

Pak-China Defence and Strategic Relations: Emerging Global and Regional Dynamics

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Abstract

Since beginning in May 1951, the bilateral ties between Pakistan and China have generally been smooth and incremental with a sheer size of mutual trust and respect. Over the time the relationship between the two has evolved to a unique level where China and Pakistan are dubbed as all-weather friends and their relationship being 'deeper than oceans, higher than Himalayas, and sweeter than honey.' Starting with mere diplomatic acceptance of each other, the bilateral relations swelled over time to build a deep-rooted strategic partnership encompassing all aspects of geopolitics and geo-economics. Generally, changes at global level tend to affect relationships among states but in case of Sino-Pak relationship there has remained a sense of semblance and smoothness irrespective of any global or regional dynamics. This relationship is found and further cemented on the basis of a set of shared objectives and values and attainment of which is equally desired and pursued by each of the countries. Keeping this growing relationship in consideration, this paper attempts to examine different aspects of this relationship and the growing common ground for multifaceted cooperation in the view of a 'Peaceful rise of China' and emerging global and regional political and strategic dynamics.

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Key Words: Deep-rooted, Geopolitics, Geo-Economics Strategic Partnership, Multifaceted Cooperation, Peaceful Rise, Strategic Dynamics.

Pakistan and China have enjoyed cordial and friendly relations from the onset when the two countries recognized each other in May 1951.¹ With the passage of time, the bilateral relationship became more inclusive to involve diplomatic, defence, economic and strategic cooperation. Pak-China friendly and close relationship is reinforced by the geographical contiguity with both countries sharing 510 km border in the north of Pakistan.² It is one of the fundamental principles of Pakistan's foreign policy to maintain cordial relations with its neighbours.³ China, on the other hand, has equally been receptive and reciprocal to Pakistan's friendly gestures. Sino-Pak relationship is based on mutual trust, mutual respect and shared security and economic interests.⁴ The bilateral relationship has sustained irrespective of the domestic, regional and global changes. Pakistan's foreign policy relating to China has been maintained by successive governments be it military or civilians at the helm of affairs. Moreover, the changing cycle of regional and global strategic contexts has ameliorated relationship between the two countries. It is against this backdrop that the Sino-Pak relationship has rightly been dubbed as deeper than oceans, higher than Himalayas and sweeter than honey.

Pakistan and China are situated in the geographical area that wields an immense significance in the broader geopolitical chessboard.

¹Kenneth, Lieberthal, "China and Pakistan: A deepening bond", *Council on Foreign Relations*, (March 2006).

http://www.cfr.org/publication/10070/china_and_pakistan.html

²Pakistan Foreign Policy, for full online text visit www.mofa.org.pk/mission/html (accessed April 10, 2016).

³*Ibid*, 2.

⁴Keylor, William R. *A World of Nations: The International Order since 1945*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 108.

In addition to the human resources, the area is also rich in natural material resources.⁵ Importance of this South West and East Asian region is maximized by the fact that it is also home to three nuclear states namely Pakistan, China and India. Just as the other regions of the world, this region is also characterized by border conflicts that resulted in various wars. Pakistan and India have fought three wars stemming out of territorial dispute over Kashmir.⁶ Similarly, China and India have also been at war with one another in 1962 over the border dispute.⁷ Pakistan, having an aggressive enemy at its eastern front, gives huge importance to a larger and more powerful China at its northern front.⁸ During the Cold war era, Pakistan matched growing Soviet-India cooperation by forging strong relationships with China and the United States.⁹

China-Pakistan Arms Transfer, 1979-92¹⁰

Year of Delivery	Weapon designation	Type	Receiving service	Quantity
1981	Hia-Ying-2	Ship to Ship missile	Navy	8
1981	Hia-Ying-2	Launcher	Navy	4
1981	Hegu Class	Fast attack Craft	Navy	4
1981-82	T-60	Tank	Army	50
1982-83	Type 82 122	MRL	Army	50

⁵“Pak-China relations in the 21st Century: Regional situation, security, economic & trade cooperation”. *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.1, No.1. website: <http://www.ips.org.pk/global-issues-and-politics/182-pak-china-relations-in-the-21st-century-regional-situation-security-economic-a-trade-cooperation> (accessed August 16, 2014)

⁶Abdul Sattar, *Foreign Policy of Pakistan: 1947-2010*, (Oxford University Press, 2011), 55.

