

PAKISTAN-CHINA STRATEGIC COOPERATION (1972-2015): IMPACT ON US GEO-POLITICAL INTERESTS IN THE REGION

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Abstract

Pakistan's search for security right after the independence led their policies to join western bloc in the midst of cold war due to threats posed from New Delhi and Kabul over territorial issues including Jammu & Kashmir issue, and Pak-Afghan Border. Pakistan's foreign policy was driven by its commitment to Washington's containment policy, which earned it hostility of communist bloc. Pakistan did not agreed to Washington's policy of supporting New Delhi during the 1962 Sino-Indian War. This led Ayub Khan to explore other options and resulted in signing border agreement of 1963 with Beijing, which established the foundation of strategic partnership with Beijing. Islamabad played a significant role to end the Chinese isolation when it arranged the Nixon's visit to Beijing in the early 1970s, which led to the Sino-US rapprochement. Since then, Beijing and Islamabad never looked back and have forged close association through the multilateral agreements over the years in the fields of military cooperation, nuclear cooperation as well as political and economic cooperation. The article summarizes the findings of doctoral studies by Noonari, which aims to explore the strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan and its impact over the US interests in the region.

Key Words: *Strategic competition, Rivalry, Nuclear cooperation, Balance of power.*

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INTRODUCTION

Pakistan became the first Muslim state to recognize and establish diplomatic ties with Peoples Republic of China (PRC) in 1951, but the relations remained strained in the 1950s due to various reasons such as Karachi's joining of western alliances in the 1950s, and its policy towards the Nationalist government of Republic of China (or simply Formosa). Even Karachi did not supported the PRC until the beginning of the War with India in 1962, as it feared the Beijing's communist ideology, which may expand to the territories of Pakistan. Beijing claimed some of the territories belonged to Pakistan during the 1950s and this raised the concern to General Ayub Khan who in 1959 proposed New Delhi the idea of a joint defense against the communist threat emerging from China in the late 1950s (The Week, 2020).

Beijing's ties with the New Delhi remained a source of concern for Karachi, as during the 1950s remained friendly has reached towards a point where they raised the slogans of *Hindi-Cheeni Bhai Bhai* (Indian and Chinese are brothers). These strengthened bondage led the Karachi to mend ties with the Beijing in order to neutralize the Beijing's view over the major issues facing its relations with New Delhi.

Beijing adopted the neutral policy on Kashmir despite its close ties with New Delhi in 1950s, which aimed to halt the further deterioration of its ties with Pakistan. Beijing's policy shifted in favour of Pakistan in 1960s and 1970s due to mutual interests of containing India and ending the isolation. The 1990s has again turned the policy towards the neutral view and called Kashmir a bilateral issue (Yuan, 2005). The situation took a dramatic turn in 2019 when New Delhi abolished the Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which guaranteed the Kashmir's quasi-autonomy, and thus China entered on the side of Pakistan (Joshi, 2020).

The border issue remained the bone of contention between two states and when the Sino-Soviet split occurred in late 1950s New Delhi was encouraged to act on the Nehru's Forward Policy, which aimed to expand the influence of the New Delhi in the region. The intervention in Tibet in late 1950s by providing asylum to Dalai Lama in 1959 angered Beijing, and thus led to war with India as they regarded Tibet as the integral part of China (Lintner, 2018). The events surrounding the 1962 particularly the support provided by the US and its western allies to New Delhi became a major reason for the Ayub Khan to explore other options for its security against the Indian aggression. This led Pakistan to look to China as both the states were involved in a conflict with India. This led both the states to normalize their ties and agreed to sign the border agreement in 1963. The 1963 Agreement between the two states have ended the territorial dispute, and the only obstacle remained in their partnership was the Karachi's policy of alliances with the west against the communist threat.

