

Pakistan's Strategic Potential and Diplomatic Relations With China Under Xi Jinping

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Abstract

In order to understand the relations between Pakistan and China, it is important to examine how the long-standing bilateral relations evolved. This includes investigating the factors and the climate that led to their strategic interdependence consolidation. Both countries developed the bilateral relations through the development of diplomatic links and a close alliance and over a period of time, their political interdependence was further engaged and combined. This article explores the foundation of comprehensive cooperation in the various phases of relations between Pakistan and China and the strategic interdependence imperatives of the two countries. It mainly focuses on the strategic importance of Pakistan to China and strengthening of the ties in numerous areas in post 9/11 particularly under President Xi Jinping's tenure and how Pakistan succeeded in benefiting from it.

Key Words: China, Geo-strategic, Pakistan, Strategic Relations, Xi Jinping

Introduction

Pakistan has been a focus of attraction for greater and potential rising powers because of its geostrategic position. Owing to its geographical location, Pakistan is situated between the twin powers of competition and cooperation in the mega-region of Central Asia, South Asia, Middle East and Caucasus. The entire area constitutes of two adjacent regions, Central Asia and South Asia that are of immense geopolitical importance. Since the start of the 21st century, these two sub-locales have shaped the focal point of global issues, first because of the US-NATO 'War on Terror' and the emergence of rising China. Pakistan stayed an alluring accomplice for the incredible forces. Because of the constantly developing arrangement of powers in presence in the area since the 1950s; China and Pakistan have discovered it mutually useful to cooperate for peace and tranquility in the locale. This has brought about a strong reciprocal key relationship focused on the protection of shared interests. Like all regional states, in any case, the two nations face difficulties entwined with promising circumstances that at the same time strain and fortify the two-sided relations. Also, hence, China-Pakistan participation in the region faces a challenge to accurately comprehend and manage the dangerous and valuable flows which stumble into the locale. Communication and mutual understanding between the two countries on conflicts and opportunities is vital in this regard. This article investigates the geostrategic

interests of China in Pakistan under the initiative of President Xi Jinping in the regularly changing regional political situation.

Literature Review

Chinese foreign policy has always been focused on friendships with Pakistan. China has tried - without success - to implement a policy of bilateralism with the USSR and the USA (Khan, 2006).

With regard to economic ties, the economic relationship between Pakistan and China in the postwar period was minimal, and China embraced the trade balance in large number. On the opposite, India concentrated on expanding its economic links with China as it entered into normalized relations. As a result, the rate of trade of both countries grew. Yet Pakistan's imports from China surpassed the country's exports to China between 1990 and 2006. At the time, Pakistan did not enjoy a trade surplus with China for even one year. In comparison, the Chinese and Pakistan trade deficit has risen over time. Pakistani imports from China have been 5.03 fold of China's exports and 5.75 times those of China exports in 2006 (Kayani et al., 2013; Shah, et. al, 2020).

Economic relations between Pakistan and China had improved entirely in the 1990s. China appeared soon next/after to the United States as a global economic force. In the period between 1994 and 1995, Pakistani exports to China witnessed a huge growth to 30.1 million USD and imports into China increased to 70.2 million (Sarwar, 1996; Muzaffar, et. al 2017).

Pakistan economic collaboration is a core component of the strategic relationship, but Pakistan faces major economic challenges. With China having economic resources and technical prowess, it has the potential to take Pakistan out of these problems, Pakistan is equally important geographically in the light of China's BRI grand strategy as Pakistan gives China access to large markets in Central Asia, Middle East and Africa by way of Gwadar (Irshad, 2015). Thus, there is a potential between the two countries to form a symbiotic relationship.

The political alliance between Pakistan and China reflects a continuing cooperation, regardless of the different values and cultures. Both countries have taken numerous steps towards expanding their relationship through a tactical alliance focused on mutual values and interests, as one famous Chinese says, "There is only one step on the journey of thousands of miles (Javaid, & Jahangir, 2015).

Diplomatic relations with China since 1947

The inability of the limited industry to operate transport and coal has been a setback for Pakistan's economy. In 1949-1950, China offered a 'coal for

barter trade' to support the weak economy of Pakistan (Chaudhri, 1970). As a result, Pakistan became the first Muslim country and the third country to recognize the independence of China after India and Burma.

