

The Growing South Asian-African Trading Interconnectedness: An Economic Battle for New Delhi and Islamabad

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Abstract

The emerging great power politics in the African region has raised the significance of African countries in contemporary world politics and forced the leaders of different states to start paying substantial attention to the African continent. Akin to a few other states, the South Asian nations, mainly India and Pakistan, have started formulating various cooperative connections with leading African countries while emphasising their untapped economic potential in the world. It has led the African states to augment their ongoing trading collaborations with the outside world. In South Asia, New Delhi and Islamabad have started activating their cooperative economic interactions with the key African players while revising their conventional patterns of Africa-centric foreign policies. In the debate of rising bilateral collaborations between African and South Asian nations, the Look African Policy Initiative of Islamabad cannot be ignored. The government of Pakistan preferred to concentrate on the African region to develop multifaceted economic collaborations with the leading African economies. Contrasting Pakistan's African policy, the Indian leadership under different political administrations structured a multi-layered New Delhi policy for the African nations. The India-Africa Forum Summit has been treated internationally as the leading initiative describing the multidimensional economic potential of Africa in Indian geo-economic calculations. In this way, the increasing trading ties of both South Asian rival nations with Africa have created a South Asian African trading interconnectedness that could not be spared from India-Pakistan economic competition in regional and extra-regional affairs. Indian mainstream security architectures always preferred to undermine the position of Pakistan in the extra-regional affairs where African Muslim nations are the present target of New Delhi. In this way, this paper is an academic endeavour to analyse the emerging cooperative ties of Islamabad and New Delhi with the leading African nations while emphasising the spill-over effects of their competition on Africa

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INTRODUCTION

The increasing interconnectedness between South Asia and African regions has become an undeniable reality of the contemporary international system due to the growing focus of India and Pakistan on the resources-rich African region. The concentration of both South Asian players on African nations is primarily based on their common geo-economic interests and contrasting trading policies, which are mainly supported by their historical and cultural connections with the African nations. This trend has added a new layer of power politics in the African region, where a combination of competition and cooperation is an undeniable reality of regional politics (Francis, 2020). The increasing economic significance of Africa in the mainstream foreign policy frameworks of India and Pakistan is directly linked to the growing emphasis of great powers on the region. The modern trends of great power politics in Africa can be traced from the Chinese decision to involve African economies in Beijing's global trading plans, formally known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI launched in 2013 envisioned increasing the international economic growth between states beyond the Asian continent, where Africa has been marked as one of the potential areas for securing high trading volumes (Kumar, 2023). These high trade volumes will provide China with sufficient trading space in the international markets under its vision of worldwide trade connectivity and economic integration. The concentration of BRI on Africa has raised the apprehensions of other great powers about China's increasing trading influences, patterned on its ancient notion of the Silk Road. A number of Chinese authors have mentioned the conceptual foundations of BRI and its prominent position in the broader Chinese economic priorities. As mentioned by Xinru Liu in *The Silk Road in World History*, Chinese trading capabilities have been recognised internationally, and it has made China a reliable economic partner (Liu, 2010). The formal political communication between Africa and China has created the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and it has been officially countered by the US Prosper Africa Presidential level national security plan. This plan aimed to cultivate close economic and strategic connections between Washington and Africa with the supportive functioning of seventeen different American government partner agencies. Moreover, the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and Russia-Africa Summit meetings are additional

factors validating the increasing significance of Africa in the contemporary patterns of great power politics.

