

Sino-Pak Strategic Partnership in Xi Jinping Era and Indian Reaction

Noreen Iqbal Swati

PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations,
Minhaj University Lahore

Email: noureenanees@gmail.com

Dr. Hassan Farooq Mashwani

Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations,
Minhaj University Lahore

Email: drhassan.ir@mul.edu.pk

Dr. Syed Ali Raza

Professor Department of Kashmiryat,
Punjab University, Lahore

Email: Kasheer001@gmail.com

Abstract

This study is an attempt to highlight the strategic and economic cooperation between China and Pakistan particularly in Xi Jinping era. As a twist appeared in Chinese foreign policy by shifting paradigm resulted the dragons following wolf warrior approaches. Xi economic extension and acquiring influence on rimland bringing Pakistan much closer to China. A multidimensional strategy adopted on the part of both Pakistan and China to maintain “strategic partnership”, to preserve and protect regional and international interests. Indian operational growth with the United States was alarming to Sino-Pak economic and diplomatic cooperation which somehow extending in military and armed joint ventures as well. In these prospects, Pakistan realized Chinese globally importance after the Indo-US military agreements and strategic ties which are growing not only across the India Ocean but reemergence of Indian alliances also seen. With this realization, Pakistan welcomed China by opening its gateways at critical era of China, when China was badly struggling to attain the flight access for its jets.

Keywords: Geostrategic, Geographic, Sino-Pak, international Politics, Regional Hegemony, Deterrence, Indo-Pak

Introduction

Xi Jinping is one of the most familiar and significant leaders of China who gives the new dimensions in the paradigm shift in Chinese foreign policy. He promoted the “wolf warrior” diplomacy while on the other side he globally engaged the world in soft power diplomacy after the introduction of economic extension under mega projects like Bridges and roads initiatives (BRI). The south Asian states located on rimland considered oxygen for the

life of Chinese economic projects. The triggering rivalry with India, forced China and Pakistan to strengthen their strategic relations. Sino-Pakistan bilateral relationship was strengthened in 1980-1991 but after 9/11, both states enhanced their trade, military and diplomatic relationship and soon emerged into strategic partnership. (Hussain, 2014)

In last decade, China and Pakistan set up new dimension in economic and strategic cooperation particularly after the advent of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In this era, China and Pakistan both states coming closer and closer to each other and signed many agreements on bilateral and multilateral cooperation. As United States (US) developed a gap with Pakistan, China filled the space and make Pakistan its dependent in economic and diplomatic crisis. (Yang, J., & Siddiqi, R. A., 2011) Pakistani alignment towards China ultimately opened new scope for India for encroachment towards United States. India successfully signed a defence agreement with USA against China and other opposition. These strategic ties on dual ends opened new strategic war and growing political tussles in the region of south Asia specifically an escalation in cold war between China and United States. (Allauddin, Liu, H., & Ahmed, R. Q., 2020)

This study is an attempt to highlight the historical analysis of Pakistan and China relations especially in Xi Jinping era with prospects of CPEC, OBOR and Bri projects and its impacts on Pakistan and south Asian region. Indian approaches and US ambitions against the Chinese increasing influence and economic expansion with implications on the region and manners of international power politics are the primary objectives of this study. This study is carried out through Chinese projects, experts analysis, research books, debates, interviews and journals from all sources. This analysis is carried out in the prospects of neoclassical realism and strategic realism to analyze the Chinese foreign policy for south Asia and its implication on region and its rivals.

While uncertainty about intentions creates competitiveness and mistrust among governments. (Rosato, 2021) Realists beliefs centered on states are rational primary actors navigating a system shaped by “power-politics, national interest, a pursuit of security and self-preservation”. (Devetak R. , 2012) The modern concept of realism was modified after world War II by western scholars like “Hans Morgenthau, George F. Kennan, Nicholas Spykman, Herman Kahn and E. H. Carr”. (Doyle, 1997) Realism entails a spectrum of ideas which tend around the axis of multiple central propositions like state centrism, power, anarchism, rationality, egoism and power-politics”. (Cheng, 2023)

