



AN APPRAISAL OF SINO-PAK STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP IN NEW SECURITY PARADIGM: PROSPECTS & CHALLENGES

Shereen Gul
Ph.D Research Scholar
Department of Political Science
Bahauddin Zakariya University
Multan - Pakistan
shereen.6084@wum.edu.pk

Abstract

International security environment is characterized by the element of continuous change. With the dawn of 21st Century South Asia is becoming more and more relevant to the changing dynamics of world politics. Firstly, when the incidents of 9/11 jolted international politics and security. Secondly, the political and economic rise of China increased Indo-US geopolitical concerns within and outside the region. And now US withdrawal from Afghanistan contains several political and security considerations for the region. Sino-Pak historical collaboration is dated back to seven decades of close relations and India has been an important factor for this engagement as a collective target of both states to mutually handle the regional and global challenges posed by India. US exit from Afghanistan without concluding any agreement with Taliban, growing Indo-US strategic axis and their mutual opposition on Sino-Pak close alliance and also on Sino-Pak economic and infrastructural projects are raising attention for future counterbalance strategy of both Pakistan and China.

Keywords: Changing Dynamics, US Withdrawal, Counter Balance Strategy, Security Environment

Introduction

Security challenges are underpinned in state-to-state relations as it is a core aspect of international relations where safety and survival occupy the central place among the nations. Sino-Pak strategic relations for pursuing the economic, military and security objectives are facing negative concerns from regional and foreign powers as India and the United States are seeing this cooperation with suspicion and reservations. Pakistan and China are involved in multidimensional strategic partnership despite having differences in their culture, religion, political and economic systems but cordiality in their relations is based on their convergence of security and commercial interests within and outside the region. Both states in the early years of their independence developed diplomatic relations and there is a history of 62 years of friendly relations between the both states. Pakistan was the first state in Muslim world who recognized the communist state of China and initiated political relations in



1951. It was a crucial time for Pakistan that it had to join the western bloc for economic and military requirements and that was a little bit of a hurdle in the relations of both states to bring warmth in the initial time of their diplomatic ties. In 1955 both countries came closer at the time of Bandung Conference and got further strength in the wake of Pakistan's support for China's getting membership in United Nations (Rana & Mehmood, 2015, pp. 98-100)

There have been two main factors in bringing both countries from the status of bilateral diplomatic ties towards strategic cooperation. First is the Indian factor and secondly the politics of Western powers towards Pakistan and China. Security challenges have been a supreme concern for Pakistan's foreign policy and in the case of China it was the main driving force for establishing relations towards friendship. Pakistan was not receiving too much support as western ally and India was getting military and economic support due to the China factor. In 1962 India-China border clashes turned into war and since that time Sino-India rivalry could not be converted into normalization of relations while Pak-China friendship strengthened by concluding the agreement of constructing Karakoram Highway in 1963 and it took fifteen years to complete. Throughout the cold war India showed its neutral character despite this fact that it had been benefited by the USSR and on other hand the United States was also assisting it to deter China and India was not made compulsory to join western alliance for that aid. That enormous military and economic aid resulted in the Indian nuclear test of 1974, after ten years of the Chinese nuclear test which was conducted in 1964. During the cold war period Pakistan's engagements with the West could not bring tilt in Sino-Pak relations. USSR and the United States' unconditional support disturbed the security balance of South Asia and at that time Pakistan looked towards China as a balancer for its military, economic and nuclear requirements. Meanwhile Pakistan also got China's political support on the issue of Kashmir, the crisis of 1971 and also on the imprisonment of 90,000 troops of the Pakistan Army. The vitality of Pakistan for its geographical location made it important and favorable for China for its economic interests and to get access to other markets such as the Middle East and Central Asia and most importantly towards the Indian Ocean as an alternate route for its trade and energy requirements. The convergence of multiple and complementary interests brought both states towards a long standing external and internal policy which could not get disturbed by the changing of governments but benefitted the both against the regional and global challenges. China was an alternate policy option for Pakistan at that time and in the 21st Century security structure is again demanding that alternate option for strategic cooperation (Rana & Mehmood, 2015, pp. 100-102).

