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Pakistan's All-Weather Friend China

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan relationship, which is also known as an all-weather friendship, is a unique and enduring friendship. It has transitioned from military cooperation to economic and diplomatic collaboration, particularly within China's Belt and Road Initiative. This paper discusses the historical foundations of this special relationship as well as its strategy and regional consequences. It is characterised by deep cooperation in the field of security, economic collaboration, and a coherent attitude towards the common enemies. The relationship has been stable due to its commitment to changing the geopolitical realities through its military, financial, and diplomatic dimensions. The uniqueness of this long-term relationship can be seen by the fact that China has been helping Pakistan through its heavy investment in infrastructure, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), or military cooperation and support in international platforms. It lies at the heart of the South Asian geopolitics, power equation and India's strategic calculus. The paper also reflects on the ambitions of China in the region and beyond.

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Introduction

The Pakistan-China bilateral relationship is commonly said to be one of the best alliances in present-day geopolitics. They are identified by the trust, mutuality, strategic collaboration, and interest in each other that led to the development of the powerful relations between the two countries in the areas of military, economic, diplomatic, and technological. China is referred to by Pakistan as its iron brother, and it has benefited by viewing China as its surest ally. The region, particularly South Asia, cannot be underestimated in the implications of this long-term friendship for the stability of the region. It is also a strategic threat to neighbouring India and global powers such as the United States.

This relationship can be described as an all-weather friendship and an example of the best interstate cooperation. The two have cemented their partnership throughout the decades with regard to shared strategic interests, political backing and an increasing economic participation. The alliance that was originally established to address threats to the region, especially India, has been changed to a more multidimensional alliance that incorporates defence, infrastructure development, diplomacy and technological innovation. As the world has evolved, there has been increased significance in the relations between these two nations in ensuring the region and balance towards strategic stability in the South Asian region and beyond.

Historical Foundations of the China-Pakistan Relationship

Sino-Pakistani relations were stabilised well in the early years of the Cold War, when the geopolitical tensions between the countries were very high. In 1951, Pakistan became one of the first Muslim dominated countries to officially recognise the People's Republic of China (PRC), and it took a bold move in going against the prevailing pressure to assimilate with the Western powers, that is, the United States. It has been the basis of a long-term relationship in history and has metamorphosed into a

multidimensional cooperation concerning defence, development of infrastructure, diplomacy and technological inventions. Their relationship was characterised by one of the most notable moments, which was the Sino Indian War of 1962.

China had played a significant role in enhancing the military capabilities of Pakistan between the 1970s and 1980s, by immensely aiding it in various wars between India and Pakistan. This military alliance was crucial in those periods of tension in the region when China would supply extremely sophisticated weaponry and technological transfer. After the nuclear developments gained by India after a successful nuclear test in 1974, China also took part in assisting Pakistan to form its own nuclear weapons program. This bilateral strategic co-operation cemented their bilateral relations and shaped their relationship as the base of the regional politics of security and the counterbalancing of the Indian influence in South Asia.

Military and Strategic Cooperation

China has continuously been the largest supplier of military equipment to Pakistan. The Chinese technology and assistance to the Pakistani military forces are shared in the form of JF-17 Thunder fighter jet aeroplanes that they co-created, tanks, missiles and navy vessels. The nuclear capability in Pakistan has also been aided to a large extent by China in terms of blueprints, technical expertise and raw materials. Also, China has been helping Pakistan in intelligence sharing and counterterrorism operations, particularly concerning the Uyghur militants, who turn to the tribal areas of Pakistan as their refuge. The two also have integrated military exercises, e.g., Warrior (Army) and Sea Guardians (Navy), to enhance their interoperability. The bilateral relations are not the only ones that relate to the Chinese-Pakistani strategic partnership. Both nations are on the same page at the international forums, whereby China has asserted its veto powers numerous times in order to protect Pakistan against the sanctions of terrorism. The case in point is that until 2019, China in the UNSC vetoed India from proclaiming terrorist Masood Azhar a global threat.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

CPEC can be described by the fact that it is the most ambitious aspect of the relationship between China and Pakistan. This is one of the flagship projects of China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was initiated in 2015. It is estimated that CPEC would be worth 60 billion. They are the highways, railways, energy stations, and special economic zones (SEZs). Gwadar Port, which is one of the areas of particular interest, is an important linking point of western China and the Arabian Sea. The main reasons for CPEC are to ensure that China has easy access to West Asia and the Arabian Sea, boosting Pakistan's infrastructure and solving its energy crisis. CPEC is also likely to lead to even greater economic integration in the region. Despite the fact that CPEC is viewed as a game-changer by Pakistan, critics observe that CPEC has raised the issue of rising debt and economic reliance on China, a factor that has led to the emergence of the issue of neo-colonialism. The potential pros and cons of CPEC should also be considered to provide both sides of the coin with regard to the project and its strategic implications.