When examining the prospects of China's foreign policy in South Asia through the lenses of realism and power politics, several key considerations come to the forefront. Realism, with its emphasis on state-centric behavior, power maximization, and the balance of power, helps in understanding China's strategic calculations and actions in the region. China is very

ambitious from its revolution to work on national interests but after the disintegration of USSR it mainly focus on the maximizing of power. In these prospects as realists proclaim that the states work in their national interests, which can be depicted as China currently involved in economic, strategic objectives and political monopoly. It intends to maximize its power and influence in South Asia, which directly aimed to secure penetration in the regional markets and acquiring geopolitical benefits. (Nicolas, 2015)

The main boost was provided to China, was the disintegration of USSR and the Asian region was open for the new player. China neglected the international actors who are involved in anarchy and working on imposing international system on this region and open its arms and tried to make an influential replacement in vacant areas. As a realistic approach China engages it's in South Asian region to protect its strategic advantages by obtaining an environment where there is no overarching global or regional power. In the entire scenario it remained determinant in strategic partnership and economic alliances as per the realistic main theme "the states from alliances and partnership, enhance their security and power". Chinese intention towards Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other regions of rimland are clear indications as this extension is a move for the counterbalance strategy against regional powers and enhancement of Chinese influence. (Matinuddin, 1987)

To be a most influential player in region, China remained consistent on making concentration upon the enhancing the economic power and infrastructure development. Its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is one of most significant Chinese power politics policy. By the upgradation and constructing new infrastructure like China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and many other initiatives in South Asian region shows the Chinese regional hegemony and influence. For the protection and successful functioning of these projects, security will be a key factor. On the base of security, it looks there will be military and strategic consideration of China along with South Asian states. As realists accentuates the importance of military power, China has highly reinforced and armor-plated its knits and ties with certain South Asian nations for strategic reasons. (Chen X. , 2017) As an instance, Chinese military and security collaboration with Pakistan is multidimensional cooperation, in economic as well as in military and strategic interests of both states.

Sino-Pak Relations: Historical Background

China and Pakistan diplo-economic cooperation started when People Republic China had emerged in a modified revolutionary power on the globe. These bilateral knits have evolved on May 21, 1950. the initial decade of relationship was nearly neutral when China was inclined towards India. The boundary issues across the Karakorum range over the Mount Godwin Austin (K-2) in Shaksgam Valley was drafted under a pact in 1963 and in

same decade military assistance also initiated between both states. After Indo-Pak war of 1971 both states were knitted into strategic relation which further turned into economic cooperation. Nuclear cooperation was enhanced in 1980s and arms and weapons joint ventures was started in 90s. In post 9/11 scenario, Sino-Pak relationship had evolved in a rapid flow soon it was become a common statement in Pakistan that Sino-Pak relationship is “higher than mountains, deeper than ocean and sweeter than honey” (Naeem, M. W., & Majid, A., 2020) which can be further elaborated as the China become largest arms and weapon supplier to Pakistan (Shah, 2018) which is worldwide 3rd largest weapons trading partner. (Faruqui, 2001)

These relations touched peak when the China Pakistan Economic Corridor was launched and Kashgar to Gwadar route became functional and both states unanimously agreed upon the cooperation in civil nuclear power sectors. (Dwivedi, 2013) Currently, China is major stakeholder in the economy, foreign policy, regional cooperation and arms supply. Sino-Pakistan can play a significance role after Quad security dialogues as China is looking for safe and easily accessible trade corridors and new advantageous routes to make CPEC and One Belt One Road projects more beneficial and influential. Chinese cooperation with Pakistan has reached economic high points, with substantial Chinese investment in Pakistani infrastructural expansion including the Pakistani deep-water port at Gwadar and both countries have an ongoing free trade agreement. For example, according to the Chinese custom statistics the bilateral trade volume for the calendar year 2017 crossed the US\$20 billion mark for the first time. In 2017 China's exports to Pakistan grew by 5.9% to reach \$18.25 billion whereas Pakistan's exports to China fell by 4.1% to \$1.83 billion which is on the good and healthy flow.