Regarding South Asia, Beijing's decision to involve Islamabad in its BRI plan has formed a closed trading relationship between the two nations and let their respective governments sign the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The signing of CPEC has facilitated the government of Pakistan in demonstrating a major transformation in its foreign policy linked with the geo-economic dimension of Islamabad's foreign relations and the growing focus of Pakistan on the states having multifaceted, untapped trading potential. For this purpose, Islamabad-based formal political authorities introduced certain policy initiatives to diversify the country's global export destinations, which could enable the government to create more space in the international markets parallel to augmenting its trading engagement with the international community, as confirmed by a report of Asian Development Bank (Bank, 2022). It is intended to reduce Pakistan's dependency on traditional trading patterns of the international markets, where business partnerships with more states, especially under the shadows of BRI, will support Islamabad's efforts to improve its trading capacities. In reaction to Pakistan's Africa-centric approach, the mainstream Indian leadership raised serious concerns about African economic developments based on China and Pakistan's growing engagements in Africa. Indian formal state officials dubbed the inclusion of African nations in the BRI, and their growing trading business contacts with Islamabad could hamper New Delhi's Africa-centric foreign policy objectives (University, n.d.). New Delhi's approach for constructing bilateral and multilateral interactions with African states principally pursues the objectives of sustainable development and capacity-building through heavy investments in different domains. The focus on human capital has enabled New Delhi to improve its cultural diplomacy in Africa, which ultimately empowers two-sided people-to-people relations. With the support of its heavy investments, New Delhi aims to cultivate reliable and sustainable partnerships in the African continent against Islamabad and Beijing's models of African development (*India's Africa Policy and Drivers of Diplomacy in the Global South*, n.d.). Moreover, New Delhi-based academic and policy circles have started suggesting that the government authorities strengthen their economic and strategic connections with African nations to efficiently counter the progressing multi-layered trading collaboration of Africa with China and Pakistan.

Therefore, the central theme of this paper revolves around the increasing economic significance of Africa in contemporary world politics, where China's launching of BRI has added

a new chapter in the history of African regional politics. This paper is an academic endeavour to highlight the inclusion of Africa in the BRI and Pakistan's increasing focus on the African continent based on its leading geo-economic priorities. New Delhi's anti-Pakistan and anti-China policies and their African directions have been analysed in this paper and treated as an important factor fracturing the broader scope of inter-continental business between Africa and South Asia. In this way, this paper treats China as the key factor in improving the African standing in contemporary power politics, in which the South Asian African trading interconnectedness has become one of the essential features of the contemporary international system. The rising inter-regional connectivity between South Asian and African regions has become a serious concern of New Delhi, which is fundamentally determined to oppose Pakistan in regional and extra-regional politics. Thus, descriptive analyses in this paper seek to maintain a comprehensive account of different arguments underlining the growing cooperative connections of India and Pakistan with African key players parallel to pursuing contesting geo-economic interests in the world.

AFRICA IN THE WORLD POLITICS

The growing importance of African nations in the contemporary international system has become an unquestionable reality and an irrefutable truth due to the increasing emphasis of great powers on the African continent. The Chinese decision to involve the continent in its broader geo-economic plans and Russian preferences for signing various economic collaborations with different African nations have dragged the ongoing designing of great power politics towards Africa, where the United States and European powers have also expressed their critical apprehensions. The wealth of natural resources is the fundamental point of attraction for the key players of the international system regarding Africa, witnessing the colonial history of the world when the rare minerals and precious natural resources of African nations were the main points of attraction for the powerful nations (Kepe et al., 2023). The concentration of great powers in the resource-rich areas of the African continent marked various structural changes and systemic transformations in the African nations during the colonial era. The international intellectual community has labelled it under different phases, such as the Scramble for Africa, the White Man's Burden, Mission Civilisatrice, and Chattel Slavery. These phrases tried to provide a comprehensive understanding of the continent's suffering under the colonial era when the colonial powers were strict with their economic and strategic interests without estimating the impacts of their colonial competition on the Indigenous state structures. Thus, the combination of economic and strategic

objectives of the European colonisers left worse impacts on the political, social, and economic landscape of the continent (Kolapo & Akurang-Parry, 2007). Despite observing several phases of colonial anguishes, the multidimensional economic potential of African nations remained a permanent feature of the continent's global outlook. The colonial era caused various structural changes in the region, and invading colonial powers proved to be the mainstream driving forces in regional politics. The role of foreign invaders placed the entire region under the strategic competition of great powers parallel to causing multi-layered damages to the intra-state and inter-state interactions in the region (Laumann, 2012). In this way, it is appropriate to maintain that the history of the African region passed through various phases of foreign invasions and external involvements, which caused political instabilities, economic crises, and social unrest across the region.

