relations: Impact on Pakistan," *IPRI Review*, <http://www.ipripak.org/improvement-in-china-india-relations-impact-on-pakistan/>.

¹⁷ Jingdong Yuan, "China's Kashmir Policy," *Jamestown Foundation, China Brief*, 5, no.19 (December 31, 1969).

¹⁸ Rahman, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations," 213.

¹⁹ Rabia Akhtar, "The Correct Narrative on Pressler," *Dawn*, May 29, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1335979>

²⁰ Jehangir Khan, "US-Pakistan Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Implications for World Peace," *MAGNT Research Report* 3, no.4, April 2015, 211-225.

President Jiang Zemin came to Pakistan in 1996 and both countries decided to expand and strengthen bilateral relations. In 1999, China helped Pakistan in building 300 MWe Chashma nuclear power plant near Kundia Town, District Mianwali, Punjab. In 2001, the Chinese Prime Minister, Zhu Rongji, visited Pakistan and then in December, General Pervez Musharraf, the President of Pakistan also went to China. The bilateral relations were reinforced by increased cooperation in the areas of defence production and space technology. China became the most reliable source of defence equipment for Pakistan.

The overall defence cooperation during the post Cold War between two countries operated under the provisions of the Sino-Pak Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in June 1990.²¹ The MoU provided for ten-year cooperation in procurement, Research and Development (R&D) technology transfer and co-production. This time period was extended after the US enforcement of Pressler Amendment.²² In January 1990, both countries agreed to design, develop and manufacture MBT-2000 Al-Khalid jointly. The design is an upgrade of the original T902M. The initial prototypes were produced in China and fielded for trials in August 1991. Development efforts have mainly focused on improving the design for Pakistan's terrain and high temperatures since 1992 — the year of establishment of the Heavy Mechanical Complex at Taxila.²³ The "Thunder Programme" to produce JF-17 jet fighter, started back in year 1999. Its primary objective was to decrease the reliance on the Western jet-fighters manufacturers.²⁴

Post-9/11 Phase

The 9/11 events altered the strategic dynamics of the Southwest Asian region, especially after the US military involvement in Afghanistan. In this phase, along with economic interdependence, there has been an increase in

²¹ James Lamont and Farhan Bokhari, "China and Pakistan: An Alliance is Built," *Financial Times*, June 30, 2011.

²² Senate, "The Pressler Amendment and Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Programme," *FAS*, July 31, 1992.

²³ Ikram Sehgal, "A Tank Factory for All Seasons," *Defence Journal*, July 1998.

²⁴ "JF-17 Thunders: Pakistan to Get 50 Chinese Jets in Six Months," *Express Tribune*, May 21, 2011.

strategic interdependence between the two states. China like other major global players the US and Russia developed strategic partnerships with the developing countries, re-aligned and re-adjusted their bilateral and multilateral relations. In this whole situation, Pakistan's relationship with China has remained of paramount importance for both countries. This is particularly true in the perspective that the 1990s proved to be an era of turbulent events impacting South Asia's geo-political affairs: the 1998 nuclearisation of South Asia; the Kargil conflict; war on terrorism; the US invasion of Afghanistan and 2001-2002 military stand-offs between India and Pakistan.²⁵ The Kargil conflict and India-Pakistan military stand-offs gained great importance as India and Pakistan were in possession of nuclear weapons. To diffuse these tensions the US and China played a constructive role.

Since 9/11, the concept of security has also undergone a profound transformation. It has now evolved into a multi-dimensional phenomenon covering both traditional and non-traditional threats. The global war on terrorism, the growing US strategic cooperation with India coupled with upsurge in China's economic relations and the regional developments in the Asia-Pacific have deeply impacted Pakistan-China relations. China has already become an important stakeholder in maintaining peace and security in South Asia owing to the expansion of its economic and trade relations with the countries of the region. For example, China is enormously investing in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which will connect Xingjian with Pakistan's Gwadar deep sea port. China has also financed the building of the Gwadar port as well as a huge network of roads and railway tracks, hydro and thermal power, mining, electronics and nuclear energy. China initiated significant infrastructure development projects in Sri Lanka.²⁶ Its companies are working to build a number of mega projects in Bangladesh and Nepal.²⁷

In view of progression in geo-political affairs of the region, the prevalent strategic alignments were also revised. Pakistan received a status of non-NATO ally for its participation in the US-led war on terrorism as a