⁷Ibid, 5. 103.

⁸Ibid

⁹Raja Muhammad, Khan, "A Broader Perspective of Sino Pakistan Relationship. (June 2011), 12.

¹⁰Musa Khan Jalalzai., *Pakistan: Islam, Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*. Lahore: Kitabbistan, 2006.

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1983-84	A-5C Fan tan	Fighter/ground attack aircraft	Air force	52
1984	Hal-Ying-2	Ship to Ship Missile	Navy	16
1984	Hal-Ying-2	Launcher	Navy	4
1984	Huangfen Class	First attack craft	Navy	4
1986-7	F-7M Air Guard	Fighter Aircraft	Air Force	20
NA	A-5 A Fan Tam	Fighter/Ground attack aircraft	Air Force	9.8
1985	HQ-2B	Surface to Air missile	Navy	20
1985	HQ-2B	Surface to air missile system	Navy	2
1987	Fuking Class	Support Ship	Navy	1
NA	K-8	Jet trainer	Air Force	6
1989-90	Type P58A	Patrol Craft	Navy	4
1989-91	T-69	Tank	Army	275
1989-91	Anza (Under License)	Portable SAM	Army	350
1990-91	F-7P Air Guard	Fighter Aircraft	Air Force	80
1992	F-7M Air Guard	Fighter Aircraft	Air Force	40
1990-92	Red Arrow-8	Anti Tank Missile	Army	150
1991-92	T-69 11	Tank	Army	160
1991	M-11	Ballistic Missile	Army	55
1991	M-11 Launcher	Ballistic Missile Launcher	Army	20
1992	F-7P Sky Bolt	Fighter Aircraft	Air Force	40

Speaking to the audience at Harvard University in April 2016, Pakistan's permanent representative to the United Nations, Maleeha

Lodhi termed her country's relationship with China as “historic, strategic, trouble-free, and pivotal to Pakistan's foreign policy.”¹⁰

Emerging Regional and Global Scenario and China's Interests in Pakistan

China has emerged as the most powerful country in the region and the primary rival of the US.¹² At regional level China is unrivalled and at the global level it is the only country that has successfully rivalled the once invincible US.¹³ However, just as China's approach to economic reform was informed by pragmatism, so too was its attitude towards the United States.¹⁴ Changes at regional and global level affect foreign policies of states to a considerable extent. For example, nature of the distribution of power at international level has a direct bearing on the behaviour of states comprising the system. States behave differently in unipolar, bipolar and multi-polar international systems. The region, in which Pakistan and China find themselves, is going through political makeover that is without precedent in the recent history. In the north of Pakistan is an emerging China, an assertive and hegemonic India in the East, and a highly instable Afghanistan homing NATO troops in the west. These dynamics in the region makes an enhanced relationship between China and Pakistan a logical and realistic objective.

Counter-terrorism and stability in Afghanistan: A shared objective

South Asian region has a history of Superpowers untimely engagements and uncertain abandonments.¹⁵ Though Afghanistan has

¹¹China Pivotal to Pakistan's foreign policy: Maleeha Lodhi, *Dawn*, April 27, 2016.

¹²Martin, Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 13.

¹³*Ibid*, 10.

¹⁴*Ibid*, 10. 180-181

¹⁵The sentence comes from author's intuition and has not been taken from a source.