The contemporary developments of the international system have changed the global outlook of Africa because the transforming geo-economic tendencies of the contemporary world have led the African leaders to improve their standings in the regional and international environments. It could be measured by assessing the changing perception of African nations in the world and their growing trading fascination across the globe. This factor has led the African governments towards a variety of strategic platforms and business enterprises linked with the objective of economic diversification while believing it will reduce the intensities of intra-state and inter-state clashes in the region (Onditi et al., 2019). Additionally, the improving diplomatic engagements and political communications of regional governments with the external powers have changed the African ways of managing the continent's foreign relations and its position in the changing patterns of global power politics. The quest to high African at the international scale introduced a new vision of the region under the slogan of "African Solutions to African Problems" (Mammo & Vusi, 2017). This slogan was raised in modern African history, and it was defined by a Ghanaian economist who defined certain new paths of regional politics, which showed the determination of different leaders to address long-term regional problems without the involvement of external powers. It has refreshed the broader themes of Pan-Africanism, regional cooperation, conflict resolution, and decolonisation, whereas the Chinese focus on the region augmented the notion of African development beyond the influences of external players (Ebetaleye, 2003). The regional leaders started relying more on the multilateral framework of African cooperation in the form of the African Union (AU) to expand their business partnerships through various cooperative alliances. These patterns of regional politics produced several platforms of sustainable and

inclusive trading practices with the provision of increasing their multilateral cooperative frameworks such as African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM), and African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

With the support of these regional features, the traditional standing of the African region in world politics has been improved, and African governments have started offering various trading opportunities to other regions where South Asian regional powers emerged as one of the leading cooperative partners of Africa. The growing interconnectedness between South Asia and Africa is primarily driven by certain factors such as diplomatic communication, political coordination, economic interests, and, importantly, strategic geopolitics (Games, 2024). The leaders of both regions have common trading benefits in which Africa's emerging urbanisation at the societal level provides business prospects for South Asian trading enterprises, whereas African economists consider South Asia an appropriate destination for their domestic products. In this way, the common economic vision between both regions is intended to reduce the dependency of two-sided governments on the traditional market structures of the world.

SOUTH ASIAN AFRICAN INTERCONNECTEDNESS

The leaders of the key African players involved in enduring strategic competitions between different nations always prefer to keep their respective regional power balance in their favour. The governments of African nations remained obsessed with the vision of regional peace and stability while believing that the economic development and social prosperity of the region would be achieved under the auspices of a cooperative regional political order. It is widely believed that African economic development will alter the conventional patterns of international trade, where the fixed hegemonic positions of the great powers will be changed. For this purpose, the African governments have started constructing trading collaborations beyond their home region, where South Asia is an appropriate case. Pakistan and India have emerged as the leading aspirants in increasing their economic connections with Africa. New Delhi- and Islamabad-based state authorities have launched exclusive policies for Africa, which can be measured in the following points.

PAKISTAN'S LOOK AFRICA PLAN

While realising Pakistan's significant role in the Chinese global trading networking, Islamabad-based policymaking circles have started emphasising the African region, which already

has strong ideological connections with Pakistan. Pakistan's quest for construing multileveled economic engagements with African nations was formalised in 2017 when the Ministry of Commerce announced the Look Africa Policy Initiative and decided to focus on three African blocs: Southern African Customs Union (SACU), East African Community (EAC), and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (*Look Africa Policy Initiative - Ministry of Commerce | Government of Pakistan*, n.d.). These three blocs have instructed the leading economic decision-makers of Pakistan to foster their trading collaborations with different African nations based on bilateral and multilateral connections. In reaction to the growing emphasis of Pakistan on exploring new avenues of economic collaboration in the African region, a number of African governments have taken reciprocal measures. Pakistan's government is determined to change the traditional misperceptions and misconceptions of its domestic business community about African nations while believing that the increased people-to-people connections between Pakistan and various African nations could enable Pakistan to improve its trading potential beyond the home region. To support this vision of the government, the university-level scholarship programs for African students in Pakistan play a vital role in increasing people-to-people connections. It endeavours to empower the African youth in the contemporary advanced education trends of the modern world. (*African Students Association Pakistan*, n.d.) The Islamabad-based state authorities believe that the education exchange programs will empower the young African generations and let them realise Pakistan's potential in the regional and international markets. Additionally, the defence training of various African military and political personnel of diverse backgrounds provides an opportunity for African governments to understand the need for multidimensional collaborations between Islamabad and the members of the AU. It is pertinent to mention here that the governments of African nations already have a brief history of cooperative engagement with Pakistan to cultivate robust inter-state relationships parallel to enhancing mutual understandings on common ideological grounds (Administrator, 2024b).

Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference (PATDC) is an important step for Pakistan, which envisions improving trading and economic collaborations with African economies while identifying and exploring new investment platforms. The regular meetings of PATDC help the two-sided state authorities to rationalise their formal planning of multi-layered trading cooperation in the areas of agriculture, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and information technology. After having multilateral meetings in Kenya, Nigeria, and South Africa, the ^{fourth} round of PATDC was held in Cairo in January 2024, and the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan organised it

(TDAP) and Pakistan's Ministry of Commerce (*4th Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference, Single Country Exhibition Inaugurated in Cairo, 2024*). Moreover, business-to-business (B2B) meetings at the government level are persistently arranged, and several workshops and seminars are held concerning trade facilitation awareness to increase investment opportunities at the societal level. The Islamabad-based political authorities are also active in arranging and organising cultural exhibitions and policy discussions for the promotion of its Look Africa plan which is primarily designed to improve the scope of Foreign Direct Investment between Pakistan and Africa (*Pakistan Hosts Trade Conference in Cairo to Strengthen Economic Ties with Egypt, n.d.*). To effectively implement the Look Africa planning, the government officials of Pakistan have started multiplying the Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with African states in diverse fields. The African vision of Pakistan has convinced the mainstream government authorities to improve their diplomatic communications with African states, which has resulted in the opening of several new embassies of African states in Pakistan, such as Ethiopia (Rehman, 2023). The Ethiopian ambassadorial services in Pakistan are presently emphasising the improvement of trading ties at the societal level between Islamabad and Addis Ababa. There is a high probability of other African countries following the Ethiopian footsteps in Pakistan, which will strengthen the scope of multidimensional cooperative connections between Islamabad and different African capitals (Arif, 2023).

INDIA-AFRICA PARTNERSHIP

New Delhi's vision of improving its foreign relations with Africa has been formalised in the India-Africa Partnership, a comprehensive and multidimensional program to develop collaborations in the fields of economy, diplomacy, development, and education. The Indian approach to cultivating trading collaborations with African states is primarily inherited in the broader context of South-South cooperation with the aim of serving the common interests of states located in different parts of the Global South (Biswas, 2015). Additionally, the basis of shared interests and common values between New Delhi and leading African capitals have been supported by the multilateral framework of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), where the Indian and African leaders showed their commitment to keeping their nations independent and sovereign beyond the imperialist influences of foreign invaders. The combination of NAM and South-South cooperation defined the cooperative basis of New Delhi's ties with the African region, and it resulted in several tangible economic collaborations and considerable strategic partnerships

(Mathews, 1987). In addition to signing different MoUs at the bilateral level, the multilateral initiatives formed the India Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Program and the Pan-African e-Network Project. Furthermore, the establishment of the Africa Fund emerged as a major step destined to serve the objective of New Delhi's economic engagement beyond its home region (Nantulya, n.d.). The modern approach of New Delhi for capitalising the African trading potentials resulted in the creation of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), the India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS), and Vaccine *Maitri* (Vaccine Friendship) for the African nation under the broader framework of multilateral cooperation. The IAFS is considered by the two-sided leaders as an appropriate platform for arranging political dialogues and enhancing cooperation on the issues of common interests and shared values (*The Ten Guiding Principles for India-Africa Engagement*, n.d.). It is primarily established to serve the interests of participating governments in the domains of economic development and political coordination, capacity building, and cultural exchanges. In contrast, the ISO is an alliance of mostly sunshine nations that share expertise for the efficient consumption of solar energy. The ISA is intended to reduce the dependency of its member states on fossil fuels, and it has become an effective intergovernmental forum in India-Africa relations (*Africa50 Signs MoU with International Solar Alliance to Source and Finance Solar Projects across Africa*, n.d.). The core theme of ISA is aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which has provided it global recognition and support from diverse directions (*The UN Interagency Technical Mission to the International Solar Alliance (ISA)*, n.d.).

