

## PROSPECTS OF SINO-PAK RELATIONSHIP

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### **Abstract**

*“The founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 was a truly historic event, and so was the independence of Pakistan in 1947.”<sup>1</sup> Sino-Pak relationship has stood the test and trial of the history, ever since the establishment of this astounding affinity. There has been convergence of views and of both neighbours and mutual support at all the tiers: bilateral, regional and global. Both countries are cooperating with each other on a number of bi-lateral projects currently underway. In addition, both countries continue to explore opportunities to cooperate on various projects of mutual benefit. Strengthening the Sino-Pak relationship is a pivotal pillar of the long-term foreign policy objectives of both countries, aiming at promotion of global peace, respecting each other’s sovereignty and building of a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity. The paper attempts at evaluating the prospects of further bolstering Sino-Pak relationship in the context of the changing global scenario. It also explores the possibilities of cooperation in the field of bilateral commerce and trade, defence cooperation, Pak-China civilian nuclear deal, and deliberates upon the prospects of Pakistan becoming an energy corridor by reassessing the use of the underutilized Gwadar Port.*

### **Sino-Pak Historical Linkages and Pakistani Geopolitics**

Emerged from the fertile basin of the Yellow River (Huang He), before 4000 BC, today, the People’s Republic of China is a country of 1.3 billion people.<sup>2</sup> It has in its surrounding; the great Himalayas, a huge ocean, the Gobi desert, Tibetan Plateau and world’s most significant regions and civilization-rich countries.<sup>3</sup> The Pacific separates its heartland to an “area about a quarter the size of the continental United States.”<sup>4</sup> Its economic growth rate is one of the world’s highest, thus

enabling it to emerge steadily as a major power in the global power politics. During the times of China's Tang dynasty, an eminent Chinese monk Hsuan-Tsang<sup>5</sup> studied Buddhism in Taxila on his pilgrimage to the west. His sojourn in Pakistan, recounted in a book entitled "The Great Tang Dynasty Record of the Western Regions"<sup>6</sup>, is a popular account in the history of exchanges between the Chinese and Pakistani people. Indeed, at a time when Europe was in the dark ages, China was one of the world's most advanced civilizations.<sup>7</sup> Tales of Chinese fabulous wealth and sophistication have been narrated by traveller like Marco Polo. Likewise, under the Confucian Government, China reached to the remarkable level of scientific and technological advancement much ahead of Europe.<sup>8</sup> There has been a gradual downfall of this giant for centuries, but, the modern China under Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is likely to overtake<sup>9</sup> the sole super power in another two decades of 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

By virtue of being the, "geographical pivot of history"<sup>10</sup> as described by Sir Halford J. Mackinder, the geo-political location of Pakistan essentially makes it impossible for the adjoining countries and regions to ignore it. Traditionally this piece of land has been used as a linkage between Central, West, South, and East Asia and ties the surrounding regions into a web while acting as the hub. This significance was adequately highlighted by, the former President Pervez Musharraf in June 2006, in a statement; "Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia---We offer the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and inter regionally".<sup>11</sup>

Traditionally, being part of the Indus Valley Civilization, the geographical positioning of Pakistan has always been used as a trade route. Mostly, this area has been used as an extension of 'Silk Road' between the great Chinese Empire and rest of the world. With the increase in the means of communication and diversification of the transportation routes, this region has acquired significance in the globalized

world under the concept of a global village. On the economic facade, Pakistan is surrounded by emerging economic giants like; China and India who are in dire need of energy, whereas its next door neighbours include oil rich Central Asian States and Middle Eastern countries. The geo-political significance of Pakistan is linked with trade, geopolitical configuration, minerals and energy wealth of its surrounding regions and states. Its 600 kms long Makran coast lays a beam of the energy and trade routes out of the Straits of Hormuz and overlooks the strategically volatile gateway to the Gulf region having more than 60% of oil and 25% of world gas reserves, thereby making Pakistan as an attractive location both for East and West. Neighbourhood of Central Asian States having over 23 billion tons of oil and 3000 billion cubic meters of gas has further enhanced geographic imperatives for Pakistan, as it offers these landlocked energy affluent states the shortest route to the warm waters, the Arabian Sea.

### **The Strategic Foundation of Sino-Pak Relationship**

Following the rich history shared by two ancient civilizations, Sino-Pak entente has strengthened and solidified with the passage of time. Under the dynamic leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, People's Republic of China came into being from the ashes of civil war between Communists and Nationalists on October 1, 1949. Pakistan was the first Islamic country, second Commonwealth and the third non-Communist country which recognized the People's Republic of China on January 4, 1950<sup>12</sup>. Diplomatic relations were established on 21 May 1951, sequel to the negotiations with Pakistan's first Charge d' Affaires who had arrived in Beijing in April 1951.<sup>13</sup> Thereafter, the first Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan made his arrival in Karachi, then capital of Pakistan in September 1951 and Pakistan's first Ambassador to China reached Peking in November 1951.<sup>14</sup> After having established bilateral diplomatic ties six decades ago, the year 2011 has been declared by both nations as the year for the celebration of Pak-China diplomatic relationship. Both countries are holding a series of "commemorative activities covering fields like politics, economy, culture, education, sports, etc."<sup>15</sup>

Owing to the compulsions of the Cold War alliances, there could not take place a meaningful progress in the bi-lateral relationship of Pakistan and China in the decade of 1950s. Gradually, a solid foundation was laid for this strategic bilateral engagement between Pakistan and China in the subsequent years. Apart from establishing the diplomatic relationship, in 1955, during the Bandung Conference, Pakistani Premier Mohammad Ali Bogra and Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou Enlai, formally agreed to enhance their bilateral ties in regional as well as in global context. Visualizing the strategic significance of this relationship, Chairman Mao Zedong, expressed his desire for a better and cordial relationship between Pakistan and China during his meeting with Pakistani Ambassador to China, Mr Sultan ud Din Ahmed, on, May 23, 1955. The historic visit of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to Pakistan in December 1956 was of a great significance.<sup>16</sup> The visit enabled both countries to understand viewpoints of each other. In the joint communiqué, it was agreed by both countries that, there is no conflict of interests between two neighbours. It was further reiterated that, divergence of views on many problems at international level should not prevent the strengthening of friendship between Pakistan and China.<sup>17</sup> Earlier Prime Minister Suhrawardy made a 12 days long trip to People's Republic of China.

