

PAK-CHINA PARTNERSHIP: US AND INDIA'S RESPONSE

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Abstract

Pakistan and China have always enjoyed multidimensional and cordial relations on the basis of mutual trust and understanding. These relations have taken a further boost in the post 9/11 era. Though they made policy adjustments in the light of global transformations, yet their relations continued to be in harmony with each other. The year 2015 marked the big boost in these relations through the culmination of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement worth \$ 46 billion. CPEC brought forth many opportunities for both the countries to promote their interests respectively, is viewed negatively by US and India, as a step to contain US role and Indian ambitious designs in South Asia. Many other countries who were previously against the CPEC, are now taking interest and wanted to be a part of it. US has developed Asia pivot to contain China's rise and to reinforce its position in the Asia pacific region and also supports India's reservations over it. While India views it from the prism of its security concerns in the light of its rivalry with both China and Pakistan. As an emerging global power, China has the potential and willingness to support and promote Pakistan more than any other power of the world. This paper looks into the interests of Pakistan and China associated with each other, CPEC and the US and India's responses over their strategic partnership.

Keywords: China, Pakistan, US, India, CPEC, Interests.

Introduction

Pakistan and China are 'all weather tested allies' yet the signed agreements need to be implemented in their true letter and spirit to grasp the actual potential of this partnership. In fact, it is the mutuality of interests and shared threat perception that not only have led to the convergence of their interests but also have made complementary to each other. Pakistan and China both depend on one another for the fulfillment of their strategic interests as nations have interests not the friendships. Whenever, Pakistan faces any external pressure or threats to its security, China has always extended its support to Pakistan via giving its air cover, supported its nuclear program, and protected its economy from external pressures. It also supports Pakistan on various international forums like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and the G-20 etc. Pakistan reciprocates with supporting China on

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every issue either pertaining to national security related to Taiwan or Xinjiang or any other matter etc. However, growing China-Pakistan association is often seen with skepticism by the US and India. US is apprehensive due to China's rise as a major challenger to U.S. hegemony while India sees growing China-Pakistan partnership through the prism of its security interests. This paper examines the Pak-China partnership by addressing the following research questions. First, how and Why Pakistan and China are important for each other? Second, How Pakistan and China are supporting each other? Third, how this entente between Pakistan and China is viewed by US and India? This paper's research methodology contains the use of appropriate secondary sources and the official statements issued by the leaders of concerned countries during different timings.

This paper has been divided into three sections. First section after giving a brief description of historical relations, spells light over the importance of China and Pakistan for each other. Second section probes into the Pak-China cooperation during the war on terror, explores CPEC and discusses the role of regional states over it. Third section looks into the US and India's concerns and actions to derail this strategic partnership. The final section concludes the whole article.

Historical Relations between Pakistan and China

Since China's inception in 1948, both countries started their relations on the basis of cordiality as Pakistan was among those few countries who accorded recognition to the newly born state of China in the first week of its independence. On May 21, 1951, China and Pakistan established diplomatic relations. Relations were amicable and were on good note. Though China did not like Pakistan's entry into west sponsored defense pacts like SEATO, CENTO, etc. However, it did not criticize Pakistan as it understood that these pacts are driven on the basis of Pakistan's security needs. In 1951, China had to intervene in the Korean war to protect its security interests in the region at that time, Pakistan did not vote against China, in the United Nations General assembly (UNGA) to label it as an aggressor, this gesture helped both states to strengthen their relations and was appraised by Chinese leadership.