These cooperative steps are aimed at promoting new avenues of business and investment between New Delhi and leading African economies, and the emerging collaborations of two-sided governments are associated with bilateral business deals, preferential trading measures, and the promotion of favourable investment opportunities. In addition to concentrating on specific fields, including agriculture, mining, energy, pharmaceuticals, and information communication technology, the African nations are the recipients of Indian concessional credits and loans for infrastructural development and capacity-building purposes. The combination of both sectors is intended to uphold the African regional vision of safeguarding the scope of its socio-economic development parallel to signing a few bilateral trade agreements with individual African nations for the advancement of their inter-state level business connections and the reduction of tariffs (Bhatia, 2023). Both dimensions of economic ties are planned to enhance Indian investment in Africa and the active connection-building between two-sided business communities. For the extension of economic ties with African nations, the Indian government introduced the Duty-Free

Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme to provide duty-free access to the Indian markets for export. The focus of the DFTP is on the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), in which the African nations are exclusive for accessing Indian markets for export purposes (*India-Africa Partnership*, 2015). New Delhi mentioned the African states in the DFTP during the first India-Africa Forum Summit of 2008. Moreover, New Delhi added African nations to its Indian Lines of Credit (LoCs) for the improvement of infrastructure consisting of roads, railways, power plants and water supply schemes (*The Changing Nature of India's Lines Of Credit to Africa*, n.d.). It developed cooperative connections between the Indian and African Import-Export banks (Exim Banks). This initiative has increased the trading volumes between New Delhi and several African nations and witnessed the completion of a mega trading deal under the India-Focussed Club in March 2024 (*Afreximbank Closes \$282 Million "First-of-Its-Kind" India-Focused Club Deal*, 2024).

Furthermore, the Pan-African e-Network Project strengthened the growing hi-tech collaboration between New Delhi and several African nations. It established a connection between the two sides through satellite and fibre-optic networks (*India-Africa Pan African e-Network Project - Impacting Lives in Africa - Embassy of India, Dakar - Senegal*, n.d.). It is envisioned to secure substantial progress in the tele-education and telemedicine services, which has connected twelve super speciality hospitals and leading higher educational institutions of India to African countries. In addition, the e-Vidya Bharati and e-Arogya Bharati network project flourished this Indian-AU collaboration, and they offered several advanced educational services to the African youth (*Embassy of India, Asmara, Eritrea*, n.d.). The focus on youth has been highlighted by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and its exclusive African Scholarship Scheme for the promotion of India-centric educational features across the African continent, which is the core agenda of ICCR. It is primarily designed to foster the worldwide cultural promotion of India and the expansion of its soft power image across the African region (*Embassy of India, Antananarivo, Madagascar : ICCR Africa Scholarship Scheme*, n.d.). The investment in the education sector is primarily designed to cultivate a soft image of India around the world, in parallel with promoting a positive image of New Delhi on certain cultural grounds.

INDIAN SOFT POWER PROMOTION

The promotion of cultural diplomacy in Africa has become a prime feature of Indian African policy, which is strictly aligned with cultural affinity, business activities, education exchanges, and diplomatic communications. These initiatives are envisioned to increase New