The gradual cementing of this relationship during 1950s brought both the countries closer as manifested in 1961 when, "Pakistan voted for restoration of China's seat in the United Nations."<sup>18</sup> Pakistan not only supported but strongly lobbied for the restoration of China's legitimate right to the permanent seat of Security Council in the United Nations Organizations.<sup>19</sup> While supporting the permanent membership of China in UNSC, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Zafrullah Khan said in 1950, "China is not applying for admission to the United Nations. It is a member state, a permanent member of Security Council, one of the 'Big Five'."<sup>20</sup> Both countries signed the boundary agreement in 1963. This was a significant milestone as it displayed the growing confidence between the two neighbours. From the Pakistani side, the agreement was

signed in February 1963 in Beijing by then Foreign Minister Mr. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. Later China helped Pakistan in the construction of Karakoram Highway, commonly referred as friendship highway, linking China's Xingjian region with Gilgit-Baltistan through Khunjerab Pass, at the height of 16000 feet. Successful completion of this project was the biggest demonstration of mutual support and amity between both neighbours.

While reiterating the historical wordings of Chairman Mao Zedong, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao described the friendship between Pakistan and China as, a "lush tree with deep roots and thick foliage, full of vigour and vitality,"<sup>21</sup> during his historic visit to Pakistan in December 2010. The initial relatively slow pace of mutual understanding got an impetus in the era of Field Martial Muhammad Ayub Khan, when the then Foreign Minister (later Prime Minister), Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto advocated and helped devising a strategic dimension to this bilateral partnership. Through his strategic vision, Bhutto advocated Pak-China relationship as a vital pillar in the Foreign Policy of Pakistan. The same vision exists today as a shared-belief in Pakistan's policy-making quarters and Pakistan has maintained this strategic relationship as an inalienable part of its diplomatic relationships. This strategic partnership between both countries was initially driven by the mutual need and the bilateral alliance was termed as an alliance of necessity. However, with the passage of time, both countries have acknowledged the shared unrelenting affinity and closeness in their relationship. Apart from the political connections, both countries had developed military relationship which subsequently led to the creation of a Joint Committee for Economy, Trade and Technology in 1982.<sup>22</sup> Upon establishment of the first ever trade agreement for mutual benefit and cooperation of both countries in 1953, Sino-Pak bilateral trade, which initially stood at \$10 million, is now expected to touch the target of \$15 billion in next few years.

Earlier Pakistan played a very crucial and pertinent role in bringing United States and China<sup>23</sup> closer to each other in

early 1970s by catalyzing and providing logistics for the Sino-US secret diplomatic linkage, in the height of the cold war. Consequently, these developments provided opportunities and allowed China to step out from the close-door policies and isolated economy, thus allowing it to interact and explore new avenues and opportunities in the international markets, especially U.S and Europe. This facilitation subsequently enabled China to mould its political outlook, trade and industrialization on modern lines. Consequently, in prevailing times, China has emerged as a major economic and military power, second to US only. During the cold war era as well as thereafter, Pakistan indeed acted as a bridge between China and the Western world led by the US. America, on its part, was able to minimize the number of its adversaries especially in the Communist world by engaging with China, for which it should give Pakistan the due credit. Indeed the Sino-Pak friendship has matured into a comprehensive strategic partnership for peace and development in the region and abroad. Due to this mediatory role of Pakistan, today, America is the biggest trade partner of China.

During the critical stages like 1965 and 1971 wars, China whole heartedly supported Pakistan. After Indian aggression on Pakistan in September 1965; China declared that, Indian aggression on any single neighbour, concerns all of its neighbours. It was clearly said in the Chinese official statement that, “the Chinese Government sternly condemns India for its criminal aggression (and) expresses firm support for Pakistan----.”<sup>24</sup> On September 9, 1965, Premier Chou En-lai declared: “India’s armed aggression against Pakistan has thoroughly exposed the Indian reactionaries’ most publicised nonsense about their policy of non-alignment and peaceful co-existence. How can there be a peaceful and neutral country that arbitrarily commits aggression against its neighbours?”<sup>25</sup> In 1971, China however, was confronting nuclear-armed Soviet troops along Sino-Russia border,<sup>26</sup> thus could not divert its troops on Sino-India border, however, “China did what it could to support Pakistan in the United Nations, and after the war, it helped to pick up the pieces.”<sup>27</sup>

At the international stage, China continues to second Pakistani point of view on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, considering India as an illegal occupant of the state's territory. In 2005, Pakistan and China signed a landmark treaty dubbed as "Treaty for Friendship and Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations."<sup>28</sup> According to the treaty, both countries have committed that "neither party will join any alliance or bloc, which infringes upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity"<sup>29</sup> of both nations, and "would not conclude treaties of this nature with any third party." This treaty is a key instrument which enables both countries to strengthen their strategic, economic and cultural relations. A total of twenty-two agreements (for cooperation in defence, politics, trade and economy) were signed between Pakistan and China under this friendship treaty, during the visit of Chinese Premier. In fact, the treaty has, "institutionalized the broad-based and multi-faceted relations between Pakistan and China".<sup>30</sup> As per Mr. Salman Bashir, the current Foreign Minister, (then Ambassador to China), the "most important" aspect of the treaty was the "clear and unambiguous, categorical assurance by China to defend Pakistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity."<sup>31</sup> This commitment is also evident from the Chinese response on the eve of US raid in Abbotabad on May 2, 2011, when it asked US to respect Pakistani sovereignty.