At systemic level either commonality of interest or shared threat perception led the states to cooperate with each other. In case of Pakistan and China, India is a common enemy. The matter of fact is Pakistan's policies are Indo-centric but China is a state who never cherished to have good relations with

India at the expense of Pakistan. Though, initially Pakistan was less careful in its anti-communist rhetoric as Prime Minister Bogra at a conference in Colombo in May 1954 spoke of international communism as the biggest potential danger to democracy in the region¹. Premier Zhou Enlai communicated it to the departing ambassador that he was hurt by Pakistan. Yet still he said that, he fully understood Pakistan's circumstances. This signal was carefully taken by Pakistan and at a meeting after the Bandung conference (April 1955) between Prime Minister M. Ali Bogra and Premier Zhou Enlai, it was explained to China that Pakistan's entry in west sponsored pacts were not to encircle China and that Pakistan would not take part in any alliance and war against China². In 1956 Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai visited Pakistan and in a joint communique it was stated that the differences of opinion on various issues would not block the strengthening of relations among Pakistan and China³. Developments during 1957 and 1969 had brought the relations of both countries into a new phase of cooperation. India put an allegation on China for supporting the war within parts of Ladakh (Kashmir) and North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). At the same time, the American and Soviet inclination towards India revealed the fact that India got all kinds of military support from both power blocs while Pakistan's request was ignored and put down. In the same way Pakistan openly opposed India's acts of waging war to get the weapon from West and U.S. in particular. Amidst the 1965 Indo-Pak war, China fully supported Pakistan not only by extending diplomatic support but also provided necessary military technology and financial assistance. All this moved the partnership to the new horizons beyond the state level interactions and extended to the people of both states⁴. In 1971, Pakistan was disintegrated and Bangladesh was created due the Indian conspiracy. Remapping of Pakistan after Bangladesh creation suited well to the interests of China and they touched the new heights of friendship.

Connected to late 1970s' politics of Cold War, Pakistan at western side was essentially a focal point of the Cold War rivals—especially due to Afghanistan in the aftermath of Soviet invasion. Pakistan suited well to China's strategic interests within South Asia and across the region owing to Pakistan's centrally-located position in southern Eurasia; its nearness to the Muslim world and due to its role in Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan triangle which held its influence upon Central Asian Republics, Gulf States, and the Middle Eastern states⁵.

In 1970's and 80's China supported Pakistan especially in the field of defense. It also provided the economic aid and financial assistance in 1977 to

overcome economic difficulties and in 1979 to cope up with the Afghan migrant issue, who came to Pakistan after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Then, the ending of the cold war and the shifting of the world's focus from traditional security to socio-economic matters changed the spectrum of Pak-China relations. During this period, China maintained a neutral stance over the Kashmir issue because, it wanted to settle border dispute with India. Yet, India's reluctance to sort out Indo-China border disputes had given further boost to Pakistan-China entente.⁶ In 1998 nuclear explosions first by India and then by Pakistan, China held that India's nuclear explosion test had created a threat of War in the region and it had damaged the atmosphere of trust among the two nations⁷, while it kept quiet over Pakistan's explosions. The dawn of the new century further strengthened their ties.

Importance of China

China is a state that is bordering the fourteen countries of the world, namely Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, India, Nepal, Korea, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, Bhutan, Russia and Tajikistan. China is a peace loving nation and they believe that peace with neighboring countries is vital for their own security and well-being⁸.

The pace of Chinese progress is so fast and its progress is not limited only till China but it is recognized internationally. It is contributing a lot more for regional integration and for integration of the economies of the friendly states. This century is said to be of Asians due to shifting of world political focus from Europe to Asia, and due to the rise of Asian powers like China, India, etc. There is increased US presence in the region that is on one hand to constrain and counter increased Chinese influence and on the other to have access and control over the untapped resources of Central Asia. US's defence pacts with Australia, South Korea, Japan, India and ASEAN states are steps to contain China's increasing power and influence in Asia Pacific and Indo-Pacific regions. On the economic front, the US and its allies (Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, Peru, New Zealand, Singapore, the United States and Vietnam) were negotiating and successfully signed Trans-Pacific Partnership was signed on 6 October 2015, aiming to strengthen US business opportunities in the region and counter China-ASEAN trade⁹.