²⁵ Fazal-ur-Rahman, "Traditional and Emerging Areas of Strategic Cooperation between Pakistan and China," <http://pcc.org.pk/downloads/traditional-and-emerging-areas-strategic-cooperation.pdf>

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

frontline state. India and the US aligned to cooperate in tandem in extra-regional affairs and Indo-Pakistan relationship once again suffered a huge setback in the aftermath of the 2008 terrorist attacks in Mumbai. The emergence of such events altered the conceptual geographical paradigm of South Asia.²⁸ Pakistan's security matrix confronted enormous problems in the post 9/11 regional developments, which engulfed the sovereignty of state and its territorial integrity due to drone attacks by the US and its strategic cooperation with India.²⁹ In this precarious situation, both countries not only supported each other but also further progressed in advancing their bilateral strategic cooperation in the field of economy and defence.³⁰ However, in spite of these substantial developments, there are some areas, such as anti-terrorism, Afghanistan and energy security, that added a new dimension to their strategic partnership.³¹

Some scholars such as Shamshad Ahmad, former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan; Liu Zongyi, a senior scholar at Shanghai Institutes for International Studies and Shahzad Akhtar, Research Associate at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, argued that the origin of the strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China was mainly India-centric. However, in the post-9/11 perspective, it can safely be said that several new factors have also contributed to the recent visible change in the nature and significance of Pakistan-China strategic relations. For instance:

- i. Emergence of China as a rising power and the Indo-US strategic alliance to contain China's influence.
- ii. Xinjiang factor in Pakistan-China relations both in terms of China's western regions development policy and fighting religious extremism.
- iii. Pakistan-India military standoff in 2002.

²⁸ Shamshad Ahmad, "Post-9/11 Foreign Policy of Pakistan," *Criterion Quarterly* 1, no.1 (September 27, 2013).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Huma Sattar, "China and Pakistan's All-Weather Friendship," *Diplomat*, March 12, 2015,

<http://thediplomat.com/2015/03/china-and-pakistans-all-weather-friendship/>.

³¹ Rahman, "Traditional and Emerging Areas."

- iv. Nuclear factor of South Asia and China's role in providing strategic stability in the region.
- v. Geo-strategic importance of Pakistan as the energy corridor for the region.
- vi. Stabilising Afghanistan and the significance of Pakistan-China cooperation especially after the drawdown of the US-NATO forces from Afghanistan.
- vii. China and Pakistan's role in regional organisations — the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

According to Hu Shisheng, Senior Researcher at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), the Pakistan-China strategic cooperation has witnessed some tangible changes, from the Cold-War mentality, which revolved around confrontation, power-balance and mutual-checking, to post Cold-War thinking, which focused on common development, shared destiny and appreciation of responsibilities.³²

Pakistan-China relations had remained smooth and in the post-9/11 period their relations have attained the status of “strategic partners’ and “good brothers.”³³ Pakistan-China strategic interdependence increased manifold mainly due to the US presence in Afghanistan and the enhancement of Indo-US strategic cooperation. The salient developments of this phase include exchange of high-level visits and the signing of the “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations” on April 5, 2005, in which the two countries agreed that both will refrain from joining “any alliance or bloc, which infringes upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of either nation, while simultaneously positing that both parties would not conclude treaties of this nature with any third

³² Hu Shisheng, Senior Researcher, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), Interview conducted by the author, Beijing, July 28, 2014.

³³ “Mamnoon Hussain Stresses Use of Modern Technology,” *Express Tribune*, July 9, 2017.

party.”³⁴ Another important development was the cooperation in building of Gwadar port started in 2001 and the MoU on the CPEC was signed in July 2013. Both countries signed an agreement on April 20, 2015, to initiate development project in Pakistan worth US\$ 46 billion.

In November 2011, when NATO forces attacked border areas of Pakistan, killing 26 Pakistan army personnel, China reacted aggressively. According to a Chinese government official, “any threat to Pakistan will be taken as a direct threat to China.”³⁵ The administration of Pakistan’s Gwadar port was given to China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) in 2013. China’s Prime Minister Li Keqiang also visited Pakistan and several agreements were signed. An important development of this year was the approval of the CPEC linking Gwadar Port to Xinjiang province of China.³⁶ At the end of 2013, China also agreed to construct a major nuclear power plant in Karachi, which will have the capacity of producing 2200MW. “China National Nuclear Cooperation (CNNC) [...] promised to grant a loan of at least US\$ 6.5 billion to finance the project, which will have two reactors with a capacity of 1,100 megawatts each. It would be completed by 2019. Each of the two reactors would be larger than the combined power of all nuclear reactors now operating in Pakistan.”³⁷