### **Sino-Pak Areas of Bi-lateral Cooperation**

The common feature of Sino-Pak strategic relationship is based on promotion of both, regional and global, harmony and peace. Despite its global stature and overwhelming economic and military strength, China has not resorted to aggressive posturing towards its neighbours, states in its regional periphery or towards any extra-regional country. Indeed peaceful co-existence is the hallmark of the Chinese foreign policy, <sup>32</sup> and so is the main objective of the foreign policy of Pakistan.<sup>33</sup> As per the vision of the founding father of Pakistan, together with other sister nations, Pakistan has to make "greatest contribution for the peace and prosperity of the world."<sup>34</sup> Chairman Mao Zedong, also founded the

People's Republic of China on similar principles of; "equality, mutual benefit and mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty,"<sup>35</sup> adopted in the First Session of the "National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference"<sup>36</sup> on 29 September, 1949. It embodied the major content of the "Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence."<sup>37</sup>

Apart from protection of its own independence and territorial sovereignty, the main principles of the Chinese Foreign policy are; "upholding of lasting international peace and friendly cooperation between the peoples of all countries, and opposition to the imperialist policy of aggression and war".<sup>38</sup> Even being a major power in the historical perspective, China has demonstrated itself as a none aggressive and soft power towards its neighbours. Neutral analysts today have accounted that the Sino-India War of 1962, was thrust upon China by India. Revelation from the Chinese studies of the Sino-India War, published in 1990, also embark upon the similar finding; "Indian border policies derived from an Indian effort to weaken or overthrow Chinese rule over Tibet-- -- to seize Tibet, to turn Tibet into Indian colony or protectorate or to return Tibet to its pre-1949 status"<sup>39</sup> eventually compelling China to finally opt for a military solution. Indeed, being the successor state of British India, Nehru wanted to persuade the same policies, as British India used to employ. India followed a similar policy to destabilise Pakistan by invading Kashmir and convincing Afghan Kingdom to raise the issue of Pakhtunistan. As per Professor Hu Yan of PLA National Defence University, Indian Premier Nehru worked throughout in 1950s to turn the Tibet into a, "buffer zone"<sup>40</sup> between India and China, while apparently keeping a friendly policy.

In December 2010, Chinese Premier Mr. Wen Jiabao, visited Pakistan for three days. This visit has been indeed of a unique significance, as it covered all aspects; strategic, political and economic. During the visit, Premier Wen Jiabao made sure to meet all stakeholders in Pakistan. Apart from the traditional meetings with the President and Prime Minister, Chinese Premier met with leaders of all political parties of



Pakistan. Rather, it was a rare mosaic of Pakistani political, religious, and territorial leadership gathering to welcome their all-time friend in Islamabad. This gathering was indicative of the fact that, there exists no second opinion about Pakistan's relationship with the People's Republic of China. No foreign leader has ever received such a massive reception and united response with a spirit of love in Pakistan. Together with political leadership, Premier also held a meeting with the Armed Forces heads under Chairman Joint Chief of Staff Committee and assured further enhancement in the ongoing cooperation in the field of defence. On this occasion, Premier Wen Jiabao declared that, "Beijing would never give up on Pakistan."<sup>41</sup> The major areas of Sino-Pak multi-layered relations are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### **Political Linkages**

One of the most significant features of Sino-Pak bilateral relationship is the respect for territorial sovereignty; none of the two have indulged in each other's internal affairs. Unlike United States, China has not meddled in the domestic affairs of Pakistan, be of any nature. This indeed is a cornerstone of Chinese foreign policy and so is the case with Pakistan. Despite the ties that Chinese Communist Party (CCP) enjoys with Pakistani based political parties, included among which are religious groups, China supports and firmly follows its relationship with the government of Pakistan. It is worth mentioning that, CCP is world's largest political party, having membership of over 70 million people.<sup>42</sup> On its part, Pakistan considers that the East Turkistan Islamic Movement in its autonomous region, Xinjiang, is unlawful and has detrimental effects on the sovereignty of the China. It is a declared view of Pakistan that it believes on One China policy and considers both Taiwan and Tibet as integral parts of China. Similarly, Chinese position on Kashmir has also been absolutely clear with Beijing reaffirming the disputed nature of Kashmir. China has advocated for the resolution of the matter as per UN resolution and as per the wishes of its people, a stance Pakistan has held since 1947. Despite being part of SEATO and CENTO, Pakistan has decided against sending troops for

UN mission in Korea, and also abstained from voting in a UN resolution aimed at tagging China as an aggressor country.<sup>43</sup>

During the 2010 visit in his address with the Joint Session of the Pakistani Parliament, Chinese Premier assured Pakistan an unflinching Chinese support on the issue of Kashmir as per UN resolutions. As a courageous display, while recognizing the disputed nature of Kashmir, China does not stamp visas to the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir on Indian passport. Rather, it attaches a separate page to stamp the visas for Kashmiris, considering them as a separate entity. China always desired a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue, as per the wishes of its people. Chinese Prime Minister also appreciated Pakistan's role and sacrifices, in fighting out the terrorism. While pointing towards myopic global response towards Pakistan, the Chinese Premier said, "Pakistan has paid a heavy price in combating the terrorism. The fight against terrorism should not be linked with any religion or ethnic group and there should be no double standards."<sup>44</sup> Indeed, in conformity to the national interests of the peoples of both countries, this strategic partnership would promote, "peace, stability and prosperity of the region."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, China also assured Pakistan for its wholehearted support to Pakistani position on the Afghan issue. Both countries believe that, ISAF forces should vacate the region and the Afghan issue should be resolved through a regional approach by amalgamating all Afghan groups and factions, and not through dictation of extra-regional powers. China, like Pakistan, has its concern over Indian bid for the permanent membership of UNSC and its hegemonic designs and discriminatory treatment with the regions' smaller countries.