Pakistan became friend of US and China through a successful bilateralism policy while gaining USSR animosity. Pakistan preferred to remain neutral in domestic affairs that is to say, in these critical situations. Zafrullah Khan, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, openly supported China on the permanent seat question in the UNSC (Arif, 1984).

In the last 70 years of Asia's geopolitics, after the two countries formed diplomatic ties in 1951, Pakistan and China had a close link with each other. More than any other region, China has continuously supported Pakistan with diplomatic, political and military assistance (Boni, 2019).

Cold War Era

Pakistan was a magnet to the established superpowers (United States and Soviet Union) and peripheral power's (China) influence since the early days of the Cold War. Its jurisdiction consisted of two parts: East Pakistan and West Pakistan, which enhanced its importance further.

Pakistan lies at the intersection of big powers' rivalries and politics and it is accessible to a number of power seeking to utilize the geographic location to further their own national interests by forming an alliance with Pakistan. Consequently, any development in Pakistan that has an impact on the security and viability of that country will inevitably draw the attention of a number of external powers and neighboring states. These powers and states include China, Russia (formerly USSR), Iran, and Afghanistan. If these powers get actively interested in the developments in occurring within Pakistan, the United States, which is a superpower and a military ally of Pakistan, will not ignore such advances especially if it hurts its own interests. (Subrahmanyam, 1974).

During the Cold War, the geopolitical triangle of the U.S., Pakistan and China operated in a broader defense framework. The durability of the triangle was atrophied in the 1990's, after the end of the Cold War, because American involvement with Pakistan was largely diminishing and a number of economic and military sanctions were complicating it. As a result, the triangle's leg between the US and Pakistan deteriorated when the leg between China and Pakistan was growing (Smith, 2011).

Pak China Relations after 9/11

Pakistan has made a U-turn in its Afghanistan stance after the horrific incidents of 9/11 and has been standing by the Americans. Although that Pakistan's link with the China remained solid and further broadened, despite

being a front-line nation in the ongoing global war against terrorism and a non-NATO ally (Zeb, 2012). The regional security imperatives, in particular increasing Indo-US co-operation, added to Pakistan-China relations in the post-9/11 period a new dimension.

CPEC

The Gwadar Port in southern Pakistan is to be the trading nerve center of China, with a large part of its trade, in particular that of oil, being carried out via the port which is ownership of the Chinese-owned Chinese state-owned China Overseas Port Holding company (CCOPS) (Hussain, 2017).

In this strategy the Chinese firms, Huawei for Telecommunications, Haier for Household Devices, Chinese Mobile and China Metallurgical Group Company (MCC) in mining and minerals will expand on their already developed market presence. It calls for the development of an infrastructure and supportive policy climate to encourage fresh entry in other fields, such as textiles or clothes, building materials and cement, fertilizers and agricultural technology. Under the programme the establishment of industrial parks is essential to this by supplying water, perfect utilities, adequate energy supply and self-service power.

The key thrust of the initiative is in reality agriculture, but, contrast to CPEC's reputation as a large manufacturing and transport business involving power plants and roads. The strategy is more detailed and stipulates the largest amount of farm programmes and plans. The proposal outlines a dedication from one end of the distribution to the other for agriculture. Chinese firms will run their own farms, fruit and vegetable and grain processing facilities by the provision of other inputs and seeds, such as fertilizers, pesticides and credit. Logistics enterprises would run a comprehensive agribusiness and transport infrastructure as described in the Dawn strategy.

Another common information and technologies investment is planned, and a robust monitoring and surveillance framework is being developed in cities from Karachi to Peshawar, with 24 hour roadside videos and busy law and order markets. For the region, a national fiber-optic backbone is being created, not just for internet, but also distribution of broadcast, which will support in 'disseminating Chinese cultures' with Chinese media (Husain, 2017).