FACTORS STRENGTHENED THE BOND BETWEEN TWO STATES

Beijing's policy of peaceful co-existence played a pivotal role in strengthening its partnership with its neighbouring states, as it favoured to increase cooperation with nations, and resolve the issues through peaceful means rather than interfering in the affairs of other states. Karachi from the beginning has tried to establish friendly ties with Beijing, and it supported the UN resolution to unseat the Kuomintang (or the government in Taiwan) with PRC. During the Korean war of 1950-53, it did not support the UN Resolution, which branded the China as an aggressor. The Bandung Conference of 1955 was the turning point where Pakistan premier assured his Chinese counterpart that Karachi's intentions of joining of western alliances were not aimed towards Beijing.

Pakistan needs to secure its borders as it has strained relations over eastern border with India since the independence, and on the other

side has disputed border with the Kabul on western front has provided an opportunity to avoid hostility with China as government didn't want to open a new front.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Beijing's ties with New Delhi soured on the border issue, which led to the 1962 border war between two states (Riedel, 2015). Earlier Karachi fought a war in 1948 with New Delhi over the Kashmir issue. New Delhi emerged a common enemy of Beijing and Karachi, which led them to form a partnership against the common threat. Beijing and Karachi settled the border dispute in 1963 agreement, which resulted in the beginning of a new era of partnership to achieve common interests.

US ROLE IN THE REGION

US shown little interest towards the South Asia because of the British influence in the Indian subcontinent, as it remained part of the British Empire until 1947, and its involvement in the cold war politics particularly in Europe. The cold war politics has divided the world into two blocs i.e., the capitalist bloc led by the Washington with its western allies and communist bloc led by Moscow with its communist allies.

Washington realized the importance of the region as it saw the developments of the pro-communist movements across the newly independent states of Africa and Asia in the 1950s. Washington realized that Moscow is trying to develop a foothold in the region and New Delhi and Karachi are important access to the Indian Ocean. US built the alliances in the region to contain the communism (Yeo, 2019). US initially approached to the New Delhi for the alliance against communism but the Indian non-aligned policy did not supported the idea. On the other hand, Karachi was engulfed in multiple challenges such as the security challenge from New Delhi, and economic crisis. The policy makers elite including its armed forces were pro west in the 1950s rather than pro-communism, and thus Pakistani premier Liaquat Ali Khan inclined the invitation from Moscow to visit the

state, and accepted the invitation promptly from Washington and paid state visit in 1950.

The politics in the Karachi has remained very different and since the state was based on the principles of Islam and has opposed the concept of communism. It was not an easy decision for Karachi to consider the invitation received from Moscow to visit the Soviet Union.

Karachi maintained its neutrality and showed no interest in becoming part of the cold war, but the security considerations and the inclination of the ruling elite towards west has driven Karachi to join the western bloc in early 1950s against the Soviet Union. Since then, Karachi has remained a major aid recipient of the west in both economic and military terms except for few brief periods in which West has imposed sanctions/restricted the aid.

The security remained a top consideration for the policy makers in Karachi as it faced the security threats from New Delhi due to multiple reasons inherited from the British partition of India in 1947, which led towards the war over Kashmir in 1948. Karachi looked towards the external powers to meet the security needs it faced during the early years in order to ensure its survival against the threats posed by New Delhi.

Thus, Pakistan need for external support to fulfil its security needs and has remained a central theme in designing their relations with Washington during the cold war years. The US on the other hand needs a state in the region to keep an eye on the Moscow's ambitions in the region and Pakistan became a close security partner, which provided air bases in the 1950s from which US U-2 spy planes flew into USSR for the espionage purposes.

South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO):

SEATO and CENTO remained the central treaties during the 1950s, which tilted Pakistan's policy towards the west and Pakistan became the active player in the cold war politics. Pakistan's security considerations drove them to join the alliances as they have provided the weapons to the Pakistani forces and the economic aid to the already fragile state. Pakistan's search for the partner led it towards the western alliances who were mainly aiming towards the containment of the Soviet Union rather than India. Pakistan joined SEATO in 1954 and CENTO in 1955 in order to gain valuable support from the west.