On a recent episode of the US raid on Pakistani soil to kill Osama Bin Laden, China showed her unflinching support to Pakistan and emphasized United States to respect the sovereignty of Pakistan. Indeed, the repeated visits of leadership from both countries have proved that. Pak-China relationship is higher than mountains and deeper than oceans, in letter and spirit. In the wordings of the Pakistani Ambassador to China, "The entire Pakistani nation was deeply

touched by China's forthright, principled and staunch support to Pakistan, expressed by Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Jiang Yu, following the killing of Osama bin Laden. Pakistani media applauded China's reiteration of the principle that independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of any country should be respected; and its reaffirmation that Pakistan Government was determined in its resolve and strong in its action in the fight against terrorism."<sup>46</sup> This is a reality that, Pakistan's relationship with China is not "based on expediency, but on careful assessment of Pakistan's national interests."<sup>47</sup> Under the transforming international environment, China is undertaking a number of Confidence Building Measures with connected regional and neighbouring countries. China has been holding security dialogues and regular meetings including track-2 routes with all neighbours including India.<sup>48</sup> Another added feature in overall Chinese diplomacy, in the prevailing times, is the conduct of military exercises with regional countries as part of military diplomacy.

### **Economic Cooperation**

Sino-Pak bilateral trade started in 1950, initially through a barter agreement, when China had started supplies of coal to Pakistan in exchange for jute and cotton. By 1952, this Pakistani export had reached \$4 million.<sup>49</sup> It was a time when India was all out to undermine the nascent Pakistani economy. Thereafter, both China and Pakistan further boosted these initial linkages. Analysts believe that, "China's rapid economic growth and emergence on the world stage in recent years appear as signs of a country that is growing ever more powerful"<sup>50</sup> Chinese economic growth rate is one of the highest in the world. Indeed, in its economic development and rapid growth rate, Chinese human resource and enabling environments like; facilitation in the form of tax exemptions and providing provisions for cheaper energy has played a very significant role. China is the main engine of global economic growth, contributing no less than one third of the world's total growth.<sup>51</sup> Chinese rise has been equally felt in the East and West. Traditionally, both countries have strong economic

bonds and China continues its economic assistance to Pakistan without attaching undue strings. Apart from the traditional cooperation, in December 2010, during the visit of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, Pakistan and China concluded economic deals worth \$35 billion in total.<sup>52</sup>

These deals include; 17 agreements, four memorandum of understanding (MoU) and a joint venture. Around 83 Chinese companies are already working in Pakistan in various fields like; exploration of oil and gas, information technology, telecommunication, power generation, engineering, automobiles, infrastructure development and mining sectors. Currently over 100 Chinese enterprises are working in Pakistan under the Five Year Programme for trade and economic cooperation. These Chinese companies have identified sixty-two projects, out of which twenty-seven have already been launched, twenty-six are being examined and remaining ones are being reviewed. This indeed is a new record of the economic deals and agreements in the Sino-Pak bilateral history. Like other major powers, China also supports countries it considers significant via political, military and economic assistance.<sup>53</sup> However, unlike US, it does not exploit those countries under the garb of provisions for assistance.

During this visit of Chinese Premier, with a view to further enhance the economic cooperation, Prime Minister Gillani and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, attended the Pak-China Business Cooperation Summit, which was participated by 260 Chinese delegates together with 150 Pakistani counterparts. On this occasion, Chinese Premier, reiterated his resolve to further enhance the bilateral trade with Pakistan in the coming years with an aim to further improve the flow of investments between both countries. He said that, “his country would increase investment in Gwadar Port”. Chinese Premier also promised that his country would remove the trade barrier between Pakistan and China by improving trade infrastructure and promoting Pakistani exports to Chinese markets. Apart, there exists a ‘Free Trade Agreement (FTA) on goods, investment and services between both countries and

the Free Trade Commission (FTC) having members from both sides who meets regularly.

By 2010, the Sino-Pak bi-lateral trade has risen to \$8.7 billion from just \$1.8 billion in 2002, which is a remarkable improvement. In 2010, “Pakistan’s exports to China have increased by 37% while import from China grew by 25%. The overall growth rate is a promising 28%.”<sup>54</sup> There is an increased likelihood that, this bi-lateral trade, through a constant growth rate, can tap the threshold to \$15 billion, by 2015. In this regard, FTC has already started its consultations “to enhance trade liberalization and promote economic and trade growth of the two countries. It will also look into the issues of dispatch of official purchase missions from China to Pakistan, visa facilitation measures and development of an Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) system.”<sup>55</sup>

### **Sino-Pak Defence Cooperation**

Over the years, “China has emerged as Pakistan's single most trusted and enduring military ally.”<sup>56</sup> Contrary to Indian perceptions, this is mainly because of their mutually shared complementarities, as opposed to being based on animosity towards India or any other country. This is clear from the fact that Pakistan did not attack India to lift its occupation over Kashmir during Sino-India war-1962. On its part, the Chinese military has, traditionally, been defensive<sup>57</sup> in nature, though it remains combat ready at all times. Despite the huge military power of the PLA, there are no heavily guarded garrisons along the Chinese frontiers; instead, the Chinese military is displaced internally, exceptions being made in case of a real threat. During the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Reform and Opening, President Hu Jintao urged PLA to take part in ‘non-war related operations’.<sup>58</sup> This is clear evidence that China is not in favor of power projection. Indeed, in the case of Sino-Pak ties, “the depth and the nature of defense relationship is exceptional. This relationship goes far beyond the buying and selling of weapons.”<sup>59</sup> While it is a reality that Pakistan has been the most allied ally of the US, it is also a fact that Pakistan has been the most sanctioned ally of the US in its

history. Under these sanctions in the most difficult times, China provided a steadfast support to Pakistan's defense and security. Most recently, once the US decided to withhold Pakistan's military assistance (\$800 million), to pressurize Pakistan, China offered Pakistan much more than this suspended US assistance.<sup>60</sup> India welcomed this action against Pakistan, while getting for itself the most sophisticated weaponry, including stealth aircraft from US. In stark contrast to Pakistan's self-centered friends, "China is not just a source of conventional and non-conventional arms, but has been a provider of critical technologies that, in turn, have enabled Pakistan to develop an indigenous nuclear and missile Programme."<sup>61</sup>

