

Pak China Relations in the Emerging Scenario

The Government of Pakistan, while realizing the importance of trade and commerce, has rightly shifted from Geostrategic alliances to Geo-economics, as in changing world, the economics are becoming more important for the nations. In the new international horizons and regional dynamics after withdrawal of US led troops from Afghanistan and dramatic fall of Kabul a new version of Taliban called Taliban 2.0 has emerged. Though the reformed and transformed version Taliban under the Doha Agreement seems more responsible and serious to bring sustained peace and broad based Government, yet the volatile and fragile situation in Afghanistan will need more time to consolidate.

In the evolving regional peace situations, the role of China is becoming more important as superpower for cohesion of the region. The BRI of China is further assuming strategic importance for the socioeconomic development of the region. The new scenario appearing in Afghanistan can optimistically reveal a peaceful picture of the region, which will pave ways for the early completion and extension of CPEC in Pakistan and its extension beyond Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistan and China can play a very active and positive role in this evolving but volatile situations in the region. For socioeconomic development of the region, sustained peace and economic growth is required. In the adversary and preemptive stances of India and its highly antagonistic character after the fall of Kabul to Taliban, which is

treated an apparent failure of their foreign policy, India is like a bad man quarrelling with his own tools and spare no chance of maligning Pakistan. In such situations, the bilateral relations between Pakistan and China, needs new dimension and strengths. This Chapter illustrates, the new paradigm of Pak China relations and its future in terms of regional integration.

The strategic relations between Pakistan and China can be divided into Cold War Phase and Post-Cold War Phase. The rivalry between China and India provided an opportunity for Pakistan to consolidate its relations with China as per famous proverb *The enemy of my enemy is my friend*.

Both the friendly countries signed an agreement in 1963, which opened new areas of collaboration in the cold war era. Besides the border agreements, two other agreements on air travel and trade. China's support to Pakistan during the Indo Pak wars in 1965 and 1971 by providing military and economic assistance, further cemented this friendship. Construction of Karakoram Highway in 1974, provision of assistance in developing the nuclear technology, support during Afghan war, help in developing ballistic missile program are some of the examples for consolidation of the relations.

The Pakistan US relations remained always subject to distrust and trough & crest. Pakistan always complained of lack of trust from US as the latter always doubted the sincerity of Pakistan as good friend. During visit of United States, Pakistani premier made it clear to US media, that friendship can rest on mutual trust and respect only, no matter if one friend is more resourceful. On the other hand, US expected always more from Pakistan in War Against Terrors, though this has already inflicted heavy human and material losses to Pakistan. The present Government has also made it clear that Pakistan will be no more part of any regional or global conflict. The relations between US and Pakistan, reached its lowest ebb, when Pressler Amendment¹ was invoked in 1980,

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

which enforced stringent sanctions on Pakistan, which led to financial challenges and miseries for Pakistan. In this hour of need, the financial and military support from China, proved a great deal for the economic survival of Pakistan.

In the post-Cold War and 9/11 era, the unipolar world emerged with US remaining the only dominant superpower. This also created arrogance in American military and political leaders. Pakistan was forced to be an active partner in War Against Terror, initiated by US against the Alqaida and Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This war, inflicted heavy losses to Pakistan and region and America spent more than \$ one trillion with no ultimate gain rather sacrificed thousands of their citizens besides hundred thousand people from Pakistan and Afghanistan. This futile war finished with the exit of US army from Afghanistan in July/August 2021. The well needed policy of the present American Government under President Biden, prefer to distant from the War in Afghanistan. Instead of supporting, their partner in War, America supported India to counteract Pakistan. This led to creation a big gap of trust between US and Pakistan. The support of China to Pakistan and other countries of the region in the areas of mutual cooperation, realignment and readjustment of mutual relations under new global dynamics made China, a reliable partner with Pakistan and other developing countries. The salient developments in the post 9/11 regime between Pakistan and China, include signing of *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighborly Relations, Cooperation on building Gwadar port under CPEC etc*².

