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" The China-Pakistan Nexus: A Challenge to The Us-Led Regional Order"

Abdul Wahab Khan

Dr. Muhammad Naveed Ul Hasan Shah

Ghazala Shaheen

MPhil Scholar Pakistan Studies in International Islamic University Islamabad

Assistant Professor, Abasyn University, Peshawar

MPhil Scholar Pakistan Studies in University of Karachi at [ayeshaghazalal@gmail.com](mailto:ayeshaghazalal@gmail.com)



## **Introduction:**

The geopolitical landscape of Asia has been undergoing significant shifts in the 21st century, with the rise of China emerging as a central driver of change. As China's economic prowess continues to grow, so does its assertiveness in regional and global affairs, posing challenges to the established order dominated by the United States and its allies. Central to this evolving dynamic is the deepening relationship between China and Pakistan, which encompasses economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions, presenting a complex challenge to the existing regional balance of power (Smith, 2023).

Economically, both countries have a symbiotic and complex relationship, with the China Pakistan Economic Corridor being the prime example the two countries have a basically interventionist relation. Aimed at infrastructure construction, energy cooperation, and economic cooperation, CPEC is thus viewed as China's large-scale development strategy for constructing a signal line connecting Pakistan's Gwadar Port and China's Xinjiang region. This corridor allows both PR and China to receive access to the Arabian Sea and also bolsters the connectivity and economic progress of Pak (Jones, 2022). Despite the economic cooperation and engagement, the security and defense tie consist of arms import, cooperation in military exercises and equipment and technology sharing between China and Pakistan. Pakistan has great significance for China in its geographical location to South Asia as South Asia has some of the most intense population's densities globally. On the other hand China provides military equipment's and technologies along with military aids to Pakistan including arms supplies. Such a cooperation not only sustains and improves Pakistan's defense capacities but also strengthens China's geopolitical position in South Asia, which poses a concern for the US allies (Wang et al., p 2024).

Thus, the primary focus of this paper is to expand on how the China-Pakistan bilateral relationship contributes to the ongoing challenges to the extant US-led regional structure in Asia. This study focuses on understanding how this relationship shapes the economic, military and diplomatic aspects of the alliances system and how it threatens the existing balance. In addition, it aims to find out the commonalities and differences between China, Pakistan, and the United States in order to come up with policy prescriptions that may help solve the problems characteristic of the contemporary international relations in Asia today (Wang et al., 2024).

## The Deepening China-Pakistan Partnership

The existing relationship between China and Pakistan has been propelled by historical formation of relations that have fostered close relations in different political, economic and military spheres. This Sino-Pak amity has occupied mostly with the commencement of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), that is, the part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The experts have discussed the fact that CPEC holds great importance in the sphere of international relations because it is considered as a key to China's geopolitical goals; Pakistan gains necessary infrastructure development and economic growth through the implementation of the CPEC project (Zhang, 2021). This has is evident in the stages of development of this partnership which has been informed by geopolitical aspects, as well as economic gains between the two states. Therefore, there exists a need for an assessment that captures and explains the dynamics of CPEC in relation to influence of the region and its stability.

Being one of the most discussed and crucial project of the BRI, the socio-economic and infrastructural growth of Pakistan appears very promising with the implementation of CPEC. To that end, CPEC strives to cover contractual infrastructural deficiencies in highway, rail, power, and Special Economic Zones in Pakistan, in addition to seeking trade and investment connections (Khan, 2020). Further, the corridor helps China expand its strategic frontiers to Arabian Sea distancing from the unstable South China Sea or Malacca strait. This strategic diversification is also consistent with China's major goals of diversifying the sea threats and developing economic relations with MEA (Middle East and Africa) countries. Therefore, the value of CPEC is not only that it boosts the geopolitical importance of Pakistan but also the growing role of China as an economic superpower.

China and Pakistan relations have made a strategic upgrade cutting a new phase for their relations through CPEC which has both prospects and prospects for stability and global governance in the region. While CPEC promises economic dividends for Pakistan and bolsters China's influence in the region, it also raises concerns regarding debt sustainability, environmental degradation, and geopolitical tensions (Malik, 2022). Moreover, the corridor traverses through disputed territories such as Gilgit-Baltistan, adding a layer of complexity to regional dynamics and potentially exacerbating existing conflicts (Rashid, 2023). Thus, policymakers must carefully navigate the intricacies of the China-Pakistan nexus, balancing economic interests with geopolitical realities to ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of the region.