Baseline of Contemporary Relationship

China has provided baseline in economic development in Pakistan, particularly after 9/11 era, when India and United States tried to marginalize Pakistan. Pakistan always trying to keep good economic and diplomatic ties with China from early 1960s. Indeed in new dynamism, where economic partnership is very vital and big markets always preferable to all producer and manufacturer. In case of China, it is quite pleasant that it always preferred Pakistan against India: the bigger market of Asia. On the other hand, Pakistan is making its utmost effort for maintaining deeper relationships with China as declared it the central part of the Pak foreign policy. During Zia's era, Pakistan conveniently worked hard to improve its diplomatic linkages with China along with strengthening economic ties. After Zia's tour of China, it was praised that Pakistan was one of only two States which presented their crucial support to China on Tiananmen Square protests during the 1989 demonstrations. (Dutta, 1994)

This supported boosted by China into economic and military cooperation

and China started to supply modern armaments and war weapons to Pakistan. China also supported Pakistan on various internal and foreign issues, particularly on diplomatic grounds specifically on Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. Pakistan, in return, supported China on Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan issues. (Khan S. S., 2011) The journey from diplomatic relations, soon growing into military support, weapons production, upgradation of war ammunition and economic support in launching of energy projects, agriculture and infrastructural development with healthy Chinese investment. The most significant phase of Sino-Pakistan cooperation is overviewed in the field of deepened military cooperation resulted in a joint venture of manufacturing armament ranging from fighter jets to guided missiles frigates. (Makhdoom, 2010)

In 2001, MBT-2000 Al-Khalid tank was prepared in a joint Sino-Pak venture. Soon after China showed its pleasure to invest in the building of Gwadar deep seaport in 2002. Under the civil partnership, both countries signed a contract of 110 million dollar for the construction of housing project on Multan Road Lahore during 2003. After couple of years both states were ready in 2006 to sign free trade agreement. (Ashraf, 2017) Along with economic ties and infrastructural development support, Sino-Pak military nexus produced another masterpiece JF-17 Thunder (known as FC-1 Fierce Gragon): a multirole fighter aircraft in a joint venture in 2007.

2008 was the year of new economic ties and linkages between China and Pakistan when both were become agree to construct a new Railway line on the routes of Karakorum Highways to link Chinese Xinjing with Gwadar Seaport. After few month, Pakistan Navy made in service F-22P frigate. The first Sino-Pak military joint anti-terrorism drills was stated in 2010 and in same year China sent four military rescue helicopters in Pakistan in rescue operations to flood struck with a worthy donation of 260 million dollars. (Aziz, K. Z. & Hashmi, A. R., 2021)

In the tour of Wen Jiabao in 2010, more than thirty billion dollars agreement were signed which led the foundation of current China Pakistan Economic Corridor Project. With increasing Indian arm race, Pakistan desired to buy air-to-air SD-10 missiles from China to upgrade JF-17 Thunder fleet. In 2013, Pakistan entrusted the management of Gwadar Port to Chinese Overseas Port Holding be replacing Singapore's PSA international. Pak-China trade were boosted after the happy tour of Li Keqiang (Chinese Premier) when many agreements were signed and trade between both countries first time touches twelve billion in an annum. The CPEC, a project of eighteen billion dollars was approved by both which will link Gwadar Port on Arabian Sea with Chinese renown city Kashgar by the construction of 200 km long tunnel in this project. (Shafqat, S., & Shahid, S., 2018)

China interested to finance 6.5 billion dollars in construction of major nuclear power project in Karachi to obtain 2200 megawatts electricity from two reactors in 2013 and 31.5 billion dollars investment for energy projects,

Gwadar Port extension and other infrastructural development also announced by Premier in 2014. China invested 1.27 billion dollars in construction of Orange Line metro train 27.1 km long project in 2014. Pakistan and China made 19 more agreements in CPEC program and total investment reached to 42 billion dollars in November 2014. On 20th April 2015, the President of China Xi Jinping with first lady and delegation of high-level officials and traders made his first tour of Pakistan and during his tour 51 MoUs were signed as well as some projects related with CPEC. In same year, GoP issued a coin worth of Rs. 20 containing the Sino-Pak flags to commemorate the lasting friendship. (Paswan, 2017)