Regional Politics: Stakes and Interests in Pakistan

Since the advent of the 21st century, South Asia has been focused on global geopolitics. China is an economic giant and reaching West through the

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Pakistan has been more effective in regional geopolitics through CPEC (part of BRI). The US is worried about the development of Chinese interests in Asia, because it has perused "Pivot to Asia" policy to fight China in Asia, while controlling India, because China's interests are at risk in Asia. Pakistan has risen to importance for China in this situation.

The friendship between Pakistan and China is sweeter than honey and higher than the Himalayas. They are friends of all weathers and friendship has been thriving throughout history since they have been up and down many times. They remained the most reliable friends and constant. Pakistan is more important than ever for China in the midst of terrorism and the BRI programme. All collaborate to eradicate extremism in order to establish a peaceful and prosperous zone from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Xinjiang (Small, 2015).

Diplomatic Offers from China

In the early 1990s, for their suspected nuclear and missile research cooperation, Pakistan and China were subjected to military and economic sanctions. Yet China was standing with Pakistan and was not bowing to pressure and proceeded to rejuvenate their relationship further. In the 1990s, its economic effect was negatively influenced by Pakistan's uncertain political condition and incomplete tenures of political governments. However, when the United States turned its back on Pakistan by putting trade sanctions on it, China helped Pakistan politically.

In contrast to America, Pakistan has always experienced reliability in the case of ties with China, which is highly esteemed for its dedication, durability and favor to Islamabad's security values. Beijing has managed to gain Islamabad's trust and help. It built self-confidence in the defense sector. China is supporting its closest friend with technology transfer, replacement supply and local recovery centers and so on.

Geo-strategic Location of Pakistan

The geographical position of Pakistan has been at the junction of the rivalries and politics of the big and small powers. China is Pakistan's biggest investor in Gwadar Deep Sea Port, situated strategically on the mouth of the Hormuz Strait. Both the United States and India warily see it as a chance to launch the Chinese Navy, which allows them to launch warships and submarines in the Indian Ocean. Recently, China has promised almost 43 billion dollars to invest.

A detailed geostrategic and practical estimate is the basis of a strategic relationship between Pakistan and China. It is an equally essential multidimensional collaboration between the two countries. Geo-economic methods are used in achieving the region's already tense and uncertain geo-strategic goals (Khan &Kasi, 2017).

Strategic Importance of Pakistan after 9/11

During the time after 9/11, China and Pakistan expanded their strategic cooperation significantly. Economic and trade cooperation is also reinforced at the same stage as economic cooperation which has become an important part of China-Pakistan's strategic partnership. At first, there was a low amount of trade between the two nations. China's exports to Pakistan, for example, totaled US\$19 million and Pakistan's imports in 1960 were worth US\$4 million. The share of China's export to Pakistan was 377 million USD and its import from Pakistan was 45 million USD, thereby achieving a combined trading volume of 822 million USD in 2000. While trade volumes between the two countries rose by 43% from 1960 to 2000 (Khan, 2012), they still were not as high in the light of:

- i. Sino-Paksize of Economies.
- ii. The two countries' close military relationship.
- iii. Geographical proximity of Sino-Pak.
- iv. Many domestic goods and a wide range of products consumption.
- v. To benefit from the comparative advantages of varying commodity manufacture.

In the aftermath of September 11, Pakistan became economically more dependent on China. For instance, in 2014 China came into being as Pakistan's biggest exporter and Pakistan's second largest commodity market. As exports to China were multiplied, the two states' free trade agreement was advantageous for Pakistan. Therefore, China and Pakistan had a bilateral trade rate of \$12.7 bn in 2014, double the volume in 2017. Chinese imports

from Pakistan have crossed 1.7 billion US dollars and Chinese imports from Pakistan are 15.7 billion US dollars. The difference between exports and imports is continuously rising considering the rise in international cooperation and tremendous growth in overall trade. While the official and informal estimates suggest that there are differences in the region of \$3-6 billion between imports and exports.

In the time since 9/11, both countries have increased economic relations and have signed more bilateral agreements, such as the China/Pakistan Joint Investment Company (CPJIC), the Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Both countries have recently agreed on a full service trading plan. The technological and financial aid can also be strengthened if this Arrangement is successfully enforced.