The incident of 9/11 posed challenges to the entire world security structure and again there had been left no choice for Pakistan unless to join the western coalition to fight against terrorism but it could not affect the mutual trust of Pakistan and China. The United States' long presence in the region and increasing Indo-US bilateral relations introduced new challenges for both strategic friends Pakistan and China. China's increasing economic posture, economic ties with India and their mutual interest in the formation of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) is also another aspect of Sino-India future relations and prospects and contains concerns and challenges for Pakistan. Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism are not recognized by United States and there has been seen



hesitations in strategic relations of both states with the element of trust deficit for further cooperation while on other hand India's leading role in world politics with United States' full support for India compelled Pakistan to look towards alternate options and other regional powers by taking a shift in its foreign policy by relying more on China and revising its policy with Russia.

Sino-Pak Convergence of Interests

Sino-Pak relations are characterized as mutually beneficial relations. The scope of convergence and interests of both states is widened. The shared interests are based on securing the national interests of both states and among these interests' security occupies the central position for collaboration. Mutual cooperation of both states traditionally started from the challenges posed by India. Rivalry of India is composed of both conventional and non-conventional patterns. This rivalry has been amplified because now India is not alone, instead an Indo-US joint opposition is becoming more and more visible and it is also perceived that US withdrawal from Afghanistan is based to increase its focus on China's strategies in the Indo-Pacific region with the objective to contain it. China wants to secure its strategic interests by using Pakistan's geopolitical advantage in the region. To address the issues of energy and to achieve the economic endeavors, Pak-China joined their hand together on the multimillion dollar project of Bridge and Road Initiative (BRI) which includes more than sixty states. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship of BRI along with the construction of Gwadar Port. China's Bridge and Road Initiative (BRI) is aiming at a network of corridors and ports, consisting of land and maritime silk routes for transfer of trade and energy products These projects would enable China to get access towards Indian Ocean through Pakistan as an alternate route for its energy and trade activities with low cost and time saving qualities. Moreover, CPEC also will decrease China's dependency on Malacca Strait which contains high risk of India's blockade strategy against China in times of crisis. Pakistan is important for China for its political support on issues of Taiwan, Tibet and Xinxiang. In the same way Pakistan seeks China's political and logistic support within the region. Pakistan sees China's role as a trustworthy neighbor in the wake of having insecure and suspicious relations with its other neighboring states; India and Afghanistan. Pakistan urges China's support to consolidate its stance over Kashmir. It also serves as a balancer for Pakistan's deterrence policy with India as India is looking towards United States for the enhancement of its nuclear and technological advancement in the region (Hussain, Abidi, Sami Ullah , & Batool, 2015, pp. 597-600).

Sino-Pak Shared Interests with Reference to India

In South Asia, India's aggressive ambitions, its pursuit of leading the region according to its agenda and influence is a matter of concern for all the countries of the region in general but for Pakistan and China in particular. India shares borders with Pakistan, China, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan. It is and has been involved in territorial issues with almost all the neighboring states with major and minor border disputes. With China and Pakistan, it has serious territorial clashes. These issues include the area of Askai Chin at the Tibet Plateau, Depsang Plains at the state of Jammu & Kashmir along the



Indian border, Trans Karakoram Tract and Arunachal Pradesh. The presence of these issues between China and India are the sources of tension between the both states and both countries fought a war in 1962 by which India faced a serious setback followed by a series of border clashes and skirmishes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) such as in 2017 Doklam crisis and clashes at Galwan valley in 2020 (Smith, 2021, pp. 29-31). Territorial issues between India and Pakistan are the sources of hostility between the two states which are complemented by the ideological differences and antagonistic economic interests and led to three major wars of 1948, 1965 and 1971, violent clashes such as Kargil, cross border violations along Line of Control (LoC) and several other conspiracies in both states. These issues include the core territorial issue of Jammu & Kashmir, Siachen and Sir Creek. Both countries have a history of dialogue and also a history of Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) with bilateral and multilateral efforts towards resolving the disputes but lack of political will could not remove the hostility. Resolving these issues is the only way to lessen the tension and for normalization of relations between the both states (Andersen & Jiang, 2018, pp. 17-21). Viewing in detail the Pak-China relations with reference to India it can be stated that both countries share following commonalities against India:

- Common history of controversial geographical standpoint with India.
- Sharing of border with India; China from southwest and Pakistan from northeast links to India.
- History of both countries having violent confrontations with India.
- Both countries keep common objectives of containing the expansionist policy and influence of India in the region and abroad.
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In order to counter Indian threat both countries entered into strategic cooperation and are working for the following shared interests:

- Sino-Pak bilateral strategic nexus is seen in the context of avoiding India's sole focus on any state; instead, a shared threat would keep the intensity of the hostility to the lower level.
 - Both countries are working on the agenda of confining the offensive and hegemonic role of India within the boundary of South Asia that it should not expand its policies and influence outside the region.
 - Pakistan and China are too much concerned about India's role in Afghanistan as Afghanistan is a strategically important state for securing multiple political and economic interests and India's presence is limiting both Pakistan and China's role in the warring territory.
 - Both Pakistan and China want to keep India away from its access to the land of resources; Central Asia. Central Asia is being considered as a potential resource and new market for the regional and foreign players.
 - Both states are engaged in security cooperation against India to undermine the presence of Indian troops in Kashmir where Pakistan and China both have their territorial strategic concerns.
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For the attainment of above purposes Pakistan and China are involved in political, economic and military cooperation using these political, economic and military ties as a tool against India's increasing role in regional and world politics (Dumbaugh, 2010, pp. 26-27).

Strategic Multidimensional Cooperation between Pakistan & China

Strategic multidimensional approach in Sino-Pak relations initiated as a new policy option for Pakistan after the series of sore events in Pak-US relations. China initiated this multidimensional stance by recognizing and acknowledging Pakistan's position in the region as a, "Fulcrum of Asia". China entered into strategic cooperation with Pakistan to pursue its policy, "Pivot to Asia" as in 1990s it had been following its policies to give strategic importance to the regions of Central Asia and West Asia for its political and economic objectives. During the Administration of Xi Jinping, a shift came in foreign policy of China and strategic coordination in case Pakistan got priority in terms of China's long term economic and political goals in the region.

Gwadar as a part of China's new policy of "string of pearls" occupies strategic importance for China. Gwadar a warm water sea port, is situated in Pakistan's province of Baluchistan at a distance of 72 km near Iran border. Gwadar has become vital not only for Pakistan and China but for the whole region for economic boosting as it is located near the Persian Gulf and also along the Strait of Hormuz which is the route of 40 % of the world. China wants to see Gwadar as its alternate short cut route in Indian Ocean to get access to Middle East and to the Central Asian countries (Shah & Chaudhary, 2013, pp. 3-7)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a game changer project which was signed between Pakistan and China on 20th April 2015 when Chinese President Xi Jinping made a two-day visit to Pakistan and signed 51 Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. It's a mega project with the \$ 46 billion Chinese investment aiming at massive economic development not only for the strategic partners, Pakistan and China but also for Afghanistan, Central Asia, India, the Middle East and also for Europe. Economic corridors are the global practices which are experienced all over the world and in South Asia it has been considered as a new tool for poverty alleviation, economic growth and the development of this deprived region. This project was conceptualized by former Chinese President Li Keqiang in 2013 during his visit to Pakistan. He also proposed another corridor within the region named as BCIM-EC (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor). Both corridors belong to the least developed areas of South and South East Asian states aiming at excessive economic integration of these less developed areas. The China-Pak Economic Corridor project is based on linking the Xinjiang province of China from Kashghar to Pakistan's sea port Gwadar. CPEC is the part of Chinese long term economic strategy of building, One Belt One Road (OBOR) project, which lately became Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This



initiative is a reflection of Chinese new foreign policy towards economic integration. The BRI project consists of two components: One consists of a land route; New Silk Road and the other is a sea route called 21st Century Maritime Silk Route (MSR). These both interrelated projects are consolidating in the building of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB). Proposed Silk Road Economic Project encompasses variety of interlinked projects such as chain of transportation in terms of corridors and passages, pipeline cables for communication such as fiber-cables and harbors across the heartland area of Central Asia, Middle East, South Asia and Eurasian parts of Europe (Ranjan, 2015, pp. 6-13). The corridor project concludes the series of energy and developmental projects which are under the umbrella of Sino-Pakistan economic department which are:

- i. Power projects of coal at port Qasim, Gadani, Hubco, Sahiwal and Sheikhpura. ii. Jhimpur power plant.
- iii. Hydropower project at Karot.
- iv. Enhancement of Karakorum Highway under phase II and other infrastructure projects related to Karachi, Multan and Lahore Motor Highways.
- v. Construction of Gwadar International Airport.
- vi. A solar water park of 1000 MW.