Sino-Pak Economic cooperation

Bilateral relationship among two or more than two nations always measure on the scale of barter of goods, services, fruitful ideas, people to people contact and capital, while mostly neighboring nations are interlinked by roads or trains and often it is observed that neighbors take measure to control the penetration and access of the water of sea or river, travel on overland, transportation through bus or rail, and even through pipelines. A very rare openhandedness rises as a cost which could be paid in the kind of the modern terminologies like “trade concessions, technical, financial, diplomatic and military assistance/support, and other legal and illegal tolls, fees and customs duties”. (Hartpence, 2011)

After the advent of CPEC, the Sino-Pak mutual cooperation is now on the peak, especially the economic and diplomatic relationship. This emerging mutual close knits and economic linkages between these two friend neighbors foreshadowing of Chinese strategical war to become world's leading economic giant. As China is now world 2nd biggest economy by snatching its position from Japan. In this regard, Chinese economic nexus with Pakistan increasing day by day with a billionaire investment. This cooperation is in infrastructural construction, development, upgradation and further expansion between and around the routes of CPEC from Kashgar to warm water deeper port of Gwadar and its surroundings.

This is further enhanced with the agreement of ongoing free trade agreement which named as “China Pakistan Free Trade Agreement” (CPFTA). (Shah, S. H., Kamal, M. A., & Yu, D. L., 2022) It is endorsed by Chinese custom statistics the trade volume between China and Pakistan in bilateral economic activities during the year of 2017 passed 20 billion dollars, which is marked first time in the history. It is reduced in last couple of years which the change of government in Pakistan from PML (N) to PTI. In this period Pak exports increased to the 4.1% to 1.83 billion dollars while Sino trade volume recorded as 5.9% to climbed over 18.25 billion dollars whereas. These are not only limited to economic activities but cooperation is extended to the internal security, military cooperation, latest technology in medical, science and higher education by sharing cultural exchange programs. In the military

linkages now merging into closer and closer relationship in joint military exercises and Chinese supply of a great variety of modern arsenals, equipment's, arms, and latest technology-based armaments to the forces of Pakistan. (Sahibzada, 2021)

Subsequently, Sino-Pak both struggling to make their readjustment towards the destination of trade and to build and construct new safe, easier and shortest bus routes and railways line to minimize the potential effort and energy and obtain maximum and easiest outcomes in the South Asia to link with Gulf State across the Arabian Sea and follow out OPEC routes to get penetration into European States. while these both nations signed their first agreement of economic cooperation in 1963 with momentous maximization in the ambassadorial interconnectivity between both nations slowly the system of trade continuous until 2005 when a pleasant upgradation seen in the economic relationship with the increase of 39% with the amount of 4.26 billion dollars. However, the comparison always remained in the favour of China which devastatingly leading its export up to the 1.8 billion and Pakistan jumping only touched 575 million dollars.

The trade volume between these two nations was over one billion dollars in 2006, while the trade with India is more than forty time higher than this amount. The aid grant in era of Musharraf during 2001 was only 350 million after the extension and counted in the loan and grant. After few months, this amount was further extended to 100 million dollars more for the "concessional financing". China finances in several energy project with the worth of 260 million including hydel power projects, for the power stations, sub stations for the Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) and also for the installation of the transmission lines. (Hussain H. R., 2023)

Xi Inclination Towards Pakistan

The concept of non-alignment emerged during the era of cold war when states, including India, sought to remain unaligned with the major power blocs which were led by capitalist bloc under the supervision of United States and its alliances opposing the rival blocs of socialists USSR led by Soviet Union. This concept is aimed to preserve independence and avoid being drawn into struggles. India set a model as conventionally practiced a non-aligned foreign policy, underlining independence with a decline to align with any major bloc. This approach has historical ancestry and also influenced Indian relations with both Russia and USA as well as China. It historically adopted non-alignment and declared it a core principle of its mode of international relations. According to its foreign policy it appreciates the independent foreign policy of the states instead of aligning towards the rival blocs and consequence the global disintegration.