In 2014, China announced that it would invest over US\$31 billion in the development of the energy sector, infrastructure and expansion of Gwadar port. In addition, both countries signed an agreement on a project to start a metro train service in Lahore. In April 2014, Prime Minister, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, visited China to attend the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA). At the occasion, he said that Pakistan was ready to further its strategic cooperation with China, as relationship with China had been the

³⁴ “China, Pakistan Sign Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighbourly Relations,” *People’s Daily*, April 5, 2005, [http:// english.peopledaily.com.cn/200504/06/ eng20050406_179629.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200504/06/eng20050406_179629.html)

³⁵ Paul Joseph Watson and Yi Han, “Chinese Government Official: US Threat to Pakistan is Threat to China,” *Infowars*, December 1, 2011.

³⁶ “Li Keqiang Urges Development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” *Reuters*, May 23, 2013, [http:// www.scmp.com/ news/ china/ article/ 1244267/ li-keqiang-urges-development- china-pakistan- economic-corridor](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1244267/li-keqiang-urges-development-china-pakistan-economic-corridor)

³⁷ “China Commits US\$6.5 Billion Loan for N-power Plants in Karachi,” *Dawn*, December 25, 2013.

“cornerstone” of Pakistan’s diplomacy.³⁸ Nawaz Sharif visited China again, in November 2014, to attend the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). On the side-lines of the meeting, he also met with the Chinese President, Xi Jinping, having assured him that Pakistan would continue to resolutely fight the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) terrorist forces. Further, he added that Pakistan will increase its coordination with China on Afghanistan to “jointly maintain regional peace and stability.”³⁹

In November 2014, the Chinese government announced it would build several energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan as part of the CPEC. Mega projects in several fields like energy, infrastructure and connectivity would revitalise Pakistan’s economy and would help in overcoming the power shortage in the country.⁴⁰ Pakistan through Gwadar port provides China the shortest route from the Middle East to Xinjiang, i.e., 2500 miles as compared to 9500 miles from the Middle East to Shanghai. China is importing most of its oil through the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Straits. In the event of a conflict or a terrorist attack, the present routes for the Chinese oil imports could be disrupted; choking Beijing’s energy supply, especially at the vulnerable Malacca Strait. China has a territorial dispute with Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam and Brunei in the South China Sea, which further accentuates concerns about China’s energy security.⁴¹

Post-9/11 Imperatives of Strategic Interdependence

In the post-9/11 period, the rising waves of terrorism have posed a major threat to the security of both countries. China is providing military assistance to Pakistan to counter terrorism. The joint efforts of both

³⁸ “China Seeks to Plan on Economic Corridor with Pakistan,” *Xinhuanet*, April 10, 2014,

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2014-04/10/c_133253222.htm

³⁹ “Pakistan Says will Help China Fight Xinjiang Militants,” *Reuters*, November 8, 2014, <http://ca.reuters.com/article/topNews/idCAKBN0IS09T20141108>

⁴⁰ Humayun Zafar, “The Corridor of Hope,” *Daily Times*, July 25, 2014.

⁴¹ “Pakistan as an Energy Corridor for China,” *IPRI Review* 4, 2012,

<http://ipripak.org/pa/ipr4.pdf>, also see, Kim Nodskov, *The Long march to Power: The New Historic Mission of the People’s Liberation Army* (Copenhagen: Royal Danish Defence College Publishing House, 2009),

<http://forsvaret.dk/FAK/Nyt%20og%20Presse/Documents/The%20Long%20March%20to%20Power%20net.pdf>

countries to counter terrorism and extremism will also curb the menace in the region. China commended Pakistan's efforts to eradicate terrorism and the launch of military operation *Zarb-e-Azb* against local and foreign terrorists in North Waziristan Agency of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in June 2014.⁴² In this respect, there is regular intelligence sharing between the two countries regarding terrorist entities, like Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and ETIM.⁴³ Further, Pakistan steadfastly supports China's territorial integrity and does not allow its soil for any hostile activity against China. In this context, Pakistan considers the ETIM as a "common enemy" of China and Pakistan.⁴⁴

Both Pakistan and China are closely cooperating in promoting regional peace and security, especially in the context of Afghanistan. The stability in Afghanistan is vital for both Pakistan and China since they share a common border with the war ravaged country and the presence of terrorist safe havens on the Afghan side of the border threatens their peace and Stability. Both Pakistan and China believe that the solution to the Afghan conflict has to be fundamentally political rather than military⁴⁵ and support the 'Afghan-led' and 'Afghan-owned' peace process through dialogue. The presence of more than a dozen terrorist outfits in Afghanistan, especially the emergence of the Islamic State-Khorasan (IS-K),⁴⁶ has caused alarm in both Pakistan and China.