The British colonization of India, the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan and then American engagement in Afghanistan are instances that lend credence to the statement above. However, similar views have been expressed by many authors as

been the primary epicentre of superpower engagements, remaining countries of the region have also been greatly affected as a result of these engagements.¹⁶ The US was to leave Afghanistan after staying for more than 12 years leaving behind an Afghanistan fraught with an uncertain future.¹⁷ However, the US has been delaying its exit from Afghanistan after its proposed withdrawal in 2016 given the growing instability in Afghanistan. There are 9500 US troops still stationed in Afghanistan to train the Afghan forces. China, being a major stakeholder in the region, is cognizant of the challenges and opportunities associated with the eventual lessening of US influence in Afghanistan. China is increasingly concerned about the stability in Afghanistan with which it shares a short border in the mountainous region in the north. Earlier in 2016 the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi visited Kabul and held talks with the Afghan president and foreign minister. The visiting Chinese foreign minister assured Afghanistan of his country's commitment to peace and stability in Afghanistan and vowed to play his role in bringing peace and stability to the war torn country.¹⁸

The restive Xinjiang in the north, home to ethnic Uyghurs, is creating security problems for China as Uyghur militants have been using terrorism as a tool to amplify their demand for separation.¹⁹ China traces the root of these militants to the training camps in Afghanistan and Pak-Afghan border tribal areas where terrorists of all sorts have found a sanctuary.²⁰ China considers the stability in Afghanistan a linchpin of stability for its restive province of Xinjiang, in particular, and the entire region, in general.

well. For example in, Norman, Lowe, *Mastering Modern World History*, (London: Paperbacks), 266-267.

¹⁶Norman Lowe, *Mastering Modern World History*, (London: Paperbacks), 280.

¹⁷Ibid

¹⁸Mirwais Harooni, "China has become Very Concerned about Stability in Afghanistan," *Business Insider*, February 22, 2014.

¹⁹Hasan Askari, "The United States India and Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, October 24, 2014.

²⁰Khalid Munir, "A backgrounder to the North Waziristan Operation," *The Express Tribune*, June 18, 2014

Pakistan, like China, is desirous of a stable and democratic Afghanistan and believes a stable Afghanistan is not only in its interest but in the larger interest of the region and globe. Pakistan has been a frontline state in the war on terror and sacrificed thousands of its civilians and continues to bear huge economic costs. Pakistan, being an immediate neighbour of and one of major players in Afghanistan, can help stabilize the country. Moreover, Pakistan has started a major military operation to wipe out terrorists and their sanctuaries in its northern areas bordering Afghanistan.²¹ Pakistan has offered its support to China in Combating East Turkestan Islamic Movement (CETIM), a terrorist group which is active in China's restive Xinjiang province.²² In connection with these efforts, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif, visited China in June 2015 and assured his Chinese counterpart that Pakistan would spare no efforts to crack down on the terrorists.²³ Terrorism is a common threat to both countries and to be able to neutralize this threat, the two countries need to continue their cooperation in countering terrorism.

Pakistan and China have recently been actively involved in quadrilateral dialogue process to bring peace in Afghanistan.²⁴ Several meetings among the quadrilateral states have brought Taliban leaders to the negotiating table. After the failure of Murree talks, another round of dialogue between Taliban and representatives of quadrilateral group was due in May 2016.²⁵ However, the killing of Afghan Taliban top leader Mullah Mansoor in a US drone strike on May 21, 2016 has halted the peace process.²⁶ The US has also conceded that the killing of Mullah Mansoor has made the peace process uncertain. In its quarterly report to Congress, the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (Sigar) observed

²¹Ibid, 16.

²²Ibid

²³“Raheel assures China of anti-terror support”, *The Nation*, June, 5, 2014. website: <http://www.nation.com.pk/national/05-Jun-2014/raheel-assures-china-of-anti-terror-support> (accessed August 18, 2014.)