Right from the beginning, Pakistan and China have been closely co-operating in the field of defense and defense production. China has been a high-value guarantor and a reliable supplier of conventional military equipment to Pakistan, providing, for instance, F-7 fighters and the T-85 main battle tank (the new version of which is the ZTZ96). Through a Military Deal in May 1967, China agreed to deliver military arms worth \$120 million to Pakistan, which included 100x T-59 tanks, 80x MiG-19 and 10x III-28s aircrafts.<sup>62</sup> From 1972 to 1974, China provided Pakistan with \$300 million<sup>63</sup> worth of military equipment, and helped Pakistan in the establishment of defense factories. China has subsidized the future construction of four frigates for the Pakistan Navy. Apart from this, there is a joint production of 'JF-17 Thunder' aircraft between Pakistan and China, which has strategic significance for Pakistan, and is a unique example of the deep-rooted Sino-Pak friendship. On the eve of Prime Minister Gilani's state visit to China in May 2011, China offered Pakistan fifty JF-17 Thunder aircrafts, to be delivered over the following few months. The aircrafts are being manufactured jointly by both countries.

In June 2010, heading a 17-member defense delegation, the Chinese Defense Minister, General Liang Guanglie, visited Pakistan and concluded three Memoranda of Understanding with his Pakistani counterpart. Apart from agreeing to

enhance Pakistan's counter-terrorism capabilities, both countries decided to conduct joint exercises of their armed forces. Both sides "agreed to strengthen the military cooperation and strategic communication at all levels to overcome challenges being faced by the two countries."<sup>64</sup> In the entire process of Sino-Pak defense cooperation, China has supported Pakistan whole-heartedly. This is the "only country that has provided transfer of technology, soft loans and even technical expertise with no strings attached."<sup>65</sup>

As per Ambassador Masood Khan, "Our two Armed Forces have very close cooperation. Early this year, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee of Pakistan held the 8th round of Defence and Security Talks with the PLA Chief of General Staff. The joint statement issued after the talks stated: "We have unanimity of views to pursue peace and security in the region and to defeat the evil forces of terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Our active collaboration in this regard has produced results."<sup>66</sup> Sino-US military cooperation covers "high-level military exchanges, structured defense and security talks, joint exercises, training of personnel in each other's institutions, joint defence production, and defense trade."<sup>67</sup>

### **From the SCO Forum**

Representing over 60 percent of global land mass and half of the world populace, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), showed its willingness to open its membership<sup>68</sup> for other regional countries in its annual meeting held in Tashkent, on June 11, 2010. The 11<sup>th</sup> Summit of SCO was hosted by Kazakhstan in its capital, Astana, on June 14-15, 2011. Pakistan is undertaking earnest efforts to acquire membership and has presented a sound case for it, whenever such an opportunity may be made available. Pakistan feels that, by virtue of its geo-political location, it has the potential to play a pivotal role in development of its relationship with the SCO countries. It is located at the crossroads of South, Central, West, and East Asia, thus potentially becoming a bridge between the various regions and civilizations of Asia.

Through the attainment of the SCO's membership, Pakistan can fully accrue the benefits from this inter-regional and inter-continental harmony. Apart from the bi-lateral relationship, the SCO forum can best be utilized for further cementing the Sino-Pak ties. Over a period of time, the SCO has established "over twenty large-scale projects related to transportation, energy, and telecommunications and held regular meetings of security, military, defense, foreign affairs, economic, cultural, banking, and other officials from its member states."<sup>69</sup> Apart from strengthening unity and cooperation, among the members, the SCO Summit, has finalized strategies, for fighting the "three evil forces," namely terrorism, separatism and extremism; safeguarding security and stability; and advancing pragmatic cooperation among the members of SCO. Pakistan has been a victim of all these evils, especially terrorism. This step would facilitate Pakistan in overcoming these evils through cooperation of other SCO member states. During the 11<sup>th</sup> SCO Summit, the member countries signed a declaration, "condemning any unilateral build-up of missile defences."<sup>70</sup>

### **Nuclear Cooperation**

Through a deal, initially signed in 1986, China had agreed to export four nuclear power reactors to Pakistan for nuclear energy. Two had already been installed, whereas the remaining two, with an approximate cost of \$2.375 billion, were finalized in 2010. There has been much hue and cry over this agreement, from the United States and India. However, China clarified that it was providing nuclear reactors to Pakistan under the years old nuclear deal. According to Mr. Qin Gang, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, "the nuclear cooperation between the two countries was for peaceful purposes and are 'totally consistent' with its international obligations and safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency."<sup>71</sup> New Delhi and Washington had maliciously objected that the deal would breach international protocol, regarding the trade of nuclear equipment and material. The U.S ploy was to assert that the deal would overstep "the guidelines of the 46-country Nuclear Suppliers



Group (NSG), which bars nuclear commerce between Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) members like China and non-member states like Pakistan”.<sup>72</sup> However, the Pak-China Nuclear Deal was concluded in 1986, when China was neither a member of the NSG nor it had signed the NPT by then. China signed the NPT in 1992 and became a member of the NSG in 2004. Therefore, the objections were considered irrelevant and prejudiced. Nevertheless, the ‘Indo-US Nuclear Deal-2005,’ later finalized in 2008, otherwise provided the precedence, and actually opened the floodgate for any similar deal in the future. Indeed, after having set a precedence themselves, it was neither legally justified nor morally prudent for Washington and New Delhi indeed to object to the Pak-China Nuclear Deal.