⁴² "Operation Zarb-e Azb," *Revolvy*,

<https://www.revolvy.com/main/index.php?s=Operation%20Zarb-e-Azb>

⁴³ The TTP is a terrorist outfit comprising mainly of the Pakistani Taliban, which espouses enforcement of Sharia in the country and wages war against the Pakistani state and society. The ETIM is mainly a Uighur separatist armed group which advocates the independence of Xinjiang province of China as a separate country. It has declared war against China and has conducted militant attacks in the country.

⁴⁴ Ankit Panda, "Can Pakistan and China Successfully Cooperate on Counterterrorism?," *Diplomat*, May 23, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/can-pakistan-and-china-successfully-cooperate-on-counterterrorism/>

⁴⁵ "Some Countries' Need to Give Pakistan Credit for its Counterterrorism Role: China," *Dawn*, September 8, 2017.

⁴⁶ The Islamic State-Khorasan is a chapter of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known with its Arabic acronym, Daesh (Dawlat al Islamiyafil Iraq wal Sham).

Shifting Alliances

The contemporary military balance between India and Pakistan also shifted in the wake of regional alliances.⁴⁷ Following the US sponsored global war on terrorism, the post-9/11 era facilitated military cooperation between the US and Pakistan. However, the overall relations between two countries have also been affected by the close relations between India and the US. India's potential capability to strengthen itself as regional player and its cooperative demeanour led the US to increase interest in security parameters of India.⁴⁸ Eventually, the overall relations between two countries have also been affected by the close relations between India and the US. Hence, there is the likelihood of technology transfer from the US to India which will have implication for Pakistan's security. Although Pakistan-China friendship is growing stronger with the passage of time, China and India are also enhancing their bilateral relationship and engaging in constructive negotiations in resolving the lingering border dispute related to the Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. Similarly, the bilateral trade between the two countries has witnessed a tremendous upsurge. The Indo-China trade volume between India and China reached US\$84.44 billion in 2017 China's Foreign Direct Investment in India was US\$1.7 billion.⁴⁹

An important step in the US-India relations has been the signing of the 'New Framework for the US India Defence Relationship on June 28, 2005.⁵⁰ The military agreement, which was spanning over 10 years, on its expiry, the agreement was again signed in June 2015 for the next ten years.⁵¹ It is a clear indication of the US tilt towards India. Similarly, their cooperation on missile defence has been undermining Pakistan's doctrine of minimum deterrence and nuclear restraint. The Indo-US

⁴⁷ Rodney W. Jones, "Nuclear Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia: Structural Factors," Stimson, <http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/researchpdfs/ESCONTROLCHAPTER2.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Umbreen Javaid and Qamar Fatima, "US Foreign Policy Parameters towards Pakistan and India (2001-2008)," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 2 (2012), 21:40.

⁴⁹ Jones, "Nuclear Stability and Escalation."

⁵⁰ Muhammad Ishaque Fani, "The Indo-US Strategic Partnership in Post 9/11: Implication for Pakistan," *Pakistan Vision* 10, no. 2 (2009).

⁵¹ The US Embassy in India, "US-India Defence Relations Fact Sheet," December 8, 2016, <https://in.usembassy.gov/u-s-india-defense-relations-fact-sheet-december-8-2016/>

strategic cooperation along with India's enhancing cooperation with Japan is not only affecting the strategic stability in South Asia but also that of East Asia as well.⁵²

Contemporary Situation and Pakistan-China Strategic Cooperation

There are serious concerns within the Pakistan regarding the discriminatory policies of the US towards it. The US President Barack Obama visited India twice in his tenure enhancing trade and business ties between the US and India. Both sides pledged closer cooperation on defence, economic and civilian nuclear issues and the US repeatedly endorsed India's bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).⁵³ The US's policy of building a strategic partnership with India is motivated by its desire to limit the role of China in the South and South East Asia by encouraging India to play a proactive role in the Asia Pacific region.⁵⁴ This premise would marginalise Pakistan and that would not be helpful to promote regional security.