Keeping in view the regional and global dynamics, China has tried to pacify its image by replacing the term "Rising China" with the Peaceful Rise of

China. It is making its advances to engage the states with whom it was having hostile past like India and Japan.

Pakistan's Importance for China

Pakistan due to its the strategic location as a gateway to the Strait of Hormuz (which enjoys strategic importance) in the Indian Ocean, blessed with natural resources and sharing of borders with two Islamic countries, Afghanistan and Iran, has always been a center piece for Regional Politics¹⁰. Like China, Pakistan has always supported China in its times of crises. During the isolation period of China, Pakistan supported China and played a vital role in establishing its relations with the US.

During his visit to Pakistan in 2013, Chinese Prime Minister made it clear that the development of China cannot be separated from the friendship with Pakistan.¹¹ To make the friendship more strong, the Chinese Prime Minister gave a proposal which emphasized "strategic and long-term planning", "connectivity and maritime sectors" and "China-Pakistan economic corridor project". China has a great strategic interest in the Silk Road and Gwadar. In the same year 2013, president Xi Jinping presented China's vision for a "Silk Road Economic Belt" during a speech in Kazakhstan. The basic idea of this project was to increase and expand the cooperation and develop economic ties for the development of the Euro-Asia region¹².

The strategic location of Gwadar is very important because it lies on the gateway to the Strait of Hormuz. It is situated at a point that can link three regions i.e. Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Gwadar port provides the shortest, cheapest and a safer route through Karakoram Highway (KKH). Currently, China is dependent on the Gulf oil that has to follow a strong route through the Strait of Malacca that is under US influence and after reaching China's east coast, it has to travel thousands of miles for reaching west of China. China relies on the Middle Eastern oil reserves, under CPEC Pakistan would give a naval base to China at Gwadar Port to minimize the cost of transportation of oil to China.

China is highly sensitive over the growing partnership between India and US that is aimed at encirclement. China's increasing influence and power in Asia. To counterbalance this problem, Pakistan is a best alternative who has supported Chinese stance right from its inception. Pakistan played an active role

in normalization of US China relations and also supported its stance on Tibet and Taiwan's issue. Pakistan has never sit behind to extend its support to China. So, Pakistan is a very important state for China. China favors stable, prosperous Pakistan, and helps Pakistan to come out of extremism and terrorism menace as these issues have its spillover effects over China. China fears the rise of terrorism and extremism in its Muslim majority Xinjiang province.

U.S. has been making use of India for advancing its interests in South-Asia. In fact, it has been a tactic to pressurize China and put down its rising power. China's pace of progress is so fast in every field of life and in order to limit it, U.S. has developed strategic partnership with India that has been evident from Indo-U.S. nuclear deal 2005, maritime strength and moving forward towards the New Silk route. Against this background, China-Pakistan partnership becomes a necessity to maintain the balance of power in Asia, and to tackle the moves India and U.S. have been making against Pakistan and China. Pak-China friendship has also been very unique in the sense that both the states are ideologically different, having different administrative set-ups and have formed such a lasting and durable partnership between them.

China has supported Pakistan's stance regarding Osama Bin Laden and defended that Pakistani government may not have known about Laden's presence on its soil.¹³ During his April 2015 visit to Pakistan, President Xi publicly stated that Pakistan has played a productive role to resolve the Afghan problem and that China would continue to cooperate with Pakistan to promote the reconciliation process to ensure the peaceful transition of Afghanistan¹⁴.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Cooperation & Opportunities

CPEC is a project of 46 billion US dollars that is under progress. It consists of a 3,000-km, long extensive network of roads, railways, pipelines, special economic zones, dry ports and other infrastructural projects across Pakistan. The idea of CPEC dates back to the Musharraf era and gained popularity in May 2013 when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang signed the agreement for the construction of the CPEC during his visit to Pakistan.