The project of CPEC has positive implications on the economy of both Pakistan and China. For Pakistan it is considered as a source of revival for its economic instability and resolving energy crisis as it contains the package of trade, energy, infrastructure and industrial projects. For China it will bring enormous surplus by integrating Chinese investment to the markets of Middle East, Central Asia and Europe with alternate short routes (Husain, Rashid, & Arrfat, 2017, pp. 25-33).

Sino-Pak Defense Cooperation

Sino-Pak cooperation in the field of defense has remained an important and requisite aspect of Pakistan's diplomatic relations with China. It has also been a time-tested element as Pakistan's concerns are always directed towards strengthening its defense sector because of the Indian factor. Pakistan has become the largest arms importer of China in 2013 by purchasing arms for its military, air force and the navy. In 2008 both countries entered into defense agreements to accelerate their defense cooperation which has risen to 162% in 2012 from the previous five years. Pakistan assisted China in its ethnic issue related to Xinjiang province when 22 Uyghurs were arrested by Pakistan's armed forces in 2002 who were suspected to conduct extremist activities in south China (Vandewalley, 2015, pp. 4-7).

In military-to-military ties China imported highly sophisticated weapons to Pakistan. In 2011, after the Abbottabad operation when relations between Pakistan and the United States intensified and Pakistan was strongly criticized by the western media then China assisted Pakistan by supporting its point of view on killing Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan's territory and also Pakistan's untiring efforts



to root out terrorism. Both countries engaged into strategic military collaboration by a joint effort in development of JF-17 Thunder Fighter jets, Communication Satellite, sharing of intelligence information between Pakistan and China on a large scale. An agreement concluded between both states to sell eight submarines to Pakistan. It will cost EUR 4.4 billion (Kabiraji, 2012, pp. 3-17). Sino-Pak increasing military nexus has been motivated by Indo-US increasing strategic relations in order to keep Pakistan's security and capability in compatible with India. China is playing its political and moral role in supporting Pakistan's military efforts to fight against terrorism with full dedication within the country and also on the borders. Both countries are aiming to continue military training and cooperation in modernization of weapons to counter terrorism and also to contain India's hegemonic influence within the region (Ramana, 2011, pp. 3-11).

Nuclear Cooperation between Pakistan & China

Nuclear cooperation between Pakistan and China dates back to the era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto when he requested China for its assistance in obtaining nuclear technology to compete with India. China gave a positive response on providing a layout for fission reaction in 1983. In the following year China became a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and in the same year it supplied M-I I missiles to Pakistan. In 1986, under the agreement of Comprehensive Nuclear Cooperation, Pakistan got assistance from China in grading and enrichment of Uranium along with the supply of tritium gas. In 1985, Pakistan faced sanctions under Pressler Amendment and its military aid was cut down for some time and after the cold war period situation became stricter against Pakistan against the Chinese support for Pakistan. The United States also alleged China for its transfer of nuclear technology to Pakistan and imposed sanctions in 1990. The missile technology of Pakistan is also a result of Chinese cooperation as India was developing its missile technology by making larger investments in nuclear and missile sectors. On the other hand, the United States was exporting 150 F-16 fighter aircraft to Taiwan so at the bargaining chip of India and the United States, China backed Pakistan's missile and nuclear program (Shabbir, 2017, pp. 102-121).

China has been assisting in developing nuclear technology of Pakistan in establishing the nuclear facilities and plants in different parts of Pakistan. There are five Chashma Nuclear Power Plants, Karachi Coastal Power Project of 1,100 MW. Karachi Nuclear Power Plant 1 (KANUPP1) and Karachi Nuclear Power Plant 2 (KANUPP 2) of 2,000 MW. Karachi Coastal Power Project, nuclear power plants to meet the energy requirements of Pakistan and that would be completed by 2050 with 40,000 MW electricity. Under the agreement of Civil Nuclear Technology between Pakistan and China, Pakistan urged for the construction of other reactors to generate 88,000 MW to meet the immediate needs of Pakistan's energy shortage till 2030 (Shabbir, 2017, pp. 133-140).