²⁴Quad

²⁵President Speeches archives, www.whitehouse.com.us/speeches

²⁶“Mullah Mansoor Killed in a drone attack”, *Dawn*, May 22, 2016.

that “Mullah Mansoor's death shuffled Taliban leadership, exacerbated fighting, and left the future of the peace process uncertain.”²⁷ The report also found that after the death of its leader, Taliban have enhanced fighting and gained new territory and now controlled 19 of the country's approximately 400 governing districts.²⁸

Economic Interests

China, superseded only by the US, has the largest economy in the world with 13.50 trillion US dollars.²⁹ A large part of Chinese economy is dependent upon its trade with and investments in the region and the world at large. China is focused on fulfilling vision of its peaceful rise through maximizing its trade and thus strengthening its economy. A mere glance at the preponderance of economy in the Chinese foreign policy agenda suggests that Beijing has made “Power through Trade” its *raison d'être*.³⁰ It is against this backdrop that Pakistan, being a longstanding friend and neighbour of China, wields a significant position in China's foreign policy calculus. Apart from economic interests, China considers trading with Pakistan and Afghanistan can bring stability as poverty and underdevelopment have been the main factors behind the continuing instability in these two countries.³¹ Chinese Economic interests are subdivided here to square the significance of the subject:

Gwadar Port and Economic Corridor

Pakistan has a crucial geo-strategic position having links with other South Asian countries and Central Asian republics. However, it does not have effective and well-developed trade routes to reach out to

²⁷Text of the SIGar Report, published on July 29, 2016.

²⁸Ibid, 20.

²⁹Country Profile China, CIA World Fact-book 2015.

³⁰Martin, Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 66.

³¹Zhang Lijun,” Closer Ties,” *Beijing Review*, Vol.49, No.2, (January 12, 2006), 11.

Central Asian countries.³² On the other hand, China does not have access to any of the deep sea ports on Arabian sea which leaves it with the only sea route along the Strait of Malacca. The trade route through the Strait of Malacca is not only a long one but it is also influenced by US and its allies in East Asia.

Gwadar port is situated in Pakistan's province of Baluchistan whose operational control was handed over to a Chinese company in 2015 by the government of Pakistan in an attempt to further cement the bilateral ties.³³ Gwadar port is close to the Strait of Hormuz, the world's most important chokepoint due to its daily oil flow amounted to 17 million bbl/d in 2011, roughly almost 20% of oil traded worldwide.³⁴

China is the world's most populous country with a fast-growing economy that has made it the largest energy consumer and producer in the world.³⁵ Chinese demand for oil has been increasing gradually thus increasing its reliance on oil imports from Persian Gulf region.³⁶ The US Energy Information Administration (EIA) projects in its country analysis that China would surpass the United States as the largest net oil importer by year 2014.³⁷ China's oil imports have traditionally been coming in-through a detour via the Strait of Malacca that is considered costly.³⁸ Pakistan and China have agreed to build a road connecting China with Baluchistan, home to Gwadar port which is also called Pak-China Economic Corridor,³⁹ so that China can import its oil through Gwadar

³² Lawrence Ziring, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History*, (Oxford: One World Publishers), 15-16.

³³ Chinese Company Given control of Gwadar Port, *Dawn*, May 22, 2015.

³⁴ Strait of Hormuz is Chokepoint for 20% of World's oil, *Today in Energy*, Website: <http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=7830>, (Accessed September 4, 2014.)

³⁵ CIA World Fact Book, Country Profile China, 2015. 155.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 28. 156.

³⁷ China: Country Analysis Brief Overview, U.S Energy Information Administration, website: <http://www.eia.gov/countries/country-data.cfm?fips=CH>, (Accessed September 5, 2014.)

³⁸ Strait of Hormuz is Chokepoint for 20% of World's oil, *Today in Energy*, website:

³⁹ *Ibid*

port that could subsequently be transported through land route to China. This route will help Chinese imports to avoid the detour through Strait of Malacca hence can be less costly and less time consuming.⁴⁰

