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Sino-Indian Relations: Role of Pakistan

Ranjit Singh

Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, School of Humanities and Physical Education (SOHPE), CT University, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Dr. Hakim Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, School of Humanities and Physical Education (SOHPE), CT University, Ludhiana (Punjab)

Abstract

The role of immediate neighboring countries in building Sino-Indian relations is very crucial. For instance, Pakistan can be a significant factor to decide the India's relation with China. The study explores the intricately intertwined connections between the nations of India and China with reference to convergence of their shared cultural legacy, economic expansion, and development strategies. How this has fostered a closer relationship between the two nations, with a mutual aim of enhancing their global impact. No doubt, the protracted territorial disagreements, past hostilities, and distrust have also engendered a rivalry between the two factions. The burgeoning relationship between China and Pakistan has augmented the peril to India, as China's military presence on India's northern, eastern, and western frontiers has engendered the prospect of a "dual-front" conflict. It is an attempt to describe the complex bilateral relationship between India and China, characterized by both advantageous and disadvantageous aspects. Prior to formulating a series of conclusions that assess the areas of convergence and divergence in the relationship between India and China, the study undertakes a detailed analysis of the interactions between these two nations across a diverse range of factors.



Keywords

CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), Border disputes, Relations, Region, Trade, Military, Neighboring, Arms.

Introduction

Two of the biggest nations in Asia are China and India. When we discuss China, we are referring to the People's Republic of China (PRC), and when we discuss India, we are referring to the Republic of India. In this contemporary era of globalization, which is currently in progress, India is not an exception to the rule that all nations around the world are interdependent. Every country in the world today is working toward the same objective, which is to develop economically and technologically. Maintaining peace and friendly relations with the nations that are close by is therefore unavoidable. Geographically close neighbors China and India both exert significant influence over local politics as well as politics globally.

The growing ties between China and Pakistan pose an increasing danger to India. Beijing, China's capital, plans to invest heavily in Pakistan's energy sector through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which seeks to promote economic growth and trade by connecting China to Europe, Africa, and the rest of the world (CPEC). President Xi Jinping of China has promised to invest \$46 billion in Pakistan as part of the CPEC. Soon after, the CPEC agreement was heralded as the panacea for Pakistan's economic woes by the country's elite and mainstream media (Menhas, Mahmood, Tanchangya, Safdar & Hussain, 2019, p. 6144). There are many energy and transportation infrastructure projects as well as highways and bridges being built as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Pakistan. The programmes' end goals are an increase in mutual understanding and business ties between China and Pakistan. Gwadar, a port in Pakistan's Balochistan province, will serve as a link between the Indian Ocean and Xinjiang, a province in western China. This is just one of many benefits that the CPEC will bring about. By 2020, CPEC projects are expected to have cost \$62 billion (Rahman, Khan, Lifang & Hussain, 2021, p. 124).



The CPEC's building phase started in 2013. Many of China's economic pledges to Pakistan have yet to be fulfilled. Rand Corporation policy analyst Eric Warner estimates that China pledged \$135 billion to Pakistan between 2001 and 2014, but only \$4 billion was actually disbursed (Anwar, 2010, p. 98). Pakistan is one of the countries along China's new Silk Road that is among the most vulnerable to financial stress due to debt, given that China currently accounts for nearly half of Pakistan's trade deficit. Recent reports have indicated that China has been constructing several new, high-security complexes at the Gwadar Deep Sea Port in Balochistan, Pakistan's westernmost province (Lintner, 2019, p. 27). Navy Marines could be stationed in Gwadar and Djibouti to protect Chinese interests abroad, according to previous discussions amongst Chinese military sources. It appears that Beijing is giving serious thought to employing Gwadar as a military base and economic hub. Since the beginning of Pakistan's nuclear programme in the 1970s, China has aided in various forms. Islamabad needs China's help to develop a nuclear weapon capable of being used on land, in the air, and at sea. According to a report published in the Dawn newspaper of Pakistan in January 2018, Chinese influence had led to the rejection of bids from local firms for several construction projects (Ul Hassan, 2020, p. 138). A high-ranking government advisor reportedly said that China provided all the necessary machinery and raw materials for the initiatives.