Pak China relations took a new turn at the initiation of BRI by President Xi Jinping, as revival of the historical road and maritime routes to expand the trade from East to West. Pakistan, being a neighbor country to China, become a strategic partner in this Destiny Changers dream of China. Under BRI, the important part of CPEC has been kicked off in 2013. After, initiation of CPEC, the

2 M.Munir (2018) Pakistan-China Strategic Interdependence Strategic Studies , Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer 2018), pp. 21-42

regional geopolitics has taken a new turn. After seven decades of diplomatic relation between Pakistan and China will be subject to many challenges in times to come. The China new approach of engagement with the world is based on the results driven collaboration. In case Pakistan is not able to deliver different segments under CPEC, China may opt for other partners in the region. For this purpose, security of Chinese Nationals in the CPEC projects is very important and the recent attacks on them can decelerate the development of CPEC projects. Secondly the environmental challenges associated with the CPEC projects, particularly thermal and gas power plants as well as use of fossil fuels will further pollute the region. The high pollution in the Chinese manufacturing concerns is already matter of high criticism. Heavy traffic loads along the CPEC roads may create further pollution and deterioration of road.

China and Pakistan relations have four main features, firstly China and Pakistan are time tested friends and have supported each other at the regional and international levels. Pakistan has been firmly supporting China in the issues of Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang and other issues concerning China's core interests. China has been providing unmatched support to Pakistan for its territorial integrity, independence, sovereignty and providing selfless support in socioeconomic developments. Secondly both the countries are partners on the base of Win-Win Cooperation. Starting from sacrifices rendered by Chinese 40 years back in the construction of Karakoram Highways, Pakistan has become China's second largest trade partner in last 70 years. In first nine months of the current years, the bilateral trade has reached to \$11.5 billion, with 10% increase. Thirdly China and Pakistan are partners with intimate souls, with deeply rooted through hearts. Pakistan always provided valuable assistance to China for connecting with China during its embryonic age. The JF17, jointly developed by the two countries flies over the mighty mountains of Karakorum from China into Pakistan. Both the countries are strongly oriented towards global peace and prosperity.

Some of the fundamental principles to follow the trends and peace in the region, strengthen our connectivity for closer bilateral relations and have shared dream for the socioeconomic development of our countries, where we have a large number of people still living below the line of poverty. Both the countries must exploit the common opportunities and achieve common development with mutual respect, support and trust. The high level exchanges of leaders must be enhanced. Through Belt and Roads Initiatives, China want to consolidate its connectivity with the South Asian nations and other parts of the Asia and Europe. With more than \$80 Billion pledge by China, towards CPEC this connectivity will be further strengthened with Pakistan as the back bone for the Chinese road of peace, prosperity and harmony in the region. China has shared dream with Pakistan to become Asian Tigers through economic development for socioeconomic development of the region and two countries.

Professor Huang Jing from National University of Singapore (NUS) once said: *Pakistan needs China more than China needs Pakistan*. Pakistan will secure more than \$60 billion tariff in next 20 years after completion of the CPEC, whereas China will secure a reliable and cheaper energy route. Form geostrategic relation to Geopolitical and now Geo-economics, the Pak China relations, will continue to assume the new dimensions on the basis of mutual trust and shared goals.

This strategic partnership has now assumed the role of strong geo-economics in the region. However, like all others partnerships, these are also faced with few challenges. For capitalizing over the opportunities of CPEC and BRI, Pakistan has to bring structural reforms in its governance system as the present bureaucratic decision making process is both cumbersome and lethargic. With more autonomy to provinces under 18th Amendment, the consensus amongst the province and federal government is required for the decision of national economic importance.

The existing capacity with the Pakistani human resource is another challenge as Chinese manpower after endeavoring for four decades, are at different learning curve than Pakistan and

hence extensive human resource development will be required. China remains a crucial factor in Pakistan and India rivalry. Pakistan contains and contests the Indian hegemonic attempts to assume the status of regional power in South Asia³. At the same time China and India have unresolved border disputes, which has further worsened in the recent years. Expanding, Geo-economics relations with China, Pakistan would count on the China's support more than before, in its rivalry with China. With the hasty withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, fall of Kabul to Taliban, a vacuum is created and China will try its level best to fill this gap. Though China has not recognized Taliban Government, yet they have cautiously and optimistically responded to the geostrategic changes in the region. China issued a statement saying that "it respects the right of the Afghan people to independently determine their own destiny" and will develop "friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan." ⁴ For Afghanistan China can offer the rehabilitation of its devastated infrastructure and national rebuilding. In recent days, China Pakistan has enhanced their collaboration for ensuring lasting peace in Afghanistan and offering suggestions including encouraging all Afghan parties to strengthen solidarity and establish a broad-based and inclusive political structure, and supporting Afghanistan in its fight against terrorism. In wake of the recent developments in the region, the strategic relations between China and Pakistan has become once again more important and crucial.