Strategic Interests of China in Pakistan

The energy needs of China have grown sharply in recent decades as a result of rapid economic development. In this regard, Pakistan is increasingly important to China because Pakistan is able to give a safe path through Gwadar to resource rich countries in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Today, the bulk of Chinese oil imports go into the Malacca Strait and the Indian Ocean. The inconvenience of such seaways is the weakness in the event of terrorist attacks, especially in the Malacca Strait. China's weakness and dependence on Malacca route for energy trading is, according to Chinese President Hu Jintao, the greatest weak point that the enemy can use. (Storey, 2006) In addition to the Malacca dilemma, China has territorial disputes with the South China Sea coastal nations, which include Japan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines and Taiwan (Shaikh, & Fan, 2016).

Gwadar is important as an alternative energy import transit route for China because of the "Malaccan Dilemma." Gwadar has been selected by China to minimize its geopolitical vulnerabilities by being one of the key alternative transport routes. According to Chinese intelligence experts, jihadists in and around Malacca have been used by Japan and America as a pretext to boost their naval presence. The United States intensified its military involvement with China's neighbors, often called a containment policy by China (Perveen, & Khalil, 2015).

President Xi Jinping of China launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 (BRI). During his visits to Indonesia and Kazakhstan, he officially revealed two things, the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road under BRI. The scheme comprises the number of road, rail and seaside routes linking the Baltic Sea with the Pacific Ocean. BRI has six initiatives involving 65 nations, mainly developed countries, of economic connectivity. This vast economic strategy, which accounts of almost 63% of

the world's population, will support almost 4.4 billion people in those countries.

How Pakistan Exploits Its Geo-Strategic Location?

The Treaty of Friendship was signed on 5th April 2005, with the aim of establishing greater cooperation and good-neighborly relations and it rejuvenated Pakistan's friendship with China (Zaki, 2010). The former Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said that the strategic ties deal between Pakistan, China, was also a response to the strategic alliance between the US and India (Tkacik, 2011). This is a breach in the relationship between Pakistan and China in which both countries are preparing by means of new policies and initiatives to resolve the complexities of current bilateral relations. In terms of Pakistan's partnerships with China and in particular, China and Asia in general, this historic multi-layered alliance is seen as a hallmark.

CPEC is a part of Belt and Road initiative (BRI) project. It is a flagship project. The CPEC, the most important project under the BRI, announced on a big visit from the Chinese prime minister to Pakistan in May 2013. In this project bridges, gas pipelines and railways will be constructed for linking China's Xinjiang region to Gwadar. With this mega undertaking, China will use a shorter path for imports and exports. The two countries benefit from this initiative but the whole region would get benefit from this massive development programme, according to Pakistani and Chinese scholars and analysts. Because of its value for China, China included CPEC in its 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-2020). China's six key priorities for this initiative are:

- i. Access to the shortest route for exchange and goods delivery. Today, China uses the Pacific and Indian Oceans for trade with most nations. For its imports of oil, gas and other products, China is heavily dependent upon the Strait of Malacca, exporting its merchandise to Asia and beyond the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The entire distance from the Middle Eastern ports to the port of Shanghai is about 12000 kilometers and moving further to Xinjiang Province it is about 16000 kilometers. The shortest, easiest and most cost-effective route for Chinese is 2500 km by connecting Xinjiang with Gwadar via highways, trains and pipelines. The involvement of the United States in the Pacific for operation surveillance and their harmonization with China's neighbouring countries is also a consideration in China's search of alternative routes to safeguard its position.
- ii. The western and north-west regions are established in the eastern part of the country as 90 percent of China's population. This project aims to build jobs and entrepreneurship prospects for this sector in order to improve the country's overall economic development and to curb extremism and the ongoing separatist movement. China claims that these activists lead social unrest in this province under the aegis of the extremist group