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been termed as 'game changer' by the Pakistani Prime Minister because of its long lasting and fecund impact on Pakistan's internal and external outlook. The 46 billion USD project comprises a labyrinth of roads and railway tracks encompassing all provinces of Pakistan all the way leading to Xinjiang province of China and also a number of power generating plants in different parts of Pakistan make for the most of the 46 billion USD worth investment.⁴¹ This colossal investment by China is the biggest of its external investments in its modern history.⁴² China's investment in CPEC project is in line with its peaceful rise by expanding its trade relations to all the major regions of the world. Pakistan, on the other hand, is destined to benefit greatly from the Chinese investment under the aegis of CPEC. Firstly, it will enable Pakistan to overcome the power shortage it has been facing for a decade. Secondly, the project will act as a catalyst in further cementing the strategic bilateral relationship between the two in the face of growing strategic partnership between the United States and India, a setting viewed as threatening by both China and Pakistan.⁴³

The proposed corridor can face both internal and external challenges. Security challenges are the most important challenges that the corridor project is confronting. Both Xinjiang and Baluchistan have been affected by militancy and there has been an unrest.⁴⁴ For the realization of this project, peace is required to be ensured in these places.

⁴⁰“Elizabeth C. Economy, “China's Imperial President: Xi Jinping Tightens his Grip,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2015, 35.

⁴¹www.mpdr.gov.pk/cpec/html

⁴²Ibid, 32.

⁴³Syed Ali Abbas, “Regional and Global Scenario and Pak China Relations,” *Pakistan Vision*, Vol.12, No.1, (June 2012), 11.

⁴⁴Ibid

Both the US and India are not happy with the corridor project because of the fact that the realization of the project will make both China and Pakistan more powerful.⁴⁵ The US fears that this will enhance Chinese influence in Middle East, Gulf and in other parts of the world and may even replace US as the powerful broker in the affairs of these regions. India, on the other hand, seems to have bandwagon with the US in its opposition to the corridor. However, their opposition may affect the goodwill of the project, it will not affect the completion of this project. To ensure security along the route, Pakistan has constituted an army force of ten thousand special troops which will look after the security matters for this project.⁴⁶ Moreover, proposed construction of economic zones in Kashgar and Baluchistan⁴⁷ will provide employment to the local people and will transform their life thus taking them away from extremism and violence. The Baluch insurgents in Gwadar area also pose a serious threat to the project. However, through economic zones and employment to the Baluch youth, they can be pacified and be given a chance to take part in the economic revival of the province.

Bilateral Trade

Trade between Pakistan and China has gradually been increasing since the two established diplomatic relations in 1950s.⁴⁸ According to Chinese ambassador to Pakistan earlier this year, the bilateral trade between China and Pakistan has increased to \$12 billion.⁴⁹ A cursory look at the statistics of bilateral trade shows that the imports of Pakistan from China have always exceeded Pakistan's exports to China. Pakistan always had trade deficit with China and with the passage of time

⁴⁵Urvasha Aneja, "Pakistan China Relations: Recent developments", *IPCS Special Report* 28, (June 2015).

⁴⁶"Army constitutes CPEC force, *Dawn*", April 19, 2015.

⁴⁷Ibid

⁴⁸Kenneth, Lieberthal, "China and Pakistan: A deepening bond." *Council on Foreign Relations*, (March 2006).

http://www.cfr.org/publication/10070/china_and_pakistan.html

⁴⁹"Pak-China trade increase to \$12 billion", *The Express Tribune*, January 18, 2014. Website: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/660108/all-weather-friends-pak-china-trade-increased-to-12-billion-says-weidong/> (accessed Sept 5, 2014.)

this deficit is increasing. Given the ratio of Pakistan's imports from China, it is beneficial for China to increase bilateral trade with Pakistan.⁵⁰ If the volume of the bilateral trade increases, it will be beneficial for both China and Pakistan. Chinese products will have access to Pakistani markets and subsequently customers in Pakistan will have access to Chinese products easily. CPEC project is the greatest example of Sino-Pak bilateral trade in the history of the relations of the two countries. The bilateral trade will increase manifold after the completion of the project.

The CPEC project is mutually beneficial for both countries. However, given the fact that Pakistan will receive the huge investment that would not only refurbish its transport infrastructure but also its power sector, the project will be more beneficial for Pakistan in the long run.