The fact that China's interactions with India's major neighbors have directly caused India to face challenging circumstances is hardly surprising (Shivamurthy, A.G. et al. (2022)). China has spent a long time trying to improve relations with India's neighboring countries. The expansion of Chinese power in South Asia is a major source of anxiety for India. This has far-reaching consequences for the economy and security of Indian society. When it comes to issues of national security, China's presence in India's neighborhood poses a significant threat to the country (Freeman, 2018, p. 84). For instance, the CPEC and the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) both pose a significant risk to India's national security because they are both massive infrastructure projects initiated by the Chinese government. The PLA or Chinese military would be able to enter regions more easily near the Indian border as a result of these initiatives (Deepak & Deepak, 2020, p. 101). This gives the Chinese Army a significant tactical advantage in the event of war with India. This shows how China is becoming more influential in South Asia and how the countries there see China as a regional



leader, a position India covets. The preceding discourse suggests that China is steadily expanding its regional influence. This has led to a decline in India's once uncontested control of the Indian Ocean (Yu, 2017, p. 354). China's current efforts to transform from a regional power to a global power rely heavily on Pakistan as a hub for the construction of a network of ports, roads, pipelines, and railway lines connecting oil and gas fields in the Middle East to the megacities of East Asia.

The Growing China-Pakistan Axis

China's policies towards India have always relied heavily on Pakistan's support. China's goal is to keep New Delhi preoccupied with its entanglements in south Asia by supporting India's neighbors, in keeping with China's traditional strategy of taking an indirect approach to national security. China and Pakistan's natural alliance is based on shared anti-Indian sentiment, which was solidified during their respective wars in 1962 and 1965. China and Pakistan agreed to a border in 1963, and as part of that deal, China received 5180 square kilometers of Kashmir. As a result of this pact, policymakers in India's rival nation of China began to express grave concerns over the growing defense ties between China and Pakistan. China and Pakistan's relationship strengthened in response to the United States' arms embargoes against Pakistan in 1965, 1971, and 1990 (McGarr, 2013).

Since the late 1990s, Pakistan has used Chinese-made components in at least half of its combat aircraft and battle tanks, causing growing unease in India. The nuclear connection between China and Pakistan has, however, been the primary source of anxiety regarding Sino-Pakistan relations. The China-Pakistan nuclear nexus emerged after Pakistan's military defeat at the hands of India, when Islamabad sought to establish nuclear deterrence against India. In response to visits to China by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1972, 1974, and 1976, China agreed to collaborate with Pakistan on the issue. It was also speculated that after India's first nuclear test in 1974, China would begin to back Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Despite China and Pakistan's denials of any cooperation in nuclear matters, there is circumstantial evidence that supports the existence of a sustained relationship between the two countries (Singh, 2008, pp. 91-92).



The exact level of Chinese support for Pakistan's nuclear programme is unclear, but US intelligence sources have claimed that Pakistan's nuclear bomb would not have been a success without Chinese assistance. Highly enriched uranium and tritium scientists, as well as a secret blueprint for a nuclear bomb, were all allegedly provided by the Chinese in the early 1980s as part of a nuclear weapons production complex (Paul, 2003, p. 25). In 1994 and 1995, China shipped 500 ring magnets for gas centrifuges, which are used to produce weapons-grade uranium and tritium, the latter of which was used to boost atomic weapon yields in 1986. In 1996, China supplied the heavy water needed to power a plutonium production reactor—a one-of-a-kind industrial furnace for melting weapons-grade uranium or plutonium into the core of a nuclear bomb. In 1983, China gave Pakistan a nuclear weapons design, and in 1996, China gave Pakistan the high-tech diagnostic tools needed to produce one or more nuclear weapons. Furthermore, and most importantly, China has helped build the Khushab reactor and has been the primary supplier of the IAEA-safe Chasma reactor and the PAAR-2 research facility in Rawalpindi, which houses a plutonium reprocessing facility (Ramana, 2011, pp. 5–6). As an adversary of India and an ally of Pakistan's military, China has used its support for Pakistan's nuclear capabilities to counterbalance India's influence in the region.

There is some speculation that China's calculations in this area reflect an effort to prevent India from being recognised as a major power and keep it instead as a regional power. India is the only country that has a chance of striking a balance. India's rise as a challenger in Asia may be stymied by China's support for anti-Indian regimes in its neighborhood, especially Pakistan. China's stronger case is that its ambitions to be the dominant power in South Asia would be threatened by India's rise to prominence as a peer competitor. If tensions between India and Pakistan continue to rise to the point where they engage in an intense and acute arms race, India will have no choice but to focus its attention on Pakistan rather than China. Constant Chinese backing for Pakistan's nuclear missile programme may help advance a military alliance between the United States and India, which would shift the regional power balance. If this occurs, however, China and Pakistan may decide to cooperate more closely on this issue, and once again, the delicate balance of power will be a key factor in determining future policy (Paul, 2003, p. 25-26).