- 'Islamic Revolution in East Turkistan' which is linked to the militants. The Chinese administration claims that economic opportunities will help to curb this extremism.
- iii. China is the world's second largest economy and has the highest growth globally, and is the second largest customer of oil resources. China wants its oil and other energy supplies and trading lines to be safeguarded and extended. Pakistan may provide an alternative and shorter route for imports of energy. China's desire to find oil supplies led it to figure out other ways to get from the Middle East and explore new markets in Africa.
 - iv. China's fourth target is to invest in the mines and energy industries of Pakistan. Chinese coal, copper and other minerals have launched many schemes.
 - v. Gwadar Port growth and infrastructure development are the fifth priority. Regional stability and the security of Pakistan are very critical for achieving these objectives. Because of many external and internal causes, Pakistan is facing serious economic challenges. The main reason for China behind the CPEC is to provide Pakistan with an economic boost to deal with the economic and security problems.
 - vi. The last goal is to establish its naval presence in the Indian Ocean in order to track the strategic trends of the region. This will also serve to extend its Middle East footprint. China will also interact with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries without any access to sea (Afridi& Khalid, 2016).

PakistanChinaRelationsunder Xi Jinping

Pakistan was a big trading partner for China. Global trade has lately, however, improved and a free trade deal between Pakistan and China has been signed. The international ties between these two nations appear to be controlled by military and technical transactions and Chinese investment in economy and infrastructure of Pakistan has been initiated by China.

Pakistan's exports to China are increasing considerably but Pakistan's imports from China are more than exports and that difference is widening daily. China and Pakistan decided to take different steps to resolve the problem of trade deficit, for example, Free Trade Agreement Second Phase (Munir, 2018).

In order to secure a peaceful political order in South and Central Asia and avoid the growth of terrorism to China, Pakistan plays a significant role. Even more specifically, after the rising power of Xi Jinping, China proposed "One Belt One Road" grand strategy. India has not provided support, although China issued plans to spend forty-six billion dollars in Pakistan, focusing on key areas of railway, road, infrastructure and energy projects, with the goal to increase the pace of the modernization of Pakistani industry.

The proposal was formally concluded during visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Pakistan in April 2015, including signing 51 MOUs, eight projects, the inauguration of eight, and five joint energy projects. The two countries signed 51 Memoranda of Understanding. This new era of relations among the two countries involved social, fiscal, technical and cultural collaboration, in addition to familiar infrastructure and energy projects.

On April 22, 2015 China Daily announced that China issued its first investment plan for countries abroad under the Belt and Road Initiative to construct a hydropower station near Jehlum. After China has established a new strategic plan for economic growth and stability in Pakistan, this situation has changed entirely late that day to open the CPEC. Furthermore, apart from the alternative sources of energy have also been explored and several Wind-power projects have been inaugurated in cities like Dawood, Sachal, Zonergy and Jhampir.

Bilateral trade volume for the year 2017, according to the Chinese custom figures, for the first time passed the \$20 billion threshold. Chinese exports to Pakistan rose to \$18.25 billion by 5.9 percent in 2017, while Pakistan's exports to China dropped to \$1.83 billion by 4.1 percent.

In 2018, Prime Minister Khan visited China, with both sides promising to continue improving the Strategic Cooperative Relationship between All

Weather tested friends. It will enhance and bring closer to both states in the New Era.

China is the largest trade partner and major investor in Pakistan, especially in the energy and infrastructure sector. In 2018, two countries' bilateral exchange amounted to 18 billion dollars. The CPEC formally introduced a higher level of bilateral relations. CPEC is a big project of the initiative "One Road One Belt" of Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Developments occurred in the relations with Sino-Pakistan in 2018, emphasizing China's central position in the 2018 elections in Pakistan and some key developments during 2018 also occurred, including the commencement of the second phase of CPEC under the PTI administration.

In July 2019, Pakistan was one of over 50 countries that supported China's policies on Xinjiang and signed a collective letter to the United Nations Human Rights Commission commending the "significant human rights achievements" of China, noting that "stability and protection have now returned to Xinjiang, and that there are adequate measures in place for the security of the fundamental human rights of people of all ethnic groups.

Pakistan was one of the 54 countries which signed a joint declaration in November 2019 in order to support the policies of China's Xinjiang. Pakistan was one of the 53 countries that endorsed laws on national security in Hong Kong in June 2020 at UN.