US Pivot to Asia Strategy

US President Barack Obama announced in 2009 the American pivot to Asia, a strategy to shift attention towards the Asia-Pacific.⁵¹ Exhausted by its long term engagements in Europe and Middle East on the one hand and faltering economy at home on the other hand, the US shifted its focus of foreign and security policies towards Asia-Pacific coast, from Indian subcontinent to Northeast Asia.⁵² This way, the US expected its diplomatic, military, and economic presence in the region to enhance. This reorientation was based on the assumption that Asia's economic growth, China's in particular, and the Chinese military modernization process make the region critical for United States' interests, especially in the context of a US withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan.

⁵⁰Fazal ur Rehman, "Pakistan China Economic Relations: Opportunities and Challenges," *Strategic Studies*, Vol.26, No.2, (2006).

⁵¹Michael D. Swaine, "Chinese Leadership and Elites Responses to the US Pacific Pivot," *China Leadership Monitor*, Vol. 38, No.3, 23.

⁵²Joao Arthur Reis, "China's dual response to the US Pivot," *Asia Times Online*, January 24, 2014. website: <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/CHIN-01-240114.html> (accessed August 20, 2014).

This pivot to the Asia-Pacific potentially has a dual character: it can be part of an engagement strategy with the region and increase of its presence, as well as be part of a “China containment strategy”.⁵³ However, the US plans of deploying its forces in the region and strengthening of its alliances with India and Japan have been seen by China as destined to contain its peaceful rise in the region and beyond. China reacted to this strategy by establishing the Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), in the East China Sea directed at Japan, an ally of the US that welcomed its rebalancing to Asia strategy.⁵⁴

Apart from Japan, another important ally of the US in the region is India. The US and Japan's strategic partnership with India is a clear indication of containing China. Pakistan on the other hand has been supportive of a peaceful rise of China. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed, a member of Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, said that Pakistan always welcomed the peaceful rise of China since it is a source of strength and security for small and medium-sized countries in Asia, and particularly neighbours like Pakistan.⁵⁵ Moreover, with regards to India, China and Pakistan share a security concern and have been at war with it separately in the past.⁵⁶ Thus in the emerging regional scenario after the US pivot to Asia, a strong and long term defence and strategic cooperation with Pakistan is in the interest of China. In order to balance the US-assisted India, China can enhance its defence and strategic partnership with Pakistan, a country that has its own security concerns emanating from India.

In addition to this, the under-construction Pak-China Economic Corridor, which aims to link China's Xinjiang province with the strategic Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Baluchistan province, can also be a game changer in the regional dynamics.

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid

⁵⁵“Pakistan Supports Peaceful Rise of China: Mushahid”, *The Nation*, March 29, 2014. Website: <http://www.nation.com.pk/islamabad/29-Mar-2014/pakistan-supports-peaceful-rise-of-china-mushahid> (accessed August 22, 2014).

⁵⁶Kenneth, Lieberthal, “China and Pakistan: A deepening bond.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, (March 2006). http://www.cfr.org/publication/10070/china_and_pakistan.html

Once completed, this corridor will enable the two countries to transport oil and gas through highways and railways and will serve as a primary gateway for China and Middle East and Central Asia and Africa.⁵⁷ China is dependent on the Middle Eastern oil to meet its industrial demand and currently imports oil through Pacific Ocean taking a long detour. Gwadar Port, located at a strategically important point near the Strait of Hormuz, will become a productive route for Chinese imports and exports and it would vastly cut the 12,000-kilometre route that the Mideast oil supplies must now take to reach Chinese ports.⁵⁸ This will eventually strengthen the already growing economy of China thus making its prospects of rise at the international level even more likely. This can happen if the strong relations between China and Pakistan are maintained and strengthened.