Although military ties are important, China and Pakistan have extensive diplomatic ties as well. It would be very enlightening to investigate China's involvement in the Kargil conflict between India and Pakistan. Although China has maintained long-lasting cooperative relations with Pakistan, it is interesting to note that China's policy in times of conflict between India and Pakistan has changed from its previous stance during the conflicts between India and Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. During the Kargil conflict, China took a neutral stance, urging both Pakistan and India to refrain from using force. To avoid taking sides in the Kargil conflict, China maintained an impartial position (Tang, Li & Acharya, 2009). This abstention from taking sides in the conflict between India and Pakistan was active, rather than passive. China's foreign policy toward the entire region of South Asia emphasizes discreet and low-key interactions with regional powers. In China's view, peace between India and Pakistan is still essential to maintain stability in the South Asian region. Problems have arisen in China's South Asian policy due to the country's attempts to maintain cordial ties with both India, a regional rival, and Pakistan, a reliable ally. China's policy toward the countries of South Asia has always been one of maintaining peace and fostering friendly, cooperative relationships with them all. China's relationship with Pakistan has flourished within this policy framework because doing so benefits China. China has no major disagreements with any south Asian country except for the demarcation of its boundary with the Indian subcontinent (Rahman, 2009, pp. 159–161). Neither China nor India wants to resort to violence, so they have agreed to negotiate a peaceful solution. China's decision not to support Pakistan during the Kargil conflict was likely driven by a desire to maintain the already precarious state of Sino-Indian relations.

Pakistan Factor in Sino-Indian Relations

India's efforts to strengthen its relationship with China have been hampered by China's long-standing friendly relationship with Pakistan. Many Indians believe that the core of the Sino-Pak strategic partnership is directed solely against India, and that Beijing's approval and support of Islamabad is what has emboldened it to challenge India's dominance in South Asia. Although Beijing's partnership with India is light on concrete substance, the Chinese capital has been vocal about its desire to foster parallel relationships with Islamabad and New Delhi. A non-confrontational relationship between South Asian neighbors, according to this



new regional approach, can greatly increase China's diplomatic and security gains. According to this line of thinking, Beijing's support for the South Asian peace process is warranted (Pant, & Bommakanti, 2019, p. 836). Theories and concepts about the balance of power among states are typically derived from the experiences of western and European states; however, these are not necessarily reflective of the experiences that are common elsewhere, especially in the south Asian region. Hard balancing in a multipolar world dominated by Europe resulted in India as an imperial British power projection. The two superpowers, through hard and soft balancing, kept the military balance of power between India and Pakistan stable during the cold war's bipolar era (Thomas, 2004, pp. 304-305).

China's largest diplomatic mission in the world was opened in Islamabad on June 15, 2015 by Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Sun Weidong. Pakistan, located as it is between India and China, as well as Central Asia and the Persian Gulf, plays an important role in Indo-Pacific geopolitics. Over the years, China has tried to use Pakistan's strategic advantages to counteract its own domestic stability, secure its energy supply, and propel it to the top of the global power hierarchy. The three factors such as (i) unresolved issues between India and China; ii) suspicion of the United States' growing ties with India and misperception of Washington's initiatives for rebalance in the Asia-Pacific; and iii) concerns over the stability in China's western borders all played a role in the development of closer ties between China and Pakistan. These three factors have combined to increase China's appreciation of Pakistan's geopolitical importance and highlight the necessity of revitalizing ties between the two countries. China and India's relationship has been intricate, multifaceted, and conflicted. Both countries have increased their commercial, political, and military presence in the Indian Ocean, and India has expanded its influence into Southeast Asia, adding fuel to the fire of mutual distrust between the two regions. Growing U.S. ties with India, especially in the military and security sphere, have been a major source of concern for China.

The United States and India have released their 2015 Joint Strategic Vision with the goal of protecting free movement over the Asia-Pacific region and bolstering maritime security and overflight rights, especially in the South China Sea (Shambaugh, 2004, p. 65). The militaries of the United States and India have agreed to conduct more frequent and extensive joint exercises and to work more closely together on maritime security. The US-India Defense



Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) has introduced the possibility of co-production and co-development of weapons, adding fuel to the fire of those who believe the US is using its traditional allies to contain China. This is why China values its bilateral relationship with Pakistan so highly. Therefore, China has seen Pakistan as a reliable and strong partner in maintaining regional stability, combating violent extremism, and easing concerns over energy security. As a result, China has increased its investment in Pakistan over the past decade (Calabrese, 2014).