The US-India defence and nuclear cooperation, particularly the Indo-US nuclear deal, has been a serious issue of concern for Pakistan.⁵⁵ In contrast to India, Pakistan has made huge sacrifices in countering extremism and terrorism. However, by ignoring this, during 2012-14, the US supplied India with weapons worth US\$5.4 billion — for the first time surpassing Russia, which supplied US\$4.2 billion in military products.⁵⁶ India has also signed a military logistic agreement with the US on August 29, 2016 allowing both sides 'the use of each other's land, air and naval bases for repair and resupply.'⁵⁷

⁵² Amelia Gentleman, "New Era on Defense for India and US," *International Herald Tribune*, June 30, 2005.

⁵³ Muhammad Munir, "Obama's Visit Raises Concerns in Pakistan," *Pakistan Observer*, January 31, 2015, <http://www.ipripak.org/obamas-visit-raises-concerns-in-pakistan/>

⁵⁴ Gurpreet S Khurana, "Indo-Asia Pacific Explained: An Assessment of US Maritime Strategy 2015," in Vijay Sakhujia, Gurpreet S Khurana, eds., *Maritime Perspectives* (New Delhi: National Maritimes Foundation, 2016), 15-18.

⁵⁵ Harsh V. Pant, "New Phase in India-US Ties," *Japan Times*, January 30, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/opinion/2015/01/30/commentary/world-commentary/new-phase-india-u-s-ties/#.VOTCoCwwA9w>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Yeganeh Torbati and Idrees Ali, "US, India Sign Military Logistics Agreement," *Reuters*, August 30, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-usa-military-idUSKCN114241>

India has, however, suffered one setback to join the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), since it failed twice in Plenary Meetings of the NSG, held in Seoul and Vienna on June 23-24, 2016 and November 11, 2016, respectively. At least 12 NSG members (China, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Italy, Ireland, Switzerland, Austria, New Zealand, Belgium, Brazil and Russia) at the Vienna plenary called for a criteria-based approach. It is likely that China will continue deterring India permanent membership in the UNSC and NSG. The reason is obvious: China is protective of its strategic partnership with Pakistan and would not like to undermine its ties with Islamabad by letting India to gain the membership of the UNSC.⁵⁸ Even if China considers taking any step in this respect, it would take Pakistan into confidence.⁵⁹ Moreover, since India has strongly aligned itself with Japan, China is unlikely to support India's bid for a permanent membership of the UNSC. However, in relation to India's membership of the NSG, China will not support Indian membership until it does not meet the criteria, i.e., signing the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), etc.⁶⁰

India has been able to influence the US and Japan to share its concerns on China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) having implications for its national security interests in the context of the CPEC. Meanwhile, China has suggested that India stands to lose greatly if it continues to reinforce its strategic partnership with Japan.⁶¹

Pakistan-US relations under President Trump's administration clearly show a divergence of interest. Trump who was earlier planning to withdraw the US troops from Afghanistan changed his mind after he met with his war cabinet at Camp David. He was convinced that any sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan would create a vacuum for terrorists such

⁵⁸ Adil Sultan, Director, SPD, In person interview conducted by the author, Islamabad, August 20, 2014.

⁵⁹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, Assistant Professor, Area Study Centre University of Peshawar Peshawar, Interview conducted by the author, August 28, 2018.

⁶⁰ Hu Shisheng, Senior Researcher, *China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR)*, Interview conducted by the Author, Beijing, July 28, 2014.

⁶¹ Subhash Kapila, "US-Japan-India Trilateral Ministerial Dialogue September 2017 Analysed," *South Asian Analysis Group*, September 26, 2017, <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2214>

as the Islamic State of Iraq and Iran (ISIS) and al-Qaeda.⁶² On August 21, 2017, he announced his South Asia policy in which he declared that the US would continue its military engagement in Afghanistan. Pakistan has rejected the US policy on South Asia since it envisages a greater role for India in Afghanistan and the region, while not properly recognising the extraordinary contribution, counter-terrorism success and sacrifices of Pakistan for peace and regional stability.