The proposed project of CPEC is not just limited to the networks of land and rail routes but a major portion of the investment is allocated to develop power sector in Pakistan.⁵⁹ Out of total 46 billion USD, 30 billion USD is proposed for the development of power sector in different cities of the country.⁶⁰ Development in Pakistan has been marred by electricity downfall which has not only affected the industrial prowess of the country but has also affected the lives of Pakistanis. The proposed 30 billion USD investment in power sector of Pakistan by China will greatly benefit the dilapidating power sector of the country and will revive the industrial growth. In addition, the proposed land route between Xinjiang and Baluchistan will be mediated by economic zones at different intervals throughout the route which will bring employment to the country.

Indian Ocean and India Factor

China has been very concerned about the security environment in South Asia. After the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from the region, and its defeat in Afghanistan,

⁵⁷Talat Masood, "Gwadar Strategic Importance," *Dawn*, February 12, 2005.

⁵⁸Ibid

⁵⁹www.mprd.gov.pk/cpec/html

⁶⁰Ibid

China's strategic fear of its encirclement by Russia has been considerably reduced.⁶¹ However, China is apprehensive of India's ever increasing power and considers it as a threat to its interests in the region. Chinese concerns have further increased in the post-Cold War era, where the US and India have developed a highly robust strategic partnership.

China primarily wants to prevent India from developing such a power that would help it dominate the South Asian region and may eventually challenge the China's leadership role in the region. China is convinced that there is a conspicuous element of hegemonic aspiration in the Indian strategic thinking wherein it believes to be the legitimate hegemonic power of South Asia.⁶² Chinese strategic circles perceive that India wants to dominate the whole of Indian Ocean region, and for that it has forged close relations with the US. China has been very vocal about India's policies to turn Indian Ocean into India's ocean. Indian Ocean constitutes a major sea route for both China and India as both heavily rely on for the export and import of their goods to and from other major regions of the world.⁶³

Thus, there has been a general willingness on the part of China to stop India from dominating and influencing the Indian Ocean region while simultaneously devising prudent strategies to contain India so that it cannot become the regional leader of South Asia.

Pakistan, being the only South Asian country capable of challenging Indian hegemonic aspirations became a natural choice for China when it came to the Chinese interest in South Asia. On the vis-a-vis other hand, given the conventional military asymmetry between India and Pakistan, China became an important partner for Pakistan to make for latter's policy to prevent Indian hegemony in the region. In the post Cold War era, a major element of Sino-Pak partnership has been to prevent India from dominating South Asia⁶⁴ and both China and Pakistan feel

⁶¹Rajvir Singh, *US, Pakistan and India: Strategic Relations*, (Allahabad: India), 1985, 166-167.

⁶²Zhang Lijun, "Closer Ties", *Beijing Review*, Vol.49, No.2, (January 12, 2006), 11.

⁶³Ibid

⁶⁴Ibid

threatened if India becomes the leader of South Asia. Thus, this common interest has bound China and Pakistan in a strong relationship which has successfully endured change in leadership in both countries over a period of half century. While it is in Chinese interest to support Pakistan in order to prevent India from dominating South Asia, it has also been in the interest of Pakistan to have China by its side while it deals with its security and strategic problems India. China is aware of the fact that Pakistan is the only country in South Asia which has both; the capability and the will to challenge India and the fact that Pakistan has fought three wars with India, negating its regional superiority, further strengthens China's perception about Pakistan. Thus, on one hand China views Pakistan as a balancer against India, while Pakistan, on the other hand, views China as a balancer against the US strategic partnership with India.⁶⁵

Over the last five decades, China and Pakistan have strengthened their bilateral relationship through close partnership in almost all fields especially in defence and trade sectors.⁶⁶ China is aware of the fact that Pakistan is the only country that provides it an access to the Indian Ocean and through it to the Gulf and the Middle East for the exports of Chinese emerging market especially military hardware.⁶⁷ The two countries collaborated to build Gwadar port along the Makran coast in Baluchistan which opens up to the Indian Ocean. The port located at a strategically important location can also serve as a naval base for submarines which can be used to monitor Indian Ocean. Moreover, the port provides a shorter route for China through Karakorum Highway from its Xinjiang province to Baluchistan and further into Gulf.⁶⁸