Meanwhile New Delhi remained non-aligned during the cold war years despite coming close to Moscow in the 1970s as they signed the Indo-US Friendship treaty in 1972 due to Washington's security partnership with Pakistan. Although Washington and its allies have provided the military and economic support to New Delhi during and after the 1962 Sino-India War, but New Delhi was reluctant to join any bloc and wanted to secure the benefits from both the blocs.

SHIFT IN US FOREIGN POLICY

Washington's policy shift occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s due to the cold war dynamics as New Delhi faced security threat over the border dispute with Beijing (Riedel, 2015). The ill-prepared New Delhi had been unable to counter the Beijing's well-prepared armed forces during the 1962 War, and faced the humiliating defeat. Washington and its western allies during and after the crisis provided the military aid to New Delhi in order to bolster its defenses against the communist forces of China. Moscow shared cordial relations with New Delhi, and in 1950s, Sino-Soviet split over the ideology had further cemented its ties with New Delhi rather than Beijing. Moscow during the 1962 Sino-India war put the pressure on Beijing to settle

the border issue through peaceful means, and Beijing's continued vulnerability over Washington's presence in Indochina region as well as in Korean peninsula.

Kennedy administration's shift in foreign policy towards New Delhi was aimed to protect India from the threat posed by the Communist China. Pakistan raised its concern over the US military support to New Delhi, and showed reservation over the supply of arms to New Delhi. Because Pakistan's concern was that these weapons will be used against Karachi which became true in 1965 Indo-Pakistani war.

The US priorities in the region compelled Karachi to look for alternatives in order to meet the security challenges occurred after the two super powers support to New Delhi. The other reason was that the western alliances were not committed to Pakistan's cause of defending/providing support against India, but were aimed to contain communism. During these crucial times Pakistan-China cooperation increased as US 1964 State department Bureau of Intelligence and research (INR) hinted that Beijing may provide the assistance to Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons (PTI, 2016).

The 1971 disintegration of Pakistan has ended the alliance with the Washington, and during this period, US provided the US\$ 726 million military aid and US\$ 2.5 billion in economic aid. Most of the military and economic aid was during the time of cooperation era 1950-1964 in which it received US 2.5 billion for economic aid and US\$ 700 million in military aid. Whereas the era during 1965-71 was mostly dominated by the US sanctions over Pakistan and as a result, a mere US\$26 million of military aid was received by Pakistan. With the breakup of alliances in the 1970s the aid flow to Pakistan was also reduced as US only granted US\$ 2.9 million military aid during 1972-79, and US\$ 2.55 billion economic aid during the same period, which showed that Washington was interested in economic development of the state rather than a military collaboration. Washington was well aware of the Sino-Pakistan nuclear cooperation in 1983 (Bagchi, 2017),

despite it, US turned blind eye on nuclear programme of Pakistan (Akhtar, 2018). US continued to provide aid that jumped to US\$ 5 billion in the 1979-90 period in which Islamabad was engaged in a proxy war against the Soviet forces occupation of Afghanistan.

During the Afghan War President Zia had extracted a concession from President Reagan that Islamabad would work with CIA against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and in return the US would not only provide massive aid, but would agree to look other way on the question of the bomb (Cyril, 2003).

END OF COLD WAR & THE BEGINNING OF THE NEW FRIENDSHIPS

With the end of the cold war, US lost its interest in the region as Soviet Union was disintegrated and the America remained the sole superpower and has shifted its attention towards the new theatre that was the oil rich Middle East, which has been under the threat of the Saddam Hussain in the Gulf War-I (1990-91). Washington foreign policy shift towards the Middle East and Europe has put Islamabad in isolation and its fragile economy weakened due to US sanctions in 1990. The mass migration of Afghan refugees towards Pakistan has put extra burden on the weak economy, which created the political instability in the country in the 1990s until the General Pervez Musharraf imposed the Martial Law on 12th October 1999 through a military coup.