While addressing a conference in Islamabad Pakistan's Defence Minister, Engr Khurram Dastgir, has rightly noted that:

“there are strategic contradictions in the US approach and most key regional and global players have not supported this declared US policy since it envisages India to be a net security provider in the region. In South Asia's security matrix, there is no room for self-proclaimed and artificially boosted states. Regional security in the 21st Century can only be ensured through relationships and collaborations based on mutual trust and equality.”⁶³

Mostly, the presence of US troops in Afghanistan is considered an important factor for peace and security of the country. However, at the same time, the long-term US presence may lead to further instability in the region, as has been the case in the Middle East. Although, for the time being, the ISIS is not very strong in the region, following its defeat in Syria and Iraq it may shift its focus to Afghanistan. The fight between ISIS and the Afghan Taliban would result in more insecurity and deterioration of the situation in the region.⁶⁴ Rahimullah Yousafzai, a senior expert on Afghanistan, believe that in the presence of ISIS, Taliban would remain fearful of defections of its members to ISIS if they take part in any reconciliation with Afghan government.⁶⁵

⁶²Julie Hirschfeld Davis and Mark Landler, “Trump Outlines New Afghanistan War Strategy With Few Details,” *New York Times*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/afghanistan-troops-trump.html>.

⁶³“No Room for Self-proclaimed, Artificially Boosted States in South Asia Security Matrix,” *Business Recorder*, September 20, 2017.

⁶⁴“The Islamic State in Afghanistan Examining its Threat to Stability,” Middle East Institute (MEI): Policy Focus, May 2016, https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/publications/PF12_McNallyAmiral_ISISAfg_han_web.pdf

⁶⁵Rahimullah Yousafza, Resident Editor, *News*, Peshawar, *Personal Interview by the author*, April 28, 2018, Islamabad.

Pakistan and China stand together in the changing regional and global scenario and China supports Pakistan in safeguarding its national sovereignty and dignity.⁶⁶ China recognises Pakistan's position on the Jammu and Kashmir dispute. For instance, on September 20, 2016, Chinese Prime Minister, Li Keqiang, reiterated China's support on Kashmir issue. He stated that "Beijing attaches great importance to Islamabad's position on the Kashmir issue." He added that "China is standing by Pakistan and will continue to raise their voice in its support at every forum."⁶⁷

On August 22, 2017, the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, reaffirmed Beijing's support to Pakistan during a meeting with Pakistan's Foreign Secretary, Tehmina Janjua. The meeting was held a day after Donald Trump, lambasted Pakistan for allegedly offering safe haven to "agents of chaos."⁶⁸ Earlier, as Beijing came to Islamabad's defence in the light of Trump's remarks, the Chinese Foreign Ministry's spokeswoman, Hua Chunying, asserted that Pakistan was on the front line in the struggle against terrorism and had made "great sacrifices" and "important contributions" in the fight. Chunying called on the international community to recognise Pakistan's role in the fight against terrorism.⁶⁹

In another move, China twice blocked India's bid to to designate Maulana Masood Azhar, the chief of banned outfit, Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), as a proscribed group at the UN in April and December 2016, respectively.⁷⁰ On February 7, 2017, China opposed another effort – this time by the US — to declare Masood Azhar as a global terrorist. China's opposition to the US act came in reply to a proposal, which was jointly sponsored by the US, UK and France at the UN Sanctions Committee 1267 in this respect.⁷¹

⁶⁶ "Some Countries' Need to Give Pakistan Credit for its Counter-terrorism Role: China," *Dawn*, September 8, 2017.

⁶⁷ "Chinese PM Reiterates Support for Pakistan's Stance on Kashmir Issue," *Express Tribune*, September 21, 2016.

⁶⁸ "After Trump's Afghan Policy Statement, China Reaffirms Support to Pakistan," *Dawn*, August 22, 2017.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ "China Blocks India's Bid at UN to Blacklist Jaish-e-Mohammad Chief Masood Azhar," *Dawn*, December 30, 2016.

⁷¹ "China Blocks US Move for Sanctions against Masood Azhar," *Express Tribune*, February 7, 2016.

The inclusion of some militant groups such as the Haqqani Network, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) in para 48 of the Xiamen Declaration of the Ninth BRICS (acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Asia) Summit, held in China on September 4, 2017, raised some concern in Pakistan. Even in China, some senior experts on South Asian affairs like Shisheng were of the opinion that the move to name some Pakistan-based terror groups in the BRICS, declaration may strain Pakistan's ties with China.⁷² However, senior Pakistani officials were of the view that it is not true that China handed Pakistan an unexpected diplomatic setback at the BRICS Summit 2017. The fact of the matter is that Pakistan itself did not object to the inclusion of these groups in the Amritsar Declaration of the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the Heart of Asia Istanbul Process (HoA-IP) held in India on December 4, 2016.⁷³