Diplomatic Alignment

Pakistan and China have had positive relations that have been anchored on the big scale cooperation both at the global and regional levels. Pakistan has been constantly in support of China on delicate matters such as Taiwan, Xinjiang and Hong Kong since they are central to the national interests of Beijing. In its turn, China is offering Pakistan endless support in terms of the Jammu and Kashmir-related problem and justifies the presence of Islamabad in the various international organisations, including the United Nations Security Council and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). China has availed its veto power several times to protect Pakistan against international censure, particularly when it is placed under the terrorism sanctions. The collaboration on the basis of trust forms a strong stance of Pakistan in the global platform and enhances the Chinese hold on South Asia.

Existing Geo-Political Challenges

Despite the fact that their coalition is rather powerful, there are still several challenges that exist, such as the Safety of Chinese nationals, Domestic resistance to CPEC, and Economic imbalance. The other problems that directly impact it include the India-China-Pakistan triangle and the U.S.-China rivalry. The issues of security were raised after attacks on Chinese workers, particularly in Balochistan and Karachi. The Baloch separatists and the local groups have protested against economic marginalisation that they feel has been caused by CPEC. The trade relation is highly imbalanced in favour of China, which is contributing to the trade deficit in Pakistan. The worsening of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship has led to Islamabad's movement to Beijing, making Pakistan a key player in the more general U.S.-China competition. Their interests overlap despite the withdrawal of the U.S. because both nations have an interest in the stability in Afghanistan, as well as connectivity in the region.

China's Stand on the Kashmir Issue

A restrained pragmatism has defined the Kashmir issue, whereby China approaches the issue in terms of its own strategic interests and the geopolitics of the region. And though Beijing speaks of being neutral and encourages dialogue between India and Pakistan, it appears on most occasions to be on the Pakistan side. China had first viewed the Kashmir issue as bilateral, but later shifted its stance in the light of the Sino-Indian war in 1962, which occupied the Aksai Chin region. In 1963, it was further entrenched through a border agreement with Pakistan. China assists Pakistan in the global arenas, especially after the repeal of Article 370 in August 2019 in India, which denied Jammu and Kashmir its special status. In addition, CPEC, which becomes a part of the Belt and Road Initiative, crosses Gilgit-Baltistan, which is a part of the territory controlled by Pakistan, but allegedly occupied by India. China continues to invest in India despite its complaints, which could empower its grip on the control of Pakistan.

China's Stand on Terrorism

The Chinese attitude towards terrorism is reflected in the domestic security concerns, world image and geopolitical interests. The PRC policy against terrorism is discriminatory as well as aimed at political and economic objectives, despite

the fact that it officially condemns terrorism and encourages nations to cooperate in combating the terrorism menace. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region has priority in China, and terrorist activity is blamed on the Uyghur separatist movements, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). It is the stability that makes the government rationalise such enormous actions as mass surveillance and arresting over a million Uyghurs in detention camps. Nonetheless, it relies on strategic alliances with Pakistan, and when India attempted to describe the terrorist leader Masood Azhar as a terrorist at the UN was only saved by China.

Pakistan Supports China in SAARC

The project to be discussed is the CPEC by China, and a part of the BRI, which was opened in 2015, and that will benefit Pakistan. It connects Xinjiang province of China with the Gwadar port of the Arabian Sea with a length of about 3000 kilometres. The CPEC will transform the perspective of the Pakistani economy and strengthen the role of China in South Asia. The project extends to roadways, railways, pipelines and energy projects and enables quicker transport through the Gwadar bypass, bypassing the use of the longer paths like that of the Strait of Malacca. It is a strategic strength to the two nations; China will have direct access to the Arabian Sea, and Pakistan will be guaranteed a more formidable alliance with China against other regional rivals, especially India. The challenges facing CPEC are not without faults; some of them involve security, among others, political risks and the concern whether the project would be sustained on its debt. India's stand against the corridor is grounded on the fact that it will be passing through Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, and this makes the situation more complicated in terms of geopolitics.

Conclusion

The relations between China and Pakistan have been an indomitable relationship that has existed for seventy years and evolved to become a multidimensional, strategic and robust relationship despite geopolitical changes. The friendship is founded on realpolitik, which is ideologically or emotionally expounded very frequently. As China is becoming adamant to expand its influence to the West and as Pakistan is eager to ease its isolation in the region, the strength of the union between the two is strong, albeit with some implicit undertones. The alliance is strategic and should be viewed with keen strategic consideration by both India and the rest of the international community as it continues to shape the security and development trends in South Asia.

Many people view the Pakistan-China bilateral relationship as the pillar of the geopolitics of the region in South Asia and broader Asia. What originally started as a matter of strategic need has evolved into a general coalition that touches on defence, economics, diplomacy and cultural exchange. The relationship has not been very easy, but due to common national interests and long-term strategic vision, it has been strong. Undoubtedly, the two nations have a very delicate geographical proximity. Their co-operation will definitely have a serious impact on the future of South Asia.

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