Sino-Pak Mutual Interests in Afghanistan

Strategic partners also share strategic interests in Afghanistan. Political and economic regional interests are a common stance of both countries and in case of United States withdrawal strategy and



involvement of too many stakeholders in this territory compelled the both states to safeguard their interests with the common agenda. Stability in Afghanistan is a key objective of both states for the success of long-term economic integration of the region related to Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Both Pakistan and China are in favor of broader political settlement in Afghanistan by including and satisfying all the ethnic groups of Afghanistan including Taliban. That's the reason both Pakistan and China have been in favor of holding talks with the Taliban.

Another aspect of Pakistan and China's convergence of interests is India's factor. The United States' increasing reliance on India in South Asia and giving more and more projection to Afghanistan in military and political settlement of a warring state is a matter of serious concern for Pakistan and China. India's presence as backing the Kabul to develop anti-Pakistan feelings and use of Afghan territory can result in serious security related issues along the western border of Pakistan and cause negative impacts on economic and energy related projects of Pakistan which are underway in joint cooperation with China. India's involvement in Baluchistan as helping the hands of separatists and creating violence in the province can provide loss to several developmental projects which are vital both for Pakistan and China such as Gwadar economic corridor (Akhtar & Sarkar, 2015).

Counter Terrorism & Pak-China Cooperation

The new aspect of world politics is related to the issue of terrorism as terrorism is becoming a global challenge with its complex structure and worldwide activities. Pakistan is a state which is affected from terrorism and has been fighting against it with full efforts and resources. Pakistan's policy to deal with terrorism is as symbiotic as China's counter terrorism policy. Counter terrorism has become an important aspect of both states' bilateral relations as elements of stability are vital for Pakistan and China. Sino-Pak counter terrorism strategies revolve around attaining certain objectives. China seeks Pakistan's support in maintaining stability in its province of Xinjiang which is Muslims majority area and there is a risk of extremist activities. China also wants stability in Pakistan in order to secure its investment and the Chinese officials in Pakistan as China is making long term investment to sustain its economic development. The peace and stability of Pakistan particularly in Baluchistan is vital for the successful functioning of CPEC and the Gwadar Port.

For Pakistan stability is needed to secure its interests and they are largely dependent on Chinese investment. In countering terrorism Pakistan wants China's assistance in order to avoid its sole dependency on the United States. Pakistan and China want to cooperate in economic, political and military sectors but with the notion of keeping balance in their relations with other states. As in the perspective of Sino-Indian economic cooperation, a balancing factor is necessary. In the same way Pakistan's relations with the United States also need a balanced strategy for counter terrorism, safety of western border, Pak-US economic and trade relations. Both China and Pakistan are committed in their efforts not to mediate in domestic politics of both states in order to avoid any sort of negative feelings against each other which could be harmful for their relations. Terrorist attacks on Karakoram Highway, attacks on nuclear facilities constructed with Chinese assistance and the Gwadar port posing



threats to Sino-Pak strategic collaboration. Killing of Chinese civilians and the engineers working in Pakistan increased China's demand of taking security measures and the strategies to root out extremists in Pakistan which can create security issues in Chinese province Xinjiang (Dumbaugh, 2010, pp. 28-35)

Changing Scenario & Pak-US Relations with Reference to Afghanistan

International Relations are characterized by constant change. After Post-Cold War period the freezing relations of Pak-US once again got warmth and Pakistan as non-NATO ally provided all sorts of its logistic support to United States, captured hundreds of A-Qaeda members and handed over to United States but could not satisfy United States' policy makers while Pakistani governments faced severe criticism internally over Pakistan's involvement in anti-terrorism campaign and US policy of Drone attacks.

Incident of 9/11 was a turning point for world politics, military alliances converted into security alliances as new patterns of security settled for safety of citizens and survival of states. Pakistan being a neighbor of Afghanistan, faced abrupt change in its domestic and international policies and decided to participate as a front-line country in the international campaign against terrorism, bore catastrophic loss in terms of civilians and military casualties, severe economic recession and emergence of radical elements in its society pushed the country towards a complex structure of insecurity. In the wake of fighting against terrorism, Pakistan met with the challenges of extremist elements in FATA (Federally Administrated Tribal Area) and KPK (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), from where the terrorist activities spread all over the country in terms of suicide attacks on army troops, police, on public and religious gatherings and schools. In 2014, Pakistan faced a gravest terrorist attack by the militants who brutally killed the students and teachers of Army Public School by which 141 Pakistanis lost their lives. Pakistan had to launch military operations to root out the presence of extremist elements from time to time in Swat, FATA and in the areas near the Afghanistan border. But Pakistan's sacrifices and efforts could not win the trust of the US. Instead, it was developing its bilateral relations with India (Siddiq, 2012, pp. 2-10).