For its part, the Pakistani Foreign Office rejected Indo-US concerns over the Pak-China civil nuclear deal. The spokesperson said that, “Pakistan-China civil nuclear cooperation is going on for years. Our cooperation is under the relevant IAEA safeguards. Therefore concerns, if any, were misplaced.”<sup>73</sup> While tracing the history of Pak-China civil nuclear cooperation, it is pertinent to note that, a Comprehensive Nuclear Cooperation Agreement between then Pakistani Foreign Minister Sahibzada Yaqub Khan and his Chinese counterpart was signed on September 15, 1986, at Beijing in the presence of the Chinese Premier and the PAEC Chairperson Dr. Munir A. Khan.<sup>74</sup> According to this agreement, China was to construct four nuclear plants in Pakistan, namely Chasma 1, 2, 3 and 4, by 2011.

The NSG, however, was created after the nuclear test conducted by India in 1974, once India diverted the fuel meant for the atom for peace to its weapon programme. If India, the significant proliferator, could be given such a concession by the NSG, why should Pakistan be deprived of it. US officials believe that those countries which have not signed the NPT thus far cannot be granted the facility. The super power seems to be overlooking the fact that India is also a non-signatory to NPT. The US has also asserted: “Additional nuclear cooperation with Pakistan beyond those specific projects that

were grandfathered in 2004 would require consensus approval” However, Pakistan and China reject this notion, since it is akin to the pot calling the kettle black. Indeed, “US had not only violated the NPT, but had also violated the Hyde Act 2006, (by finalising a similar deal with India regarding cooperation on nuclear energy for peaceful purposes).”<sup>75</sup> Since the Pak-China deal would be under the IAEA safeguards, therefore, there would be no legal hurdle in its finalization. In the mean time the Chinese Foreign Ministry asserted that the deal was in accordance with the international law and, therefore, it rejected the Indian and American objections.

### **Energy Cooperation**

Earlier, Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani appreciated Chinese investment in Pakistan, especially in the energy sector. Prime Minister Gillani stated, “We would encourage Chinese companies to consider investments in the energy sector, which assures certain returns. Our energy requirements are expected to increase from 20,000MWs to more than 160,000MWs by the year 2030.”<sup>76</sup> In fact Pakistan is not a resource-deficient country; the problem lies with the lack of technical expertise, infrastructure development and finances. Today, in addition to the huge amount of unexplored oil and gas, “Pakistan has 185 billion tonnes of coal reserves, which would be converted into energy to satisfy Pakistan’s growing demand.” Pakistan encourages Chinese experts for the exploration of its oil and gas resources. Prime Minister assured Chinese investors special economic incentives, such as “duty-free import of plant and machinery, exemption from sales tax and income tax.”<sup>77</sup>

Pakistan and China are already working for the development of the Pak-China Trade Corridor along the Karakoram Highway (KKH). In this regard, the highway is being upgraded and the feasibility for the laying of a railway track along the KKH is currently under study. The development of this overland route would provide a further boost to the economic relationship. It would link Gwader with the semi autonomous Chinese region of Xinjiang through an

all weather highway. The Gwader port and communication infrastructure would, upon completion, enable China to have easy access to the Middle Eastern countries via the Indian Ocean, thereby enabling it to further boost its economic ties with the hydrocarbon rich region. Pakistan is otherwise becoming a hub for the oil and gas from Central Asia and Middle East to China and India. With the improvement of the communication infrastructure, oil and gas from these regions can easily be transported to the Chinese territories either through oil tankers or through an overland gas pipeline. Premier Gillani assured his counterpart of the safety of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. He asserted, "Besides a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement and the Joint Five Year Economic Programme, we are now jointly endeavouring to establish closer financial and banking sector cooperation."<sup>78</sup>

### **Future Prospects**

#### **Pakistan as an Energy and Trade Corridor**

In the initial years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there emerged a strategic thought among the leadership which considered the exploitation of Pakistan's geographical location as an energy passageway for the developing economies of Asia. This concept envisioned three main possible oil and gas transportation passageways from the hydrocarbon-rich zone to the energy-ravenous regions of Asia. These potential routes include the North-South Oil Corridor, which would connect the Middle East and Central Asia with China through the Gwadar deep sea port in Pakistan, and would have the potential to serve as a transit and supply route for India and other regional countries as well; the East-West Gas Corridor, which would connect Iran and other Middle Eastern countries with India through Pakistan, and would also have the potential to supply gas to China; and the North-South Oil and Gas Corridor, which would be able to connect India with the Central Asian States through Pakistan, with potential to supply the oil and gas to China.