Operational Activities of CPEC

The game changer project of CPEC has been operational and its first ever trade activity took place on 31st October, 2016 when the hundred Chinese containers reached at the Sust port in Gilgit Biltistan¹⁵. The First operational activity at the Gwadar port took place on 13 November, 2016. Three conveys of containers originated from Sust, Sailkot and Lahore reached at Quetta by following the different routes, from where they moved to Gwadar through N 85 Highway.

Response of Regional States

CPEC is not a project that is only limited to Pakistan and China rather it is an international project. Being a multidimensional mega project it will change the regional dynamics through its road networks, energy projects, trading conveys and people to people contacts in the coming years. International as well as regional countries are taking interest in the project. Some are attempting to be a part of the project while others are viewing it as prosperity gate for China and Pakistan only.

Afghanistan is the landlocked country and CPEC has operationalized the Gwadar port first time in its history. Being a bordering state, CPEC appears likely fruitful for Afghanistan, if it becomes a part of this project. Afghanistan's Ambassador to Pakistan said that, Kabul will obviously want to become the part of CPEC and it is equally important for Afghanistan as it is for Pakistan. It will enable Afghanistan to recover the damages of the decade's long war.¹⁶ The western route of CPEC will connect Pakistan and Afghanistan through Chaman and it will provide the shortest transit route between the two countries.

US and India views Pak-China Partnership

United States Views

US does not openly oppose the idea of CPEC and a US State Department official said, " we very much support and share the idea of regional economic connectivity. Fundamentally, we hope that eventually not only Pakistan and China, but other neighbors, particularly Afghanistan would be a part of it.¹⁷ But, US has concerns about the project, due to its strategic interests in Central Asia and close proximity of this region to Russia, Iran, and China.¹⁸ It keeps an eye over the resources of energy rich states of Central Asia. That's why US makes use of all the instruments of power-diplomacy, information, military, and economic

to pursue these interests. Pakistan is a state who facilitated the establishment of the relationship between two erstwhile enemies the US and China during the cold war era. The sole super-power US sees the rise of China with caution. Ideological and territorial conflicting relations between China and the former Soviet Union have given way to cooperative ties between Pakistan and China. China and India fought a war in 1962, have since stabilized their relationships, the *casus belli*, i.e., the unresolved border dispute notwithstanding¹⁹. All these factors lead to the closing together of India and US for their interests that is problematic for Pakistan and China. The growing cordiality between U.S. and India has been disturbing the balance of power in South Asia in favor of India which is directly effecting Pakistan and China²⁰.

In the last thirteen years during its global war on terror, US has supported Pakistan by providing \$10.5 in economic assistance, 7.6 billion US dollars security assistance and 13 billion US dollars as a reimbursement for counterterrorism²¹.

It shows that US wants to contain China and is cynical of the rising partnership between Pakistan and China and wants to dissuade both the states from this cordiality. Pakistan owing to its geo-strategic location in South Asia has been an important player in world politics. U.S. has always exploited Pakistan for the pursuance of its strategic interests. After the fulfillment of these interests Pakistan is left alone to cope up with the whole situation. As being the front line ally of the US and after sacrificing a lot in terms of material and human resources. Pakistan has now developed the feeling to explore other foreign policy options like the growing partnership between Pakistan and China and Pakistan and Russia, in order to survive and act according to its national interests, yet this partnership is viewed with skeptical eyes.

In 2011, US gave the idea of New Silk Road Initiative (NSRI) and the basic aim behind this initiative was to integrate Afghanistan with the region and to link the regions of south and central Asia. All this would be done through regional energy markets, trade and transport, increase their customs and border operations and people to people contacts.²² CPEC is also for integration and it is integrating China and Pakistan currently and other states like CARs, Afghanistan, Iran, Russia are showing their interest and taking initiatives to be a part of this mega project. Russia has sent its elite forces for military drills in GB and FATA to support CPEC. It seems that the US role from South Asia is likely to

decrease due to China's presence as a balancer and CPEC might also challenge the US influence on the oil CARs, yet the strong US-India partnership can't be ignored in this regard, as both countries have developed strong strategic, economic and political partnership. While, Pakistan is viewed only through a security lens and in the future US and India may work together to contain China's role in the region.