In 2011, flattered relations between Pakistan and the United States opened new ways of close relations in already "All Weather Friendship" holding states; Pakistan and China. The element of trust deficit between Pakistan and the United States, dissatisfaction over Pakistan's policy relating to Taliban and Haqqani Network, Indo-US Civil Nuclear Technology and strategic partnership, US granted India to play a central role in restructuring and military requirements of Afghanistan. Estrangement in relations of both states regarding CIA official Raymond Davis case, Killing of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Salala Check Post attack by NATO forces and killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers. All above things contributed to creating distances between the United States and Pakistan.

In general Pakistan's relations with the United States are contemplated in nature; a key player for US in achieving its goals and at the same time US alleges Pakistan a hub of terrorism, giving shelter to



extremists. In such a scenario Pakistan felt a need to rely not solely on the United States and decided to expand its foreign policy role in initiating diplomatic relations with the regional powers such as Russia and also entered into a new phase of friendship with its old friend China. In a changing scenario both Pakistan and China simultaneously celebrated their 60 years of friendship in the same year by naming it “the Friendship Year”. High officials of both states made their state visits and concluded the massive agreements for economic and infrastructure development and also for the advancement of military and weapons technology (Khan & Ahmed, 2015, pp. 251-257).

United States’s Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Implications on Sino-Pak Joint Ventures (CPEC & Gwadar)

Afghanistan’s geopolitically significant location is a central point for major and regional powers due to its proximity on one side with the north and south of Central Asia while on the other side with South Asia and the Middle East. The natural resources in Central Asia and Afghanistan have been alluring the major powers particularly the United States, Russia and now China. That’s the reason, Afghan land suffered from foreign invaders many times but no power could get success. The United States made its withdrawal on 30th August 2021 and after that the warring state was under Taliban Rule. Before the withdrawal process Taliban and the United States were engaged in a dialogue process for reaching an acceptable solution of transfer of power but it didn’t happen and the US left the troubled land abruptly. Both China and Pakistan were looking towards the conclusion of an agreement between US and Taliban because the vacuum which has been created in Afghanistan due to the exit of the US and absence of an inclusive Afghan government, can spill over to Pakistan and China because both are the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan.

The economic development of India and China turned the Politics of Asia from a security paradigm towards economic concerns. Trade and energy are the inevitable elements to sustain economic growth. Foreign policies of both China and India are linked to build more and more bilateral relations and the connectivity projects to meet their energy and trade requirements. China in pursuit of its regional and global ambitions is making multimillion dollar projects of developing new and upgrading ports with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. Its Blue Navy is also becoming influential both quantitatively and qualitatively in the region. India in order to curtail Chinese advancement is increasing its strength in terms of making alliances and elevating its naval strength with sophisticated weapons. Sino-Pak strategic relations and the Indo-US overwhelming alliance are some sort of competing interests in the region as questions arise on the nature of Pak-US relations in coming years. China with its project of BRI is developing more and more relations with the regional and extra-regional states. The economic corridors and the ports need peace and stability to work efficiently. On one side US withdrawal from Afghanistan and on other side Ukraine War are posing challenges on the Chinese economic agenda because BRI encompasses the entire region which is under the threat of instability (Parveen, 2023, pp. 169-170).

For China and Pakistan, peace and stability in Afghanistan is the key for fulfillment of their economic