In fact, Pakistan had been considering the construction of a gas pipeline from gas-rich Iran to Pakistan since 1993. Later

on, it was proposed by Iran to extend the facility to India via Pakistan. The concept aims to benefit all three countries and was named as the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Gas Pipeline. Later it was christened as the 'Peace Pipeline'. The pipeline was to traverse over 2,775 kilometres (1,724 miles) from Iran's South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf through the Pakistani city of Khuzdar, with one branch going on to Karachi and a second extending to southern Punjab near Multan and then on to India. Pakistan and Iran have been pushing the project to its immediate implementation but, unfortunately, over the years, India, the main beneficiary of the pipeline, has dilly-dallied the progress of the project over insignificant differences, primarily because of its engagement with the US over the Indo-US Nuclear Deal or perhaps due to perceptible security reasons in some Pakistani areas. On its part, the United States stressed that India should not have any sort of economic cooperation with Iran, owing to its serious differences over Iran's nuclear programme. In February, 2009, Pakistan and Iran again negotiated the project and agreed to finalize the gas pipeline without Indian participation. With Iranian backing, Pakistan has suggested that China be part of the project as well. China, which has otherwise been viewing Iran as a significant node in its energy security, has welcomed the offer and is desirous of extending the IPI pipeline up to the Chinese territory to obtain additional gas to feed its growing economy. Furthermore, China is interested in developing an overland means of transportation of oil and gas as opposed to a sea route, sea-routes mostly being dominated by the United States and now, potentially, strategic partner India as well.

Another gas pipeline project from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan (TAP) was finalized in 2002. The project could not be implemented owing to serious internal security disturbances in Afghanistan. The project has the potential to provide gas to India and China. With the backing of the United States, in May, 2007, India also expressed its desire to join the project through the Asian Development Bank (ADB). With Indian participation, the project was later renamed as Turkmenistan– Afghanistan–Pakistan–India

(TAPI) Gas pipeline. Now this pipeline would run from the Dauletabad gas field in Turkmenistan to the Indo–Pakistani border with an approximate cost of \$7.6 billion. This pipeline project can possibly be extended to China as well at a later stage.

Analysts say that the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline, previously known as the Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline (IPI), has the potential to be taken across the Khunjerab pass and into Chinese territory, thus renaming it as the Iran-Pakistan-China (IPC) pipeline. Similarly, the pipelines from Central Asia have the potential to be taken to the Southern Chinese autonomous region of Xinjiang through Gwadar. Currently over 50 % of Chinese oil is being imported from Middle Eastern countries, having religious and historical links with Pakistan. This oil transportation through oil tankers can take the form of the transportation through pipeline via Gwadar, the nearest overland route to Chinese soil. The proposed concept, if materialized, would enable Pakistan to utilize 20–30% of the corridor capacity while leaving 70–80 % of its capacity to be used by energy deficient China and possibly other countries such as India. The concept would also categorise Gwadar port as the Asian Energy Hub.

### **Crucial Chinese Role Needed to Make Best Use of Gwadar Port**

The only strategically significant deep sea port in Pakistan, namely Gwadar, was developed by China, through an initial investment of \$248 million, in record time. The port is located at the mouth of Persian Gulf just 150 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz, through which nearly 60% of the world's oil supplies pass. The port is of great strategic value as it adds to Pakistan's importance in the region, while allowing China to diversify and secure its crude oil import routes and simultaneously gain access to the Persian Gulf. The port was aimed to become, a regional and global maritime hub. Domestically, the fundamental factor behind the development of the port was to stimulate the economic growth in the northern and western parts of Pakistan. Regionally, the port

provides the shortest possible approach to the Arabian Sea to the landlocked Central Asian Republics and Afghanistan for their transshipment facilities. Globally, it is the best alternative and a storage port, owing to its potential to handle major ships and oil tankers. It can handle, “up to fifth-generation ships, including Panamax and mother vessels.”<sup>79</sup>

Unfortunately, upon its completion in March 2007, the administration of the port was handed over to the Port of Singapore Authority (PSA), with corporate tax exemption for a period of forty years. The otherwise concessional agreement delimited the PSA to investing \$3 billion, with \$550 million in the first five years.<sup>80</sup> However, after the passage of four years, PSA has not invested even a fraction of this amount on the port, and not a single commercial vessel has been able to reach the Gwadar port to date. The problem is likely to persist for the foreseeable future if the administration of the port remains with the PSA. In the words of the former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Sardar Aseff Ahmed Ali, “the Gwadar port project is a disaster, as the 40-year concession agreement with the PSA has not yielded any results in its first three years.”<sup>81</sup>

Indeed, “The government and the PSA are in default of commitments,”<sup>82</sup> and, as was clearly asserted by Naval Chief, Admiral Noman Basheer, the port is not serving the purpose for which it was built; therefore, the agreement with the PSA should be cancelled. Otherwise, the agreement was “one-sided and a lot of incentives have been given to the PSA,”<sup>83</sup> in March 2007, which did not develop the port any further as agreed. In converse to the basic design of the port, still there exist “no facility for supporting the oil industry---even though the port was on the mouth of Gulf. Due to this, Pakistan is unable to attract investment in Gwadar from Gulf countries ... in the oil and gas sector”.<sup>84</sup>

There is a growing acknowledgement on part of Baloch population that development is essential to bolster prosperity and domestic stability, a notion that contrasts with the interests of forces whose declared objectives are to destabilize

this zone. As per a local Baloch nationalist Sardar, Mr. Rauf Khan Sasoli, “The port should have gone to the Chinese, who built it largely from their own investment, in the first place.”<sup>85</sup> Another prominent Baloch journalist, Mr. Behram Baloch, said that, “China may be the only country which can work under the difficult Balochistan conditions.”<sup>86</sup> By not fulfilling any commitment, the PSA has provided sufficient grounds to revoke the agreement made in March 2007. Since our own expertise is limited in this field, therefore, it would be prudent to return to China – which, in addition to being the basic developer of the port, is also Pakistan's all-weather friend - and engage it in making the port fully operational. Keeping the port for three years without paying any revenue to Pakistan should otherwise bind the PSA to pay compensation. It is a fact that, apart from the think tanks, intelligentsia and the masses of Pakistan, the Baloch sub-nationalists who have been used against the Chinese in the province, have developed a feeling that it is China only that can develop and run the Gwadar Port. The Chinese have the experience, the will and the capacity to expand the port by increasing the existing three berths to eighteen by 2014 and completing the road and railway network. Above all, there is a commonality of Pak-China interests in the development of the port.