Pakistan and China have rejected the US concerns on the CPEC. It was reported in the media that while briefing the Senate Armed Services Committee, the US Defence Secretary, James Mattis, highlighted that the US is concerned that the CPEC is passing through disputed territory. India has also expressed concern that the US\$56 billion project passes through Gilgit-Baltistan (the former Northern Areas), which are part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Both Pakistan and China have dismissed the US reservations over the CPEC asserting that it is an economic cooperation initiative for the people in the region and beyond.⁷⁴

Geo-strategic Interdependence between China and Pakistan

The strategic partnership is always considered a long-term commitment by two or more countries in which they establish a close relationship in

⁷² "Mention of Pak, Afghan Terror Groups in BRICS Declaration a Mistake by China," *Hindustan Times*, September 6, 2017, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/brics-declaration-addingterror-groups-based-in-pak-afghan-is-a-costly-mistake-by-chinasayexperts/storyZujyLPpfKXlu3qaA99bzJN.html>.

⁷³ Ambassador Abdul Basit, Brief remarks at the Eighth Session of Islamabad Informal China Study Circle held on September 7, 2017, Banquet Hall, Islamabad Club, Islamabad.

⁷⁴ "CPEC Has Nothing to Do With Territorial Sovereignty Disputes: China Responds to US Criticism," *Dawn*, October 8, 2017.

their core policies.⁷⁵ In such a partnership, their long-term engagement is vital to promote common objectives. The bilateral strategic partnerships are interdependent in nature and all the parties further each other's interests in one way or the other — reciprocity being the basis.⁷⁶ While explaining the geo-strategic interdependence, Tarique Niazi, Professor of Sociology at University of Wisconsin expounds:

the strategic interdependence of the two countries is compelling each other to bond with the other. China is taking the lead to employ economic and public diplomacy with Pakistan to broaden its strategic state-to-state partnership into people-to-people bonds. With increasing trade and investment, China is helping a turnaround in the Pakistani economy. Parallel to economic relations, it also is expanding cultural linkages through education, civic society and media to strengthen the tree of Sino-Pak friendship to weather unanticipated hailstorms.”⁷⁷

Today, Pakistan has become strategically significant for China due to various reasons. It can provide a safe outlet to China for the development of its western regions and in this respect, the development of Gwadar port is crucial for both countries. China has been confronting many challenges in the South China Sea that were further increased after Obama's Asia Pivot policy.⁷⁸ Pakistan's potential in peace building in Afghanistan is also recognised by China; hence, a close cooperation between Beijing and Islamabad is the need of the time. The long-term presence of American forces in Afghanistan is viewed with suspicion in China and thus, it is aware of the role which Pakistan can play in stabilising the country. China believes that instability in Afghanistan is the reason for unrest in its Xinjiang region.⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Fraser Cameron and ZhengYongnian, “Key Elements of Strategic Partnership,” in Crossick Stanley, et al., *China-EU Common Future* (World Scientific Publishing, 2008), 3-14.

⁷⁶ The Compassion Capital Fund (CCF), *Partnerships: Frameworks for Working Together*, US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocs/partnerships.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Tarique Niazi, “New Challenges in Sino-Pakistani Relations,” *China Brief*, no.14, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=3873#.VJUzSdgBA](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews[tt_news]=3873#.VJUzSdgBA)

⁷⁸ “Barack Obama Says Asia-Pacific is Top US Priority,” *BBC*, November 17, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15715446>.

⁷⁹ Zhang Li, “Implications of a Stable Afghanistan for China: Opportunities and Challenges,” in *Stabilising Afghanistan: Regional Perspectives and Prospects*, eds.,

Despite its various problems, Pakistan is a country of immense geo-strategic importance. According to Stephen P. Cohen, “while history has been unkind with Pakistan, its geography has been its greatest benefit.”⁸⁰ There are many factors that make Pakistan a strategically significant country. These factors include Pakistan’s strategic location on the confluence of South and Central Asia and West Asia. Similarly, Pakistan is contiguous with two emerging regional countries like China and India. It also offers the Central Asian States the shortest route to the Arabian Sea. Many trade and energy routes linking Central Asia and the West Asia with the South Asian region are passing through Pakistan. China’s link to the Middle East and Africa via Gwadar port will allow it to compete with Indian expansion in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.⁸¹

China is important for Pakistan in many ways - it is a time tested and reliable friend of Pakistan, which helped in strengthening the security of Pakistan. Furthermore, it helped Pakistan to counter the Indian efforts to become a regional power. By issuing stern warnings to India, China also played an important role in its support to Pakistan, especially in achieving a ceasefire in the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Following the war, in an attempt to compensate for war losses; China supported Pakistan with military equipment including tanks and fighter aircraft.⁸²

In the early 1970s, Pakistan played an important role in normalisation of the Sino-US relations.⁸³ This development introduced a new dimension to the region, especially if seen in the context of the Cold War that enhanced Pakistan’s importance for China. The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971, was

Maqsoodul Hasan Nuri, Muhammad Munir and Aftab Hussain (Islamabad: IPRI, 2011): 37.