Delhi's influential role in the African continent by introducing several avenues of socio-economic development. The Africa-centric Indian cultural diplomacy has roots in the colonial era when the Indian leaders under British colonial rule were connected with the resource-rich African region (Sahay, 2019). The initial trading connection linked Indian traders with the East African coast, and it led them to trade different products like spices, textiles, and African gold and ivory with the key African nations. In this way, the colonial era laid the foundations of cooperative interconnectedness between British India and Africa. This interconnectedness was further boosted when the British Raj started sending indentured labourers to Africa for diverse purposes. The rising anti-colonial African voices initially received Indian support from prominent subcontinent leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, who was a renowned advocate for ending colonial rule and respecting the demands of different nations for independence. An academic account of *Gandhi's Rise to Power: Indian Politics 1915-1922* confirmed the peaceful attributes of Gandhi's thoughts and their valuable influences on Indian traditional politics (Brown, 1972). Gandhian thought supported the civil rights campaigns of African nations and their quests for ensuring colonial retreats from the continent. Moreover, Gandhi shaped his philosophical ideas about the social and political activism of nations during his stay in South Africa. His struggle for independence through the philosophy of non-violence and civil disobedience campaign made momentous progress in Africa, which later became a gravitational force of the Indian independence movement. The impacts of Gandhian thoughts in post-partitioned India became the central point of establishing Indian cooperative ties in the African continent. A number of Gandhi's biographical accounts have mentioned the role of the South African life of Gandhi in flourishing his ideas and philosophical orientations (Desai & Vahed, 2015). So, the initial Indian leadership in the post-decolonised subcontinent established independent relations with the continent and supported their freedom struggles against the foreign invaders.

The roots of these developments cannot be divorced from the subcontinent's history when the Indian leaders were ambitious to expand Indian influence beyond South Asia through different means, such as creating common grounds with several nations located on the African continent. In this debate, South Africa is prominent because the Indian government supported the historical anti-apartheid movement and offered its moral and material support to South Africa's African National Congress. During the Cold War, the intergovernmental setup of NAM further strengthened Indian foreign relations with Africa (Srivastava, 1995). The two-sided economic cooperation flourished in the post-Cold War era when Indian leaders liberalised their economy and started heavy

investments across the African continent. All these developments supported the broader vision of New Delhi's soft power promotion and the application of cultural diplomacy in the African continent. The popularity of Bollywood and the promotion of Yoga and Ayurveda were the important factors that were further enhanced by India's multifaceted scholarship programs for the region of AU. The training of leading professional and academic communities of different African nations in India plays an influential role in this regard, which exhibits New Delhi's determination and commitment to deepening its trading engagement with the members of the AU. New Delhi's plans for the African countries are strictly grounded in its foreign policy and Indian strategy for carrying its soft power projection in certain regions, as described by Patryk Kugiel in *India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy*. This book highlighted the significance of soft power in the conventional framework of New Delhi's foreign relations and their promotion in the desired directions (Kugiel, 2017).

The soft power promotion of India on the African continent is primarily designed to counter the Chinese role in the region and Beijing's ambitions to increase investments in diverse areas. It raised Indian apprehensions about African directions of BRI and Pakistan's inclusion in it through the signing of the CPEC. In reaction, the Indian government has started developing closed cooperatives with the states having a critical position in the Chinese global trade networking. This scenario has witnessed a proposed project, the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), in 2016 when the Japanese and Indian state officials agreed to work on economic cooperation and sustainable energy between Asian and African nations (*ABOUT AAGC | RIS*, n.d.). The AAGC planning showed New Delhi's explicit plan to oppose massive Chinese investment plans in the African region, parallel to attracting the African governments towards anti-Chinese gatherings of the nations (Panda, n.d.).

INDIAN ANTI-PAKISTAN SENTIMENTS

The multi-layered interaction of New Delhi with the outside world cannot be separated from its anti-Pakistani sentiments which aim to keep active Indian global campaigns to counter Pakistan in the regional and international affairs. The decades-long Indian antipathy towards Pakistan is mainly based on its economic and strategic interests. The main purpose of these interests is to isolate Pakistan in the international community diplomatically and to stigmatise the national image of Pakistan in the world (M, 2017). The anti-Pakistani narrative of New Delhi has become an essential component of Indian foreign relations, and it is strongly associated with Indian