India's View

India keeps a strict watch over China's developments. Though, the thaw is coming in India-China relations as both are engaging in successful diplomatic engagements, India is cautious and suspicious enough over every China's moves to Pakistan. For India and China, the point of annoyance is the balance of power considerations, although both put down this proposition²³. It is attempting its best to disrupt and damage China-Pakistan cordiality through its antagonist diplomacy."²⁴ It sees the growing warmth between Pakistan and China as an attempt to counter India. It considers that China avoids discussion over the nuclear issues with India having the fear that it will give de facto recognition to Indian nuclear power status.

India is having the aims of getting the regional superiority in South Asia and China Pakistan cooperation is a direct challenge to Indian hawkish policies. Indian Prime Minister is openly criticizing CPEC and says that it poses a great threat to the Indian interests because it passes through the disputed areas of Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan that is very near to Indian borders.²⁵ India and China both are energy consumers and both are emerging economies.

India considers CPEC as a thorn in its paw, has chalked out new ways to put obstacles in the smooth implementation of CPEC. Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing's (RAW) opening of an office in Delhi and allocation \$300 million to disrupt the projects associated with CPEC²⁶ has been a clear indication of Indian plans and actions. Pakistan has handed over Gwadar port to China and India feels perturbed due to the edge China will get in the Arabian Sea.

Evidences suggest that India has been involved behind the Baluchistan's insurgency, the province that is abundant in oil and gas reserves. India strongly object to the civilian nuclear deal between China and Pakistan on the charge that

it would violate international protocol related to trade of nuclear equipment and materials²⁷.

India develops new ties with Iran and this Indo-Iran nexus is founded to counter the CPEC. Indian Prime Minister in his historic visit to Iran in May 2016 showed his deep interest in Chahbahar Port and signed MOU for the development of port. India, Afghanistan and Iran has signed a trilateral treaty for developing the port and other projects²⁸. India is renewing its relations with UAE, Prime Minister Modi visited UAE and both countries vowed to establish the infrastructural investment fund and aim of reaching the target of 75 billion.²⁹ All this has been done to counter and contain the Pak-China partnership and particularly CPEC.

Analysis & Conclusion

China and Pakistan will continue to be time-tested in the contemporary world. In order to sustain this cordiality, both the countries need to work more closely to counter the hurdles, enemies posing in their way to distract them from each other. The competitors like India and US will continue to not only suspect this growing cordiality, but will attempt to contain it. Evidences suggest that Chinese developmental projects and efforts have proven more beneficial and fruitful than US support to Pakistan. It is due to the fact that Pak-China partnership is based on development and cooperation while the US-Pakistan partnership is security driven. Under the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, the US has provided the civilian assistance of \$5 billion but, the scale of China's investments suggests that it will be more effective for the economy of much more than the US civilian aid. So, Pakistan should now say "no more" to the U.S. in response to "do more" demand. Instead of relying and looking towards the US, Pakistan should work closely with its all-time tested ally China.

Both countries have proven committed, reliable and friendly towards each other in the times of crises. Pakistan has always supported China and China has understood Pakistan's sensitivity and security vulnerability vis-à-vis India. To make their ties more concrete, strong, meaningful, and mutually beneficial, Pakistan needs to develop an independent Foreign policy on the basis of its national interest and needs to relinquish its "YES SIR" approach to U.S. orders. China has been propelling Pakistan, in order to sustain it further on a good note, Pakistan needs to stay very active and vigilant in the light of internal and

external dangers, and otherwise in the future China might have other priorities as well as alternatives.

NOTES

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