⁸⁰ Mirza Muhammad Saleem, “Pakistan’s Geo-strategic Position,” *World Times*, April 10, 2010, http://jworldtimes.com/Article/42010_Pakistan%E2%80%99s_Geo-Strategic_Position

⁸¹ Ahmad Shaheen, “Pakistan: A Geographical Battlefield,” *Pak Tribune*, December 22, 2011, <http://paktribune.com/articles/Pakistan-A-Geographical-Battlefield-242831.html>, also see, Raymond Lee, “The Strategic Importance of Chinese-Pakistani Relations,” *Aljazeera Centre for Studies*, August 3, 2016, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/08/strategic-importance-chinese-pakistani-relations-160803101555719.html>

⁸² Rehman, “Pakistan’s Evolving Relations.”

⁸³ S. M. Burke and Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan’s Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2nd Edition, 1990), cited in Rehman, “Pakistan’s Evolving Relations.”

another development that motivated China to increase its military and economic assistance with Pakistan. Later, on the issue of the Bangladesh's application for membership to the UN, China, on Pakistan's request, exercised its veto power for the first time to stall the move, which helped Pakistan secure in a bargain the release of its Prisoners of War (PoWs) and the return of troops to their pre-war positions.⁸⁴

The Indian nuclear test of 1974 created a security dilemma for Pakistan and enhanced China's strategic value for Pakistan to counter the Indian move. Provision of nuclear energy to Pakistan is considered as one of the major contributions of China in ensuring Pakistan's security. Two 300 MWe nuclear power plants were built by China in Chashma and two more are under construction. Both countries have agreed to build two "state-of-the-art nuclear power plants with the capacity of 1100 MWe each. Pakistan intends to add more power-plants to get about 8900 MWe under its cooperation with China.⁸⁵ In addition to this, realising Pakistan's energy crisis and its implications for economic development, the Chinese experts are helping Pakistan in diversifying its energy mix.⁸⁶ To meet the growing energy demands of the country and also accounting for additional energy required for industrial zones and building of infrastructure for the CPEC, both countries have recognised the importance of energy projects. Therefore, the most important component of the CPEC is the energy sector development in Pakistan.⁸⁷

Indo-US strategic cooperation directly undermines Pakistan and China's strategic interests. Such cooperation between India and the US would provide a strong reason for Pakistan and China to have more civilian nuclear energy cooperation. In the same context, it is also noteworthy that the US-India nexus has enhanced the importance of Pakistan for China and vice versa. This situation has provided an opportunity to both countries to further strengthen their strategic interdependence by promoting their cooperation at a bilateral and multilateral level. This whole scenario reflects that Pakistan-China strategic cooperation would not only continue in the years to come

⁸⁴ Rahman, "Pakistan's Evolving Relations."

⁸⁵ "Pakistan Plans to Produce 8,900 MW Nuclear Power by 2030," *Economic Times*, January 2, 2014.

⁸⁶ "China-Pakistan Relations," *IPRI Review* 5, www.academia.edu/5201438/China-PakistanRelations

⁸⁷ Zafar, "The Corridor of Hope."

but will rather expand by embracing new dimensions, such as cooperation in energy, agriculture, industry and infrastructure development.

Conclusion

In the context of South Asia, India developed relations with most major powers especially with the US, Japan and Australia, resulting in the enhancement of Pakistan's relations with China. The pre and post 9/11 developments have consolidated the strategic interdependence between China and Pakistan in the context of the War on Terrorism, strengthening peace in Afghanistan, role of the CPEC in regional connectivity and strengthening peace and stability in South Asia. Although India remains an important factor in Pakistan-China strategic calculus in post 9/11 scenario but there are also several other factors which would continue to enhance the strategic interdependence between the two countries. These factors include convergence of interests in regional connectivity, cooperation in regional organisation, regional peace and stability and combating extremism and terrorism.