strategic designs to counter Pakistan's influence in the Muslim world, where the African region is the prime focus of Islamabad. Islamabad's quest for strengthening its bilateral cooperative agreements with the members of the AU has become a critical development for India, and it has convinced New Delhi-based leaders to adopt an anti-Pakistani narrative on the issues of terrorism, regional stability, and cooperative development (Prasad, 2017). This scenario has resulted in increasing Indian diplomatic closeness with the key Islamic nations while opposing the position of Pakistan in the Muslim world based on several alleged and pretentious grounds. One of the prominent arguments of New Delhi is linked with the global counterterror efforts of the US and Pakistan's prominent position in contributing to the international mission of combating terrorism. The Indian government is persistent in associating its mainstream narrative of terrorism with Pakistan despite witnessing the role of Pakistan as a frontline state in the US-sponsored global counterterror campaign (Raghavan, 2019). The leading state authorities from New Delhi remained active in promoting the alleged Indian claims of associating the menace of terrorism with Pakistan. New Delhi's attributes, based on its formal anti-Pakistani behaviour, have reached various intergovernmental frameworks of the international community, such as the United Nations. Moreover, India's increasing influence in different multi-state cooperative arrangements of the international community has always shown its determination to reduce Pakistan's space in the world. It has a strong belief that the expansion of Islamabad's cooperative connections with the states located in different regions could let Pakistan cultivate massive support from the international community in South Asia (Cohen & Institution, 2013).

In this way, New Delhi's growing anti-Pakistani narratives intend to degrade the standing of Pakistan in regional and extra-regional politics. Islamabad's decision to join Beijing's global trading plans of BRI and the signing of the mega corridor project has raised Indian apprehensions. New Delhi-based political authorities perceive CPEC as a serious threat to New Delhi's geo-economic interests in the broader Asian power balance. The extension of BRI toward Africa has provided Pakistan with sufficient confidence to develop various trading collaborations with the leading members of the AU (Cheru & Obi, 2010). In response to the growing cooperative connections of AU's members with Pakistan and China, New Delhi internationally portrays Pakistan as an inappropriate destination for business and investment activities. This perception of New Delhi is deeply rooted in its strategic aspirations for undermining Pakistan's counterbalancing potential against Indian South Asian regional hegemonic aspirations. The contemporary government of Narendra Modi has made numerous formal statements criticising Pakistan's

position in the regional security environment parallel to negatively highlighting the internal problems of Pakistan in the world. Modi government views the increasing diplomatic trading confidence between Islamabad and different African capitals as clearly challenging Indian strategic ambitions and its diplomatic influences beyond South Asia (Singh, 2017). In reaction, New Delhi continued its anti-Pakistan campaigns and started multiplying its strategic and trading African connections with several new initiatives. The extension of New Delhi's collaborative engagement in the African region aimed to become influential in the AU region, where Pakistan would not be able to secure a competitive position. To implicitly counterbalance Pakistan's African outreach, New Delhi is determined to promote its position in the international market as a reliable trading partner with an abundance of financial values in the international markets.

CHALLENGING FUTURE

The decades-long rivalry between the pair of South Asian nuclear weapon states manifests in the African continent as a competition for securing an advantageous position corresponding to pushing each other at disadvantageous places. The global intellectual communities have dubbed this pattern of power politics as an obstinate contest of influence linked with strong strategic footholds among the AU members (King & Venkatachalam, 2021). It is pertinent to mention here that the role of BRI and its African extension is rooted in Chinese plans to underline the untapped potential of African nations in the international markets. Chinese plans to create an international network of active trading links consisting of multileveled territorial and maritime linkages have hampered the traditional outlook of global markets, where an overwhelming wave of anti-Chinese alliances have emerged from Western power centres around the world. The Chinese reactions to the Western-centric critical sentiments of the international community have resulted in the increasing focus of Beijing on the African region, which has an abundance of economic potential and trading values for the whole world (Godfrey, 2015). The Western critical observations of Chinese global economic plans are linked with India, as India is actively opposing Pakistani and Chinese expansion of trading connections around the world, particularly in Africa. This scenario has a greater probability of Indian explicit opposition to growing cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing in the African region. The emerging influences of Indian cooperative connection with African nations through providing their essential financial assistance in multiple areas through education scholarships, infrastructural development, and financial investments. Cultural diplomacy is the epicentre of Indian Africa-centric financial assistance and humanitarian aid

programs, and these programs help New Delhi construct multilevel bilateral collaborations with the AU members (King & Venkatachalam, 2021).