The global geostrategic and geo-economic dynamics have high impact on the regional collaboration and bilateral relations. Soon after the announcement of BRI by President Xi, US and India formed alliance to contain China in the region. In the emerging regional scenario in Afghanistan, the relation of Pakistan and China will deepen further due to geostrategic importance of

3 Syed Sammer Abbas, "India's Pursuit of Hegemonic Policies Creating Instability in Region," Dawn, October 11, 2016

4 "China Says Respects Choices of Afghan People, Calls for Smooth Transition", Xinhua, August 16, 2021, available at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2021-08/16/c_1310130602.htm

Pakistan which Kaplan called as *Revenge of Geography*. The interests of China and Pakistan in the region and particularly Afghanistan are multifarious. The relations between the countries is expanding to geo-economics properties towards focus on successful BRI and CPEC. Besides economic ties, collaboration in the areas, they can expand it to commercial, educational and cultural collaborations.

For success of CPEC and strengthening a holistic collaboration with China, Pakistan needs to develop consensus at political and people levels. In past, the political dichotomies over national and international issues, has brought large losses to the nation. Despite the border conflicts between India and China, we have to keep this in mind that being a large market, China will lose no opportunity to restore economic ties with India, if Pakistan fails to come to the expectations of China. Hence political and public consensus is precursor for this collaboration to succeed. This must be complemented with strong trade policy, focus on local employment and human capital development. Pakistan would need to transform from a security sensitive stage to development state. This will require promotion of merit and transparency, internal reorientation and strengthening of institutions.

The future direction of Pakistan China relations must be focused on the following priorities: ⁵

- i. The education and research collaboration between China and Pakistan. The research must focus on various dimensions of BRI and CPEC, to create evidence based information for policy making. The academic and research exchanges must focus on developing and transferring modern technologies to Pakistan.
- ii. A pool of expert diplomats for BRI countries, particularly China, may be trained and developed. There is a strong need to understand the Chinese governance, economic and political system for close coordination in the areas of mutual interests.

⁵ Saeed Shfaqat and Saba Shahid (2018)-China Pakistan Economic Corridor-Demands, Dividends and Directions- Centre for Public Policy and Governance. Forman Christian College (University) Lahore.

- iii. There is a need to engage the youth of Pakistan in higher education, training and development in Chinese institutions to closely work with their systems and culture.
- iv. The Military and strategic programs may be further strengthened for regional stability and creating deterrence against the hegemonic stance of India.
- v. Due to expected high wages in China, the labour intensive industries may be shifted to Pakistan, where the wages are relatively low.
- vi. The Sino-Pak Free Trade Agreement has been signed in 2006, but the balance is more towards China. Both the countries must be provided with the level play fields.
- vii. Besides investment in energy, infrastructure and defence, mineral development Pakistan also needs to attract Chinese investment in agriculture, services, high-end manufacturing, and innovative technologies.
- viii. Culture and Tourism is still unexplored areas on both sides. Pakistan having a large number of Buddhist relics and stupas, need to attract Chinese for religious tourism.
- ix. People to people contact between the two countries may be strengthened through Cultural and Students Exchange programs.

The international relations between Pakistan and China, has become entangled in diverse common interests ranging from strategic to trade, education, culture and economics. With the CPEC as part of BRI philosophy of President Xi, Pakistan has assumed more importance for China in the region. Both the countries have decided to take a number of steps to resolve the trade related challenges to trade in the region. There is a great future of this collaboration for socioeconomic, geopolitical and geo-economics transformation in the region.

Stephan Cohen, a South Asian expert described the China policy of collaboration with Pakistan, as natural outcome of its

interests to counter India, as common enemy⁶. Both the countries expressed their severe concerns over the Indian Nuclear adventures and explosion, as an attempt to destabilize the region. China assisted Pakistan in many ways, to strength its defense deterrence and two mega projects of defense significance namely Heavy Rebuild Factory for manufacturing of Tank T-59 and F-6 Aircrafts factory. Besides, transfer and strengthening of nuclear technology to Pakistan for peaceful use, China also assisted Pakistan in developing the Missile technology under Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCT)⁷. This defense collaboration is still continuing and in the latest developments conventional weapons such JF-17 aircraft,⁴ JF-17 production facilities, and F-22P 5 frigates with helicopters, K-8 jet trainers,⁶ T-85 tanks,⁷ F-7 aircraft have been procured.