China traditionally encourages the non-alignment foreign policy of the South Asian states and it emphasis on non-alignment resonates particularly to Pakistan and Sri Lanka which they have sought to balance their relationships

with major powers of the world. Chinese stance also allows to engage with these states without inevitably requiring them to participate in comprehensive geopolitical rivalries. On the other hand, strategic autonomy is a key factor which refers to a state's ability to make independent strategic decisions and pursue its national interests without feeling the pressure by undoing foreign powers. On a broader level it covers economic, political and security dimensions. (Choer Moraes, H., & Wigell, M., 2022)

China, now a rising power on the globe, hoisted his flag with high value on strategic autonomy which seeks to reshape its diplomatic moves and policies in foreign affairs. These policies surely are based on its own national interests and priorities. It is also based on avoiding excessive dependence on external powers. South Asian state's relationship with China consequently pursue to maintain the strategic autonomy which may engage them economically and diplomatically without aligning too closely with Beijing's as concerned to the geopolitical ambitions. The phenomenon of balancing relationships with multiple powers allows these states to secure their national interests and strategic autonomy.

The main tool of Chinese political and economic influence over the region of South Asia is the engagement through economic knots and ties. These cooperations are so decisive which forces these states to aim to ensure that their economic cooperation would not compromise their strategic autonomy or leave them susceptible to undue influence. The relationship between economic cooperation and strategic alignment is always considered very vital in the foreign affairs of the states. The issue lies in the balancing of economic cooperation with the strategic autonomy of the South Asian state must be circumnavigated their relations with China in the manner to maximize economic development. They ensure the top priority to preserve their capabilities for making independence in strategic decision making. (Bhaumik, S. K., & Co, C. Y., 2011)

The stance of Chinese non-alignment and its acknowledgement for the significance of strategic autonomy makes diplomatic flexibility for the South Asian states. For the enhancement of economic cooperation, they may be most influential player and Chinese economic partners without unavoidably aligning with its broader geopolitical objectives. In prospects of Indo-Pak mutual relationship, if this model of economic cooperation enhances, (Khan, 2012) there may be many issues should be settled particularly the long-lasting Kashmir issue as well. This cooperation will directly and indirectly make impacts on regional dynamics after adaptation the features of non-alignment and the region of South Asia would not be needy of balance of power anymore.

The observance of China to non-alignment and the valuing the strategic autonomy in the region of South Asia in contributing to a multi-polar order. It allows the diversity in diplomacy and multilateral economic and political relations which consequently emerged in potentially fostering the stability

of entire region. This debate is concluded that non-alignment and strategic autonomy are very significant principles that shape Chinese interactions with South Asia. The central and backbone of their relationship is the economic cooperation which ensures the preservation of strategic autonomy. (Bento, 2020) In the lasting relations of the state with other states, the key consideration is autonomy. So, for China and South Asia, balancing the economic interests with the domineering to maintain self-determining strategic choices will endure to be an essential feature in the sprouting dynamics of Chinese South Asian foreign policy.

This debate is very phenomenal that China is actively participated in regional economic organization and forums for the promoting the economic ties and interdependence in the South Asian states. China also engages them more actively in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and another important forum of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (PCEP). These economic cooperation initiatives definitely assist in building trust and facilitate the regional ties for intra security and regional stability. China employs economic statecraft as a tool to achieve the most significant objectives of Chinese foreign policy. On the other hand, by leveraging these incentives like infrastructure investment and market access, it seeks to strengthen its influence and shape the policies which were adopted by Xi particularly for South Asia. (Macikenaite, 2020)

The prospects of economic interdependence in Chinese South Asian foreign policy indicate prolonging economic growth and ties by the expansion of the trade, development of infrastructure and increased investment. There are many challenges that may arise including concerns about debt sustainability, transparency in project financing and potential for the dependency of economic to become most influential partner in South Asia and its power politics. This interdependency definitely affects the mutual relationship of India and Pakistan because historically it happened when Pakistan entered into CENTO and CEATO, India made a strategic move in its foreign diplomacy and resulted in a paradigm shift in Kashmir policy by declaring as balance of power. (Kazimi, 1991)

Although economic interdependence offers opportunities on a wider scale which results in mutual benefits and economic collaboration. It introduces the complexities and considerations that go beyond traditional approaches of economy, security and geopolitical concerns. The balance between economic cooperation and the possible potential challenges will shape the advancing dynamics of the Chinese foreign policy in the region of South Asia.