Sanctions on Pakistan

US president George H. Bush denied certifying Islamabad over its alleged nuclear programme in 1990, and the sanctions imposed under the 1985 Pressler Amendment. The US presidents since 1985 has continued to certify Islamabad due to its role in Afghan War of 1979-88 against the Soviet occupation. However, once the war ended the US interests with Pakistan lost which has resulted the imposition of sanctions on Pakistan. Not only that but the US has abandoned the

newly freed Afghanistan and this led the crisis in the region as the influx of the refugees poured in Pakistan, and led the burden on the already fragile economy of the state. Pakistan during the period of 1991-2000 received a mere US\$ 429 million in economic aid and US\$ 5.2 million in military aid.

Table 1: US Aid to Pakistan

Year	Aid to Pakistan by United States of America (USA) in US\$
1950-64	2.5 billion in economic aid & 700 million in military
1965-79	2.9 million military aid & 2.55 billion in economic aid
1979-90	5 billion
1991-2000	429 million economic aid & 5.2 million in military aid
Since 2001	33 billion

Sources: Newsweek (2009), (Ward, 2018).

Pakistan faced severe sanctions during the cold war years (Mehmood, 2003). The US imposed fresh sanctions after the 1998 nuclear tests under the Glenn Amendment of 1979 and US Arms Control Act of 1994, and Symington Amendment of 1977. In 1999, Islamabad was prohibited from all military and economic aid under the section 508 of the Foreign Assistance Act due to the army takeover of the civilian government through a military coup that enabled US to impose sanctions under 508 act (Fisher, 2013). Pressler and Glenn Amendment restrictions lifted in 2001 after the Islamabad's decision to join Washington's side in its war on terror.

The aid flow to Islamabad increased since 2001 with the beginning of the war on terror, as Washington held Al-Qaeda responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Al-Qaeda Chief Osama Bin Laden was hiding in Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban since 1996, and US President George

W. Bush asked Taliban to hand over the Al-Qaeda leader, and asked the Pakistani authorities to decide “either you are with us or against us” and general Pervez Musharraf joined the US side in war on terror. This led the beginning of the War on terror against the non-state actors since 2001 in different parts of the world (Lane, 2018).

US interests in the region

United States remained a key player in the region, and has been actively pursuing its interests in the region since the cold war years. The post-cold war years have changed the foreign policy direction as the containment of the communism was no more on the agenda but the emergence of new power centres in the region has redirected its policy in post 9/11, 2001 era. The US interests in the region are discussed below:

Containing China

Washington’s main objective remained to deal with the growing strategic competition with the Beijing, which as a growing economy at the turn of the century has created anxiety for the policy makers in Washington (Shambaugh, 2021). The financial crisis of 2007-08 has slowed the global economies, which created an opportunity for China to rescue its Asian neighbours. Since 2008 global financial crisis, China’s economic growth has made it the second largest economy of the world (Yeuh, 2013). On the other hand, US role in the region reduced due to the economic crisis, its engagement in the Middle East and Europe in the 1990s, and its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2001. However, with the change of administration in Washington US policies began to shift towards their important allies in West, Middle East and to the Indo-Pacific region. Washington refocused its policies towards the region in order to contain the growing influence of China in the region. US competition with the Beijing has brought New Delhi in its strategy to counter Chinese influence (Pant, & Joshi, 2016). The 2011 Asia Pivot strategy designed to contain China and India became the central actor in the policy. Washington pursued the system of

alliances in the region to regain its strength and a strong Quad formed with New Delhi, Canberra, and Tokyo to deal the threats emerging from Beijing. The rise of Beijing's military muscle in South China Sea raised concerns for the states of Indonesia, Vietnam, Philippines and even Republic of China who opposed the Chinese militarization of the region and its occupation through artificial islands.

In this scenario Washington's policy to recognize as a strategic competitor of China defines its future direction towards the region, and the strengthening strategic partnership with the New Delhi, reassuring its allies of its commitment towards the region as well as containing China through the formation of economic cooperation treaties like Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

War on Terror

The War on terror began after the terrorists targeted the US soil for the first time after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. The 9/11, 2001 events were worst events on US territory targeting the twin towers of World Trade Centre building in New York, and Pentagon as well as a plane in Pennsylvania killing nearly three thousand people.