The joint statement released after Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz's visit to China from April 16-20, 2007, implied that the traditional friendship between the two countries now included new objectives that would improve the economic content of the relationship, including investment, trade, and energy cooperation within the framework of a bilateral agreement, and thus ensure that the relationship would bring prosperity and development to the countries involved (Kumar, 2007, p. 758). In 2013, China bought 11% of Pakistan's exports, totaling \$3 billion, making it the country's second-largest trading partner. Pakistan imported goods worth US\$11.1 billion in total, with 16% coming from China, making China the country's second largest export supplier. Since the 1960s, the relationship between China and Pakistan has been an integral part of South Asian politics. Further, it made sense for China to balance India by strengthening ties with other South Asian states bordering India, especially Pakistan, which has positioned itself as India's chief adversary for ideological and psychological reasons (Kumar, 2007, p. 759-60). The goal of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative is to connect China's economy to those of other Asian and African and Middle Eastern nations in order to forge common ground among China's trading and investment partners. Because of the increased opportunity costs of foregone trade and access to capital that are associated with conflict, as well as the creation of vested domestic interests that prefer peace over war, increased trade and financial integration tends to reduce conflict between states. In order to connect Kashgar and Pakistan's seaport of Gwadar, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative must pass through areas primarily inhabited by ethnic minorities like the Balochs in Pakistan and the Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang province. Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, where territorial claims are already contentious, lies directly in the proposed corridor's path (Hendrix 2016, pp. 24-25).



The CPEC, envisioned by Chinese Premier Li Keqiang in 2013, would stretch for more than 1,800 miles and give Pakistan access to much-required infrastructure. Despite various optimistic references from Pakistani and Chinese authorities, the CPEC is fraught with dangers and political complications (Calabrese, 2014). Threats to the CPEC from insurgent groups include Uyghurs and Balochs (Jacob, 2017, p. 62-63). Concerns about the CPEC's impact on India's sovereignty and territorial integrity have been voiced publicly by the Indian government due to the fact that it passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has significant strategic value for China, but there has been growing opposition to the project within Pakistani leadership in recent years (Calabrese, 2016; Haydarian, 2017; Baruah, 2022). India and Pakistan have been actively engaged in military conflict over the contentious issue of Kashmir on the Indian front.

Recent attacks in the Uri Sector indicate that Pakistani involvement in the Kashmir issue is likely to persist. While this may be true, India's response to the Uri attacks-a series of surgical strikes- also appears to suggest that India has the capability to counter such attacks in a much more efficient manner. But China's involvement throughout the entire spectrum of aggression by both countries and its stand that both nations work out a negotiated settlement appears to be significant. China's long-term interests in the CPEC and its energy security can be protected while India benefits from China's efforts to improve its relations with neighboring countries (Summers, 2016, pp. 1629-1630). Recently, there has been a lot of attention on China's "belt and road initiatives," which are an expansion of the country's silk road initiatives and visions from late 2013.

Everything that comes out of the burgeoning partnership between China and Pakistan, whether it be conventional weapons, nuclear engagement, the Karakoram Highway, or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, is aimed directly at India. While China sees Pakistan as a low-cost secondary deterrent against India, Pakistan sees China as an absolute guarantee of security. However, the containment of India is the primary concern for both China and Pakistan in this context (Pande, 2015, p. 21). In addition to providing Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) with weapons and ammunition, missiles, nuclear technology, and infrastructure, China has also been criticized for its apparent support of Kashmiri separatists by voting against the UNSC's designation of Jihadi groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-



Mohammed as terrorist organizations (Das, 2013, pp. 74-75). After the United States, France, and the United Kingdom gave China until April 23, 2019, to relinquish its technical hold over the issue in the UN Security Council, China appears to have been forced to change its stance in this regard. China has assured Pakistan of its full support in the event of foreign aggression, while Russia has not done so but has made it clear that it would side with China. All three countries in this alliance have the United States' influence in the South Asian region as their primary target. Since India has recently become more allied with the United States, it may encounter serious obstacles in its quest to preserve its regional sway (Thokar & Singh, 2017, pp. 63–69). As a result, India and the rest of the region may face significant threats from this strategic triangle.