Beijing and Islamabad in Regional Politics

While the Chinese stance on the Kashmir dispute against India and its expansion in Ladakh to acquire strategic deterrence against India while Pakistan is providing its assistance and diplomatic support in Xinjiang,

Taiwan, and Tibet revolts. It is further claimed that Sino-Pak relationship series is following into two parallel lines; one for the economic and trade and other for the military and defence aspects but both linkages and mutual ties are deeper and deeper in the shape of mutual projects in the production and supply of armaments which starts from bullets and ranged to the jets up to the guided missile frigates. (Kegley & Wittkopf, 2005)

On the other hand, Pakistan is also following the Sino policy that it is not merely focusing upon the arm race for the defence and deterrence perspectives but now economy and trade is hot talk in Pakistan on all the TV shows and all the newspaper because the in 70s Pakistan in looking for the nuclear capability when Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto publicly announce that we can eat the leaves but could not withdraw the nuclear project. Now on entire blue planet, the circumstance has been changes and policy diverted from weapons and war to economy and trade. So, Pakistan is also following the China pattern that avoiding the conflict and focus on the trade beyond the war.

To use energy from the natural resources to contain the energy crisis in Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz signed a memorandum of understanding in the series of a "protocol on Preferential Trade Agreement" in 2005 in a During a consultation with "senior officials of China's state-run Shenhua Group" in the Beijing city for the production of electricity from Thar Coal. (Mearsheimer J. , 2010) This project named Thar Coal Power Project and construction of the Gwardar Port project was also discussed and fixed an amount of 40 million of its construction. China Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) in Islamabad by both commerce minister of both nations during the tour of the president of Hu Jintao and Musharraf signed with milestone deed. It was expected that this agreement will be impacted as three times higher trade between China and Pakistan up to the 15 billion dollars within the next four to five years till to 2012-13.

It is also proposed that China and Pakistan both will control and minimize the custom duty unto 0% in more than 5100 tariff line and on about 4000 items are fixed for tariff less than 5% for upcoming next five years in the result of enactment of this free trade agreement (CPFTA). Till 2014, Pakistan was 64th state on the rank in terms of Sino imports while in account of exports the position is 32. In this fiscal year, the service in trade of Pakistan recorded in import and export as 5.4 and 8.0 billion dollars respectively which is an amount of 1/5 of the commercial economic and trade activities. (Walt, 1987) In larger prospect of capital, the import and export of Pakistan, it was really smaller economic power as compared its trade volume in the global capital markets was relative tiny. The relations after 2013 will be discussed in the last part of this chapter with the title of China Pakistan Economic corridor (CPEC) comprehensively discussed in detail with its projects and the progress on these projects in hierarchy on Sino-Pakistan economic nexus. In current time the Sino-Pak economic ties

and Chinese expansion in the Ladakh reached on the new horizon with multiple challenges and tasks.

Conclusion

Some scholars believed that under the framework of international relations (IR), by knowing The idea of the “balance of power” forces the states to protect one another by preventing any one state from gaining enough military strength to enslave every other state. This hypothesis further describes a stronger state which will take advantage of its weaker neighbor, pushing them to unite in defense. According to certain realists, aggression becomes ineffective when rival coalitions are in a condition of equilibrium of strength, making a system with balance of power more stable than one with a strong state. Some states that feel threatened have two options for ensuring their safety: they can join together with the threatening power or balance off the threat by forming alliances against it. There are other alliance strategies like chain-ganging and buck-passing. Realists have long argued over how a system's polarity affects the strategy that is chosen; yet it is widely acknowledged that in bipolar systems, each major power is forced to engage the other head-on. The balance of power theory is contested by constructivists and other schools of international relations, who challenge fundamental realist beliefs about the nature of the international system and state behavior, in addition to arguments among realists concerning the prevalence of balancing in alliance patterns.

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