The US begun a new war to end the terror threat and resulted in the US distraction of its cold war commitments (Pena, 2007). Pakistan in this war chose top side with US (Yamin, 2015) and provided US forces Shamsi in Balochistan and Jacobabad airbases in Sindh and only for the logistics and aircraft recovery. No attack could be launched from there (Musharraf, 2006). During the war on terror Pakistan provided the air bases of Shamsi airfield, Dalbandin, Pasni, Samungli in Baluchistan, Shahbaz base, Sindh, Tarbela Ghazi and PAF Base Peshawar, KPK, and Nur Khan Base Punjab to US forces for the operations, intelligence gathering purposes, drone strikes and logistics support to the US forces stationed in Afghanistan.

The United States provided the financial and military support to Pakistan during its war on terror and Pakistan's logistic support continued to Washington in the war and it carried operations inside Pakistan to capture the Al-Qaeda terrorists, and eliminate the safe havens inside Pakistan particularly the border region of Afghanistan.

The war remained one of the longest wars in American history and the hunt for the major culprit Al-Qaeda's head Osama bin Laden (OBL) ended in 2011 when US forces killed through the secret operation (Obama, 2020, & Panetta, 2014). The partnership with Pakistan remained under the radar due to the differences over the policy to deal with the Afghan insurgency, the drone strikes inside Pakistan, US strategic partnership with India and the status of Kashmiri fighting groups inside Pakistan. The consequences for the war has been futile for the US economy as a recent report from the Costs of War project at Brown University revealed that 20 years of post-9/11 wars have cost the U.S. an estimated \$8 trillion and have killed more than 900,000 people (Kimball, 2021).

Promotion of Democracy

Washington is primarily interested in strengthening of democracy around the world and named as champion to protect its values of democracy around the world. US provided the military and financial support to the states fighting for democracy even during the cold war years to contain communist expansion. During the late 1990s, Washington imposed the democracy related sanctions over Pakistan in 1999 after the military coup led by the general Pervez Musharraf in order to restore the democratic process in the country.

Washington's approach in the region has been to support the civilian governments in order to strengthen democracy in the region has been disturbed due to its own policies of providing the economic assistance to the autocratic rulers in order to promote its own agenda.

Enhancing New Delhi's role in the region as a balancer against the Beijing and promoting US interests in the region: Washington's interest in developing cordial relations with New Delhi has pursued since cold war years despite its non-aligned policy. Washington considered New Delhi as a competitor to the Beijing in the region. The financial and military aid flown from Washington despite its differences with new Delhi it has provided the US\$ 65.1 billion US economic aid to New Delhi between 1946-2012 made it the top economic aid recipient (Rajghatta, 2015). Washington trade with New Delhi have grown from a mere US\$ 6 billion in 1990 to US\$ 33 billion in 2006 (Martin & Kronstadt, 2008), which further increased to US\$ 140 in 2017 (Parpiani, 2018).

The role of New Delhi remained under question due to its conflict with its neighbour Pakistan since 1947 over the Kashmir issue, and its policies to the other states viewed it as an expansionist power. New Delhi's policies towards Bangladesh and Sri Lanka criticized due to their support to the Awami League government despite the election rigging allegations in 2013, and 2018 election, and their role in Sri Lanka of privatizing the ports, and their support to Tamil Tigers (Hasan, 2021). The Sino-India conflict since 1962 remains one of the major reasons for the New Delhi's increased sense of security viz-a-viz China has driven it to play a central role in the US Asia Pivot strategy to compete with the growing Chinese influence towards the region.

IMPACT OF PAK-CHINA COOPERATION ON US INTERESTS IN THE REGION

The relations between Beijing and Islamabad remained instrumental in maintaining the balance of power in the region, which tilted in favour of New Delhi due to its growing nexus with Washington. Beijing's partnership with Islamabad strengthened since the signing of the border agreement in 1963, which paved way for the beginning of military cooperation in 1966. The agreements of 1972 which

established the strategic partnership, 1986 nuclear cooperation agreement, 2005 Treaty of Amity and Friendship, and the 2014 China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has strengthened the partnership as a counter measure against the Indo-US designs in the region.