The asset requirements could be reduced from \$20 billion to \$15 trillion for the opening of a bank branch. In Urumqi High Technical Growth in China, Habib Bank Limited (HBL, Pakistan) launched its first branch on 20 March 2017. The Chinese Industrial and Commercial Bank opened its two branches in Islamabad and Karachi 8 November 2017 and in Karachi, the Bank of China opened their first branch (Standard, 2017). In order to reduce the current-account deficits, China and Pakistan have channeled investment in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through Pakistani banks. In order to collect the exact number of imports on April 30, 2018, China and Pakistan introduced an electronic data exchange scheme (News, 2018). The second phase of a free trade agreement between Pakistan and China was signed on 29th April 2019, which included several trading agreements and MOUs such as the construction, under the CPEC, of the Hevelian Dry Port, completing the preliminary phase design to upgrade ML 1 and the MOU on Marine Sciences Cooperation, China-Pakistan Economic and technological cooperation (Khan & Khan, 2019).

China has moved on to a new generation of leaders, Xi Jinping is the first to be on an equal basis, and the notion of playing second fiddle to the US appears much less fragile at the risk of their promise of a resurging force in its

legitimate position in history. In a system that is profoundly cynical about the potential of the world order to promote its current path of change, growth and stability, China's outlook for foreign policy under Xi Jinping needs to be recognized.

Beijing will expect Pakistan to be really strong under the BRI rubric. For a huge number of Chinese companies in steel and construction industries who were unable to make use of their production potential at home, the complete scale and size of the CPEC, with pipeline projects for the transport, oil, trade and industrial growth, has now become the clearing house of choice.

For Chinese firms, Pakistan is also effectively a captive market for Chinese companies that expand unimpeded by the competitions they face at home, ranging from exclusive access to Pakistan's industrial parks to a weak local economy that is prone to losing millions of middle-class customers when the Chinese goods reaches their region. Chinese corporations strive to develop the value chain. The rich experience of constructing nuclear power plants in Pakistan, supposedly in order to ease the country's power problems, may also lead to the strengthening of China's nuclear craft and its potential to control the global energy environment in the future.

This is a further reaffirmation of this economic line of thinking that Xi Jinping felt it fitting to make the CPEC part of the 13th five-year plan of China in 2016, particularly if Pakistan is not evaluated on its own, but rather as the gateway and hinterland to Xinjiang's Arabian Sea.

Results and Discussion

This paper has analyzed the strategic importance of Pakistan for China. The tenure of President Xi Jinping was started from 2013. After that, the strategic alliance between both states has taken the new phase which includes the CPEC as it is strategically important for China to provide shortest and most economical route for transfer of goods. Both countries can gain similar gains by participating in transport and electricity programmes. In shaping the regional safety order, the Chinese position and interests are growing. The CPEC reflects China's investment in Pakistan, which is highly ambitious and ultimately transformative. With the official launch of CPEC in April 2015 by Xi Jinping, Pakistan has been allowed to modernize existing road and railway networks and develop new networks in desperate need of capital to solve the energy crisis affecting the region.

Recommendations

To enhance the mutual cooperation between Pakistan and China the following are the suggested measures:

- Pakistan will become home to one of the world's most modern and rentable ports running on a large scale after the construction of the Gwadar Terminal. Both these targets will take a few years to achieve, but the gains of Pakistan-China ties are already apparent.
- The shared understanding on Afghanistan and other regional issues particularly in post US withdrawal from Afghanistan needs to be established by China.
- Pakistan should serve astrade link between China, Middle East and the Central Asia.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the strategic interests and objectives of China in Pakistan are achieved through the mutual cooperation. As Pakistan is strategically located near to China and both countries count each other for support in international and regional matters. Pakistan faces serious economic difficulties and Pakistan wants aid from China to address those challenges. China has economic and technical tools, on one hand, to take Pakistan from these problems; on the other hand, China will enter resource rich and trouble-free Gwadar, on the south-western coast of Baluchistan, Pakistan (Central and West Asia). For both sides, trade cooperation is mutually favorable. Both countries can gain similar gains by participating in transport and electricity programs. In an area still characterized by tension and instabilities, geo-economic tools are used in order to accomplish geo-strategic goals.

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