At the end, it is fair to say that the People's Republic of China has always placed less importance on its ties to India than it does to the United States, Russia, or Pakistan. China, India, and Pakistan form a geostrategic triangle, and it appears that the 1960s Sino-Indian and Indo-Pak rivalries, which are now competing for influence in the south Asian region, played a role in its formation. There are three conditions that must be met for a relationship to exhibit the triangular characteristic, as mentioned before. Each of the three countries must be able to act on its own, (ii) each state's behavior toward the other two within the triangle will have consequences for the third, and (iii) the possibility of an alliance between two countries is always present. Two of the three characteristics seem to fit China, India, and Pakistan. Since the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pakistani wars, the relationship between China and Pakistan, marked by anti-Indian sentiment, has flourished at an exponential rate. This was aided in part by the two countries working together in the military and by Pakistan's nuclear programme. Apparently, improved relations between Pakistan and Russia can be attributed to the strengthening of ties between China and Pakistan. Each of these factors appears to have a major impact on Sino-Indian ties (Kaura, 2020, pp. 503-508). This includes the BCIM-EC (Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar Economic Corridor) one of many economic cooperation initiatives that China and India have launched in recent years. However, India has turned down China's invitations to participate in the CPEC, arguing that the project's crossing of POK, which is in Indian territory, violates India's sovereignty. With respect to the territorial integrity and sovereignty of a country in the region, China's participation in the



CPEC is incompatible with China's five principles for peaceful coexistence, at least from India's perspective. Regarding the Kashmir issue, China's opposition to the UNSC listing the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed as terrorist organizations appears to be a deterrent in India-China relations. New developments, however, suggest that China has been coerced into removing its technical hold on designating Masood Azhar as a global terrorist, giving India yet another diplomatic victory.

Despite Pakistan's presence in India, Sino-Indian economic relations appeared to be progressing steadily but cautiously. Relations with China appear to be a deterrent as a result of the Galwan incident in the Himalayas, which has increased skepticism of the Chinese (Marchang, 2021, pp. 250-253). The blocking of Chinese apps, increased regulation, and tariffs on Chinese imports are all indicators of worsening relations between the two Asian countries. At a time when the world is dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, China's relations with its neighbors have reached an all-time low, and some have blamed the country's expansionist and aggressive policies. India would also be watching Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan with suspicion. With the CPEC likely to come up again during Xi's visit to Pakistan, India will be keeping a close eye on the two countries' intentions. India has voiced its strong opposition to the CPEC, citing territorial concerns (since the CPEC passes through POK).

According to T.V. Paul and Eric Underwood, who argue that strategic triangles feature interdependence, the close ties of cooperation between China and Pakistan seem to meet the criteria for such a triangle. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of China's overland connectivity projects that appears to be advancing infrastructure, and which would be a significant improvement for the Chinese in terms of faster connectivity with the countries of the Middle East and Africa (Garlick, 2018, pp. 520-521). But in smaller countries like Sri Lanka, where Chinese investments in the Hambantota port have resulted in a 100-year lease for the Chinese, India has been steadily losing ground. India, in an effort to counter China's influence in the Indian Ocean and the northern fronts, should prioritize investing more in its neighbors (although difficult). The only country in the region that seems capable of challenging Chinese influence is India, which begs the question of why China is focusing its foreign policy on India when it has a more important player in the US to deal with (and it most certainly is). The Chinese may be concerned about India's leaning towards



the United States, but New Delhi has little choice but to align itself with Washington right now. If India is again questioned about why China should be at the center of its foreign policy, the answer is simple: China is the country in the region actively working to encircle, trap, and choke India.

Also, it appears that China is benefiting from the tensions between India and Pakistan in its dealings with Pakistan. Although India has not yet achieved great power status, in the last three decades it has become a more influential and powerful nation. India's status as a regional power is still judged by its ability to dominate and impose its will on its neighbors, but the country still falls short due to its weak sway over countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Geostrategic factors, such as China and Pakistan's continued role as permanent barriers to the north, and the Indian Ocean to the south, are to blame for this limitation (Kukreja, 2020, pp. 8–10). The fact that Pakistan uses attacks on India to deal with its own domestic problems is a persistent source of tension between the two countries. By providing them with a stepping stone to the Indian Ocean and a stronger position in Afghanistan, Pakistan also acts as a patron for other actors. Pakistan does not pose a direct threat to India (Menon, 2020, pp. 15–16), but it does provide a tactical diversion for the latter. India is concerned about China's growing ties to Pakistan because they will likely increase that country's military and nuclear capabilities and make it harder for India to fully commit to the CPEC.

It is possible to argue, however, that strategic rivalry, geostrategic competition, territorial disputes, and the ever-increasing influence of the dragon in India's neighborhood characterize the relationship between India and China. Pakistan has played a crucial role in aiding China's ambitions to establish its influence in the region (despite Covid-19 related problems). Finally, given that these issues take the shape of a strategic triangle, it will be interesting to see India's reaction to this situation in the broader context of the region.



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