⁶⁵“Pak-China relations in the 21st Century: Regional situation, security, economic & trade cooperation”. *Policy Perspectives*, Vol.1, No.1. website: <http://www.ips.org.pk/global-issues-and-politics/182-pak-china-relations-in-the-21st-century-regional-situation-security-economic-a-trade-cooperation> (accessed August 16, 2014)

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Elizabeth C. Economy, “China's Imperial President: Xi Jinping Tightens his Grip,” *Foreign Affairs*, June 13, 2015, 35.

⁶⁸Ibid.

The most important driver of Sino-Pak strategic alliance has been the India factor,⁶⁹ for both countries have perceived a serious threat from Indian hegemonic aspirations in the region. Pakistan has genuine security concerns with India, particularly over Kashmir for which the two countries have fought wars.⁷⁰ China considers itself the leader of the region and it sees any attempt by India to take the leading role threatening to its larger regional strategic interests.⁷¹ This shared interest has brought Pakistan and China close and their relationship has strengthened to such an extent that the two are dubbed as all weather friends.⁷²

As far as the military-to-military cooperation between the two nations is concerned, it has become one of the tools for strengthening the relations between the two countries.⁷³ China delivered 50 additional JF-17 fighter jets to Pakistan, assisted Pakistan in building its first indigenously built frigate and in August 2011 launched a communications satellite for Pakistan.⁷⁴ This was followed by Pakistan's keen expression of interest in sending an astronaut on a Chinese spacecraft.⁷⁵ Finally, the reports that the Pakistani military had given China an access to the US helicopter that crashed and had to be abandoned during the raid on bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad caused alarm in Washington, although China and Pakistan both vehemently denied the accusations.⁷⁶ All these events made headlines

⁶⁹Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2005: A Concise History*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007)

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Urvasha Aneja, "Pakistan China Relations: Recent developments," *IPCS Special Report* 28, (June 2015).

⁷²Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2005: A Concise History*. (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007)

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Nabiha Gul, *Pak-China Strategic Partnership*. Lahore: Jahangir's World Times, January 2012.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.

during 2011 and only served to further fuel the suspicion that shrouds the relationship between Pakistan and the United States.⁷⁷

For China, the purpose of enhancing military-to-military cooperation is to ensure Pakistan facilitates, and does not hinder the domestic stability within China's borders. Cooperation pivots around supply of weapons, intelligence-sharing, counter-terrorism and joint exercises.⁷⁸ Pakistan and China carry out military exercises every two years and have tested their capacity to conduct operations from a joint-command centre, including simulation of large-scale intelligence gathering by Chinese and Pakistani troops, and search-and-destroy missions.⁷⁹ In November 2011 the two armies held their joint exercises, Youyi-IV (translating into 'friendship'), which were aimed at building capacity and intelligence-sharing for the purpose of countering terrorism.⁸⁰

Conclusion

Pakistan and China have remained trusted friends and neighbours despite the changes at regional and international level. Recent divisions at regional and global level indicate opportunities for both countries to further strengthen their defence and strategic relationship. The issue of terrorism and extremism needs to be tackled through mutual intelligence sharing. Pakistan needs to ensure the security of Chinese workforce deployed in Gwadar and on the other projects that are already underway in various sectors in Pakistan. China and Pakistan share common security concerns in the region and this commonality has so far cemented the bonds of strategic and defence relationship between the two. China has supported Pakistan at every step and even helped Pakistan to establish strong defence system, it would also be right to say that China is the biggest arms supplier of Pakistan.

⁷⁷Ibid

⁷⁸Michael Yahuda, *Towards the End of Isolationism: China's Foreign Policy after Mao*. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1983).

⁷⁹Ibid

⁸⁰Mathieu Duchatel, "The Terrorist Risk and China's Policy toward Pakistan: strategic reassurance and the "United Front", *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 20, No. 71, September 2011, p. 555