The ties between Pakistan and China remained instrumental as it assisted Pakistan in 1965 war, and Pakistan played a pivotal role in normalization of its ties with US (Munir, 2018). Since then Beijing remained major arms supplier to Pakistan, which provided assistance in the development of its nuclear programme as well as joint partner in the development of JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, K-8 Karakorum and Al-Khalid tank, and many more defence related projects.

Despite the challenges faced by the Islamabad from different quarters they have signed the CPEC agreement in 2014, which Noonari & Memon (2017) considered the game changer, as this agreement provided Islamabad the US \$ 46 billion investment in various projects mainly designed to develop infrastructure and energy projects in order to boost the challenges to the Pakistani economy.

Beijing's partnership with Islamabad had implications for the role of Washington in the region as researcher has developed key findings in his research and they are:

Role of Washington has reduced/less influential as Noonari & Noonari (2014) sees Beijing's role as a potential challenger to the Washington in the region due to its economic rise. Beijing has been able to seal the important energy deals with the different states from Africa, Middle East and Central Asia as well as other parts of the world to meet its energy needs for the booming industries. Islamabad's geo-strategic position has provided a further advantage to the Beijing as its CPEC an extension of the BRI will provide an easy and secure access to the region of Middle East, Central Asia and Indian Ocean. Chinese 'String of Pearls' is aimed to establish the

maritime Silk Road along the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) (Ashraf, 2017) to protect its sea trade and guard the important points.

Beijing emerged one of the leading power of the regional politics and posed serious challenges to US. Chinese perceived US Asia pivot strategy as a containment strategy aimed to control Chinese rise (Tahseen, 2017). Beijing in the meantime established/secured key partnership or trade deals with the states of the region, and emerged as a global actor.

The insurgency in Afghanistan is a mess for Washington's peaceful solution of the problem as US wants to establish a cordial government in Kabul in order to maintain its influence and New Delhi will have to play a vital role in this respect. Islamabad's influence over the Taliban forces has played a significant role in bringing the Chinese factor in the conflict for the future of Afghanistan.

Beijing's presence in Gwadar will provide it an opportunity to ensure the safety of its trade routes through sea and provides it an easy route for the transportation of Chinese goods through Pakistan.

These findings will help to understand that Beijing emerged as the trustworthy/ reliable ally of the Islamabad, and the partnership between both the states will counter the growing Indo-US nexus.

CONCLUSION

The partnership between China and Pakistan over the years have strengthened due to the shared objectives such as their hostility towards New Delhi, and the threat from external powers, and their pursuance to maintain the balance of power in the region. The complex security environment and the geo-strategic position of Pakistan made it the front line state during the cold war years against Soviet Union and later against terrorism in post 9/11, 2001 era. This led their security partnership with Washington, which remained the unreliable partner during the crises years such as in 1965 and 1971

wars with India. Thus, Beijing emerged as the alternate to the US military support and later into economic field, which led towards the strengthening of the strategic partnership between two states.

On the other hand, growing nexus between Washington and New Delhi at the turn of the century has compelled Islamabad to look towards its traditional partner Beijing. The alliance has reduced the Washington's influence in the region, and Washington cannot overlook Islamabad in Afghan matters. The changed political landscape in the region particularly the US efforts to contain Beijing through the web of alliances in the region and Pakistan's fear of growing Indian influence has further strengthened and brought the two states closer to each other against the future threats from Indo-US nexus in the region. Pak-China alliance remained a counterweight to US and its allies in the region. From 1963, agreement to the signing of CPEC China continued to support Pakistan on different fronts ranging from defense to economy and plays significant role on international forums highlighting the issues concerning its ally Pakistan. The bondage between two states is highly motivated by the common threats and remains friendly like US-Israel relations despite the challenges posed to it from the global powers.

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