Soon after the 9/11 unfortunate event, the South Asia became a hotspot for the military adventures of world powers. The Pak China military relations were further strengthened during this period through joint military operations in 2003, followed by signing of Landmark *Treaty for friendship and cooperation* in 2005. China provided due assistance in the capacity building of Pakistani scientists and military Engineers for developing indigenous defense weapons, as discussed below:

Al-khalid was jointly developed with China as Main Battle Tank (MBT), which is a hybrid tank; made with armament arrangements, subsystems designed through modification and unification of several international means. After close coordination between the scientists and weapons manufacturing experts of the two countries, a locally Al-Khalid was fabricated and launched.⁸ This versatile tank has the combination of Chinese NORINCO Type 90-II MBT and Soviet T-54 series. It was assembled in Pakistan at Heavy Industries Taxila (HIT). This Main Battle Tank was named after renowned Muslim General Khalid Bin Walid.

6 Cohen, Stephen P. (2001). *India: Emerging Power*. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution.

7 HIT Al Khalid (MBT 2000) Main Battle Tank (MBT) (2001), http://www.militaryfactory.com/armor/detail.asp?armor_id=181.

The Tank has been further improved with modern technologies to offers better defence during Nuclear, Biological and Chemical (NBC) battles. Over the last few years, HIT has further improved its loading capacity and the modern active threat-protection system and Integrated Battle Management System (IBMS) has been installed⁹.

Another landmark achievement of the China Pakistan military collaboration was combat aircraft JF-17, which is a world class single seat fighter jet. Some of the important attributes of JF-17, include its powerful engines which makes it a cost-effective and multi-role fighter aircraft, with the potential of facing the current and forthcoming air power employment trials ¹⁰ . These characteristics make JF-17 as extremely efficient, reliable, and economical with the advantage of lower cost for maintenance than other existing light fighters. The aircraft was jointly developed by Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation (CAC) of China and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC).

The Civil nuclear program of Pakistan was always based on peace and socioeconomic development of the country. Pak China nuclear collaboration was mainly focused on development the local capacity for establishment of Nuclear Power Plants. For construction of Chahma-1 Power plant, China provided its assistance in early 1990s and it completed in 2000. China has also shown its reiterative support to continue with six more nuclear power ventures. The Chinese Vice Minister for National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) showed their support to further exports to Pakistan for strengthening its defence. There has been substantial resistance from India and western countries but China reiterated its stance that the nuclear deals between Pakistan and China are made under the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and were legal. This provided greater strength to Pakistan in pursuing its peaceful nuclear program. Besides providing assistance in construction of

9 New Super Al Khalid Tank- AK I and II Main Battle Tank," *Pakistan Defence*, December 25, 2011, <http://defence.pk/threads/new-super-al-khalid-tank-ak-i-iimain-battle-tank.148908/>
10 JF-17 Thunder Brings laurels to Pakistan," *News*, June

Chashma-III and IV, Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC) signed a contract with China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC), for the construction of Chashma-V and has also announced its plans to construct two 1100 MW reactors in Karachi with roughly US\$6.5 billion in assistance¹¹.

The geopolitics of South Asia has taken a new shape and trends, after the initiation of CPEC, many topics like the politics, economy, and security of the region are widely debated. South Asian region will assume centrality in the regional and world affairs in wake of the emerging regional economic integrations through BRI. By year 2050, Asia Pacific will account for 51% global GDP, as per reports of the Asian Development Bank¹².

The US India relation and military alliance has strengthened during the Prime Minister Naraendra Modi and with the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan, the strategic collaboration between India and US will further strengthen. On the other hand, Pakistan will reduce its military dependence on the US, and China is taking the place of the US in this regard. These actions of US Government will bring China and Pakistan closer than before¹³. Pakistan has been relying on China, for armaments, financial assistance and also during the pandemic. In the recent geopolitical changes, this relationship between China and Pakistan is becoming more important and significant.

11 Hasan Ehtisham, "Pakistan-China nuclear cooperation," *Express Tribune*, February 10, 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/669571/pakistan-china-nuclearcooperation/>

12 Michael J. Green, "US Defence Policy Issues Pertaining to the Asia-Pacific Theatre," Statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic & International Studies, April 14, 2015), https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fspublic/legacy_files/files/attachments/ts150413_Green.pdf.

13 Iqbal, A. 2018. Pakistan reducing dependence on U.S arms.FT reports. Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1402479>. Accessed 7 July 2019.