Moreover, the high volumes of Indian investments in telecommunication, agriculture, and information technology are considerable measures hampering Islamabad's vision of exploring African economic potential. The deeply penetrating network of Indian companies in the region additionally supports a specific perception of India as a reliable economic partner in Africa, and it heavily underestimates Islamabad's economic engagements in the region. The role of the media and film industry is an important aspect of Indian image building among the AU members while communicating anti-Pakistani content in African societies through various media channels and news networks (Chakrabarty, 2016). The spread of the negative image of Pakistan has become a common practice of Bollywood, and its global outreach has already caused massive damage to Pakistan's global standing, especially under the US-sponsored global war on terror. Moreover, the politically empowered Indian diaspora plays a significant role in advocating New Delhi's anti-Pakistani thoughts through multileveled people-to-people contacts across the world. This scenario makes the international markets challenging for Pakistan and affects its efforts to explore new destinations for its trading connections. In this way, Pakistan's increasing focus on the resource-rich African region cannot be separated from Indian anti-Pakistani sentiments, which are intended to underestimate Pakistan's trading values in the international community (*ISSRA - Insight*, n.d.). The African region is an exception in this regard due to growing Indian and Pakistani concentrations in the African markets, where China is emerging as an important power capable of defining the new geo-economic outlook of the African continent in the world.

CONCLUSION

The central theme of this paper seeks to maintain an academic account of different arguments concerning Pakistan's increasing concentration on the geo-economic values of the African region in the contemporary international system where a number of states could support Pakistan's Look African Plan. It is an academic endeavour to rationalise the economic potential of key African nations to support and promote Pakistan's Look Africa Plan in the broader African region. In this way, this paper focuses on the need for changing the traditional irrational visualisation of the African continent in Pakistan at the societal level. The change of perception will improve the societal-level business connections between Pakistan and Africa, and it will enable the government of Pakistan to achieve the desired levels of trading engagements with the

key African players. Moreover, the government of Pakistan is required to take timely measures to streamline its Look Africa vision before it becomes a major challenge in the form of India's growing diplomatic and economic collaborations with the key African economies (Nawaz, 2015). Witnessing the history of New Delhi's broader anti-Pakistani campaigns in the world, the Africa region has a high probability of becoming an area of high anti-Pakistani sentiments in the presence of India's growing cooperative collaborations with the African states at the bilateral and multilateral levels.

Indian ability to shape the global trading environment through signing various economic and strategic agreements with different nations has started emphasising the African region where the BRI's grand business planning has reached, and this planning has started fascinating the regional key players towards New Delhi. The growing interests of Indian business communities, with the formal support of the government, in African markets have become a substantial challenge for Pakistan. Chinese decisions to include Africa in its broader BRI plan and signing of CPEC with Islamabad have highlighted the importance of Pakistan in the African markets (Sabharwal, 2022). It further has empowered Pakistan's national image and made it a reliable business partner in the international system. Now, the only challenge for Pakistan is to diversify its cooperative connections with key African economies where New Delhi's cultural diplomacy is still relying on various anti-Pakistani campaigns. The promotion of culture with the support of massive state-sponsored aid and investment programs intends to reduce Pakistan's space at important African trading platforms. In this way, the government of Pakistan is required to take appropriate policy measures to become an important part of emerging South Asian African interconnectedness. India is a major challenge in undermining Pakistan's position in the emerging trading connections between South Asia and Africa. Therefore, Islamabad-based policymakers need to emphasise the African nations which are presently not aligned with India and need an adequate level of recognition in the international markets. The ideological commonalities and supportive business models could be effective strategies for Pakistan, which could empower Pakistan's standing in the African region as well. Furthermore, a pragmatic and well-structured approach that is compatible with reality could serve the purpose and enable the government of Pakistan to achieve the desired objective from its vision for exploring Africa. The Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR), recently launched, is a significant step to formally recognize Africa's potential for Pakistan (Administrator, 2024a). The government of Pakistan

Needs to allocate adequate funding for ongoing research on Africa's untapped trading potential. This could enable Islamabad to enhance its diplomatic support and political coordination with Africa. Akin to PAIDAR, the Islamabad-based state officials are required to create a multileveled collaborative partnership between Pakistani and African academic institutions. It will enable the government to overcome the two-sided societal disconnects.

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