The Port provides China (especially its Western autonomous region) an access to the Arabian Sea which is not only easy but is also the shortest one. Economic experts concur that, “The volume of the Chinese trade is so much that Gwadar can beat other regional ports, if China could divert only a fraction of its trade to pass to its burgeoning western regions through the mighty Karakorum.”<sup>87</sup> Since Chinese experience of industrialization and economic growth is enormous, therefore, we can expect that given the tax exemption and cheap electricity, Gwadar would become an industrial, trade and economic hub in the days to come. Establishment of oil and gas refineries and a communication network would further boost the uplift of the area. Through a Pak-China deal, initial planning to build a railway line across the Khunjerab pass alongside the Karakorum highway has already started.

Regarding the vitality of the Gwadar port, Robert Kaplan, the US analyst, says; that, Gwadar's development would either unlock the riches of Central Asia, or plunge Pakistan into a savage, and potentially terminal, civil war.<sup>88</sup> It appears that Pakistan's desires to unlock the riches of Central Asia and the conversion of the port to a global economic hub, has invited the wrath of the global conspirators. However, we have to logically counter the growing conspiracies for the promotion of our national interests. In order to do that, the nation will have to differentiate between adversaries, and true allies. The misperception that China is developing strings of harbours<sup>89</sup> in South and Southeast Asia to contain India is part of deliberate propaganda campaign designed to put China on defensive so that its role in these regions could be cut down. Like Pakistan, other regional countries such as Sri Lanka and Myanmar are appreciative of the positive Chinese role in their development. Seeing this, other regional countries are also showing their willingness to collaborate with China in order to acquire assistance for their own developmental projects. China has indeed emerged as a role model for the regional countries. The biggest advantage China has over other global and regional powers is that, it harbours no hegemonic designs against any State. In South Asia, the smaller states are wary of Indian domination and exploitation; even Nepal, the only Hindu state in the world harbours serious reservations against Indian imperialism.

### **Commonalities for a Way Forward**

Deng Xiaoping once advised the future leadership that China should, "observe development soberly, maintain our position, meet challenges calmly, hide our capabilities, and bide our time, remain free of ambition, never claim leadership."<sup>90</sup> Following the same policy, China has amazingly developed without creating a ripple in the world and has exhibited a "peaceful rise."<sup>91</sup> Peaceful co-existence is the hallmark of the Sino-Pak relationship. According to Mr Masood Khan, Pakistani Ambassador to China, "Pakistan supports China's vision of a harmonious world a world that works for win-win partnerships instead of win-lose



paradigms.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, despite the difference in the social setup, ideology and religion, the Sino-Pak bilateral relationship has stood the test of time. The main feature of this tie is that, irrespective of the internal situation and the form of government in Pakistan, “leaders of both the countries attach great importance and give personal care to the relationship.”<sup>93</sup> In the words of the former Chinese ambassador to Pakistan, both countries in fact observe “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. We respect each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. We never interfere in each other’s internal affairs. We always consult each other about major issues on an equal basis. And, we conduct cooperation to mutual benefit. There is no clash of interests between China and Pakistan.”<sup>94</sup>

Pakistan deeply appreciates the support and assistance China has provided in contribution of our economic and social development. We fully support China’s principled stand on Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and its human rights issues. The Chinese Government and people reciprocate these sentiments and consider Pakistan to be their most reliable friend and partner. Developing relations with Pakistan is high on China’s diplomatic agenda. China supports Pakistan’s efforts in safeguarding its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The fuel for this relationship comes from the hearts and minds of the people. The prudent, farsighted policies of their governments buttress it through multiple frameworks.

### **Conclusion**

In July 1960, the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan, Mr. Mikhail Kapitsa said, “We support India and Afghanistan against you, because they are our friends, even when they are in the wrong. But, your friends do not support you; even they know you in the right.”<sup>95</sup> The statement was right. Pakistan later found a friend in the form of China, a trusted friend unlike its Western allies, who never supported Pakistani interests. There exists an unparalleled harmony of interests between the people and both the governments on political, diplomatic, economic and security aspects. In order to face the

rapidly changing global politics, both countries need to “overcome challenges and carry forward our traditional friendship.” The Sino-Pak all-weather friendship is based on complete trust, mutual understanding and a convergence of views on all issues. This sentiment resounds in the psyche of our people and is being passed on from generation to generation. Our relationship has evolved into a long-term strategic partnership aimed at promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the region. “Pakistan plumes the great achievements of the Chinese people which attest to the genius, wisdom and talents of the Chinese people and their sagacious leadership.” Right from the beginning, the bilateral relationship between the two countries has remained a relatively uninterrupted, trust-bond and all weather. It is said that the friendship between Pakistan and China is “deeper than the oceans, and higher than the mountains.” Over the years, this friendship has survived numerous geo-political and geo-strategic changes which took place at the global and regional level.

At the global level, there is a need of “reciprocity in dealing with China”.<sup>96</sup> It has an optimistic and positive behaviour towards the world; therefore, it should not be misunderstood and negatively propagated. It is sustaining the US economy considerably and has substantive bilateral trade with India. It is the considered view of political analysts that “Pak-China friendship is based on four pillars; geography, history, economics and necessity.” Indeed, owing to the geographical contiguity, we are neighbours, whereas history has made us friends. Likewise, economics has made us partners, whereas, necessity has made us allies. In the words of Mr. Luo Zhaohui, the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, “China-Pakistan relations have become an example of harmonious coexistence between countries of different civilizations. We view our relations with Pakistan in strategic terms and from a long terms perspective. Let’s join hands and work hard to usher in a much brighter tomorrow of Sino-Pak friendship and cooperation”.

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- <sup>96</sup> Alex Mackinnon and Barnaby Powell, *Op Cit.* P. 205.