agenda through smooth functioning of CPEC and the Gwadar Port. Both countries also want to pave a way towards landlocked Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) for trade and energy resources which will boost the economic development across Asia and Europe. It will also help in resolving the disputes within and outside the region. It has been estimated that Gulf energy resources would come to an end within four decades, then the whole world will look towards the CARs to meet their energy needs. CARs are landlocked and Pakistan being on crossroads of CARs, Gulf countries and the Indian Ocean can utilize its geopolitical advantage and then Gwadar and the CPEC would not only boost the economic activity of only Pakistan but for the whole region. The US withdrawal process started with a mandate on both sides that the Afghan government would release 5000 Taliban prisoners while Taliban would release 1000 Afghan security forces. The US was also on board to withdraw the names of Taliban leaders from black lists of UN and US. The Intra-Afghan talks were also underway. Taliban pledged that they would not allow any terror or extremist group to use Afghan soil against any state including Daesh and Al-Qaeda. All the matters with some hurdles were in process but then the US made a surprise evacuation. It's been approximately two years of US withdrawal, Taliban failed to form an inclusive government in Kabul and also couldn't gain international recognition. So, the power vacuum is still existing and both Pakistan and China have serious reservations that any unwanted and extremist forces can fill this vacuum at any time. This scenario is not only harmful for Afghanistan's security but can create insecurity in its immediate neighbors (Pakistan and China) and for the whole region. The United States's evacuation from Afghanistan doesn't mean that its interests are also evacuated. US has deep observation on Chinese advancement, its economic and infrastructural investments and Chinese growing interests Afghanistan and CARs. So, the US would keep its eyes on Afghanistan to safeguard its interests related to CARs and China's strategies. Moreover, US is also concerned on China's entry into Indian Ocean through Gwadar Port which would enable China to decrease its time and money for transfer of trade and energy products just in 10 days while through Malacca Strait it takes 45 days and it is also insecure due to India's influence near Malacca Strait.

China due to its stakes in Afghanistan would follow the wait and see policy till the establishment of peace in Afghanistan because it has offered a series of economic endeavors for the regional states which would keep them engaged with China instead of America. For Pakistan its dependency on China is on three main points, firstly its economic needs and energy shortfall, secondly its requirement of having a strategic cooperation with a major power and thirdly its security calculations with India. Recently the Sino-Pak strategic partnership entered into a new phase as both countries decided to include Afghanistan into the BRI initiative. According to the agreement, CPEC would be extended towards Afghanistan with the investment of US \$ 60 billion to make the economy of concerned states more productive. This agreement was signed among China, Pakistan and Afghanistan on 28 May 2023 (Shira, 2023).

Conclusion

Sino-Pak strategic and multidimensional relations are characterized as vital and necessary for



Pakistan and China by keeping in view the changing scenarios of both global and regional environments in political, economic and security sectors in the same way these relations are facing challenges within and outside the region and require policy measures. Sino-Pak military ties are not perceived positively by the United States and India. Although these both states are responsible and the concrete motivational factors behind these military-to-military ties. Economic integration of the region is also perceiving threat from the domestic and foreign stakeholders. India has shown reservations over CPEC on all bilateral and multilateral forums. The route of CPEC is passing through most of the areas which are unstable due to the presence of extremists and separatists such as some areas of KPK, FATA and some sensitive areas of Baluchistan where there is a risk of creating instability by local and foreign elements. In provinces of KPK, Baluchistan and in FATA there is a danger of reducing the viability of the CPEC project and also to the loss to Pakistani and Chinese officials, engineers and the workers. China has reportedly requested Pakistan for security assistance for the project and the people involved in it. Pakistan by keeping in view the importance of this project to meet its energy and economic needs arranged a task force of military troops. The route of CPEC is also passing through Kashmir which is a disputed territory and a nuclear flash point between India and Pakistan is posing a challenge as India is not ready to accept the passing of the route through Azad Kashmir and showed its resentment over the project. The part of the route which is passing through Chinese province Xinjiang, there live Uyghur Muslims. The relations between the Chinese government and Uyghurs have been strained for many years. There is a risk of creating instability and violent attack on this economic activity. On international level the economic relations between China and Pakistan are challenged on initiating the CPEC project by India as Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi officially opposed the project by showing reservations on its route. India is opposing CPEC with this notion that China's militarization on Gwadar harbor with the arms deal of eight submarines as largest weapons deal by China with EUR 4.49 billion. Pakistan's initiative of CPEC project is taken as a relatively shift in its foreign policy with Saudi Arabia as it was signed when Pakistan decided not to become a part of the Saudi coalition and showed the importance of building friendly relations with Iran. Islamabad needs to keep balance with its traditional partners along with new scenarios emphasizing new political and economic policies. The initiative of CPEC has exerted positive implications on Pakistan's relations with the European Union as EU showed interests in economic development of the region and integration through corridors as its interests are complementary to Chinese in the region.



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