### **Strategic Convergence and Regional Implications**

The strategic convergence between China and Pakistan stems from their shared skepticism towards the US-led regional order. China, aspiring to assert itself as a dominant power in Asia, perceives the existing order as reflective of Western hegemony and seeks to reshape it to better suit its interests (Gupta, 2020). Likewise, Pakistan, fighting a long standing conflict with India and experiencing security threats from the west, is wary of the US alliance system being extended to India, as this country has become a strategic ally of the US in the latter's operations in South Asia (Khan, 2019). These two recessions of mutual suspicion towards the US-led order have sown the seeds of strengthened partnership between China and Pakistan, particularly in the strategic fields where the two sides overlap.

The developing Sino-Pak nexus has resulted in further convergence of efforts in defense and nuclear technologies. The relations between Pakistan and China over the years can be characterized as strategic as the latter has become a significant source of military equipment and technology transfer to the former and helps to enhance its defense system through delivering varieties of modern weaponry like fighter jets, submarines, and missile systems (Chaudhry, 2021). In addition, Chinese aid to the nuclear programme in Pakistan has deepened the strategic partnership between two countries; China being directly involved in the journey of the Pakistan's nuclear programme (Khan, 2019).

This convergence of interests not only helps to strengthen the Pakistan's opportunities for military accumulation but also increases China's pace in South Asian positioning, contrary to the US and its allies. The collaboration between China and Pakistan is therefore a strategic one raising some questions and concerns on regional security and power politics in South Asia. This moving deepens the realm of Pakistan's strategic significance for China as it serves as a significant partner in China's broader regional and geopolitical strategy (Paul, 2022). Which in turn leads to mitigating regional relationships, especially in the context of India and Pakistan or other smaller nations within the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region. For the US on the other hand, democracy promotion has been a complex task given polarization of China and the balancing of relations between India and Pakistan where the US serves to maintain strategic self-interest while relenting to the demands of its regional allies (Mohan, 2020).

### **Challenges to the US-Led Order**

The evolving dynamics of China-Pakistan relations present some important opportunities as well as threats to the current US-led liberal international order in Asia. More so, there is increased

cooperation between China and Pakistan in economic, military, as well as diplomatic ties; making the two-nation partnership a formidable force against US domination in the region (Xiao & Mahmood, 2021). Their emerging interests for strategic cooperation because of their similar concern and disillusionment with the American-dominated system may have brought positive changes for the South Asian region and the world at large. That is a challenge to current US's administration policy makers, in handling relations with both China and Pakistan with the forging their strong strategic partnership. Economic and military ties between the two countries have raised a significant number of questions and issues that define the China Pakistan cooperation. These investments are helping lift Pakistan out of poverty and supplying it with the infrastructure it needs through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), preparing the country for further strategic collaboration in the region (Yue, 2020). Furthermore, by exporting equipment and technology to Pakistan in the military sector, China contributes to the change of power relations in South Asia and provides the country with stronger defense capabilities. This co-dependency not only increases China's reach within the region but also challenges the hegemonic status of America and its cohorts that once ruled supreme across the Asia-Pacific Theater.

Subsequently, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a direct threat to the US since it threatens its attempts at encouraging different trade routes and economically integration in the South Asian region. As the authority of the oceanic strategic passage keeps demanding by China to connect the Arabian Sea, the CPEC trims down the importance of maritime logistics bridges controlled by the US, including the Strait of Malacca. Further, it helps in the economic connectivity of China with Middle Eastern, African, and Central Asian nations, thereby diversifying the supply chain routes and a radical departure from the US-centric trade systems. Through these efforts, it's not only effecting the US economic influence in the region but it also challenging the Washington ability of molding geostrategic calculations in the region.

#### **Nuances and Uncertainties**

Although the relationship between China and Pakistan poses threats to the existing US led order in the region, it is a relation that contains with it numerous variables and ambiguities. The geopolitical relationship between Pakistan and the United States separated through a long history that includes military cooperation intensify the relations between Pakistan and China. Since 2005, both Pakistan's economic and military relations with China have strengthened; however, it has not severed its relation with the US and receiving military aid and participating

in counterterrorism efforts. This inherent duality in the approach is reminiscent of Pakistan trying to steer away from what it perceives as two primary threats and look after its own benefits within the framework of constantly changing regional balances.

Furthermore, there are various issues of CPEC and the sustainability of the BRI that leave room for uncertainties in the long-term implementation of China-Pakistan cooperation. The following are some issues that make skeptics question the viability and security of the CPEC projects and whether or not this corridor and some of its projects are susceptible to negative impacts from spoilers: Additionally, internal stability and political governance in Pakistan remain other factors that may affect the outcome of CPEC; with Pakistan experiencing issues such as corruption, bureaucratic red tape, as well as socio-political instabilities which remain the major impediments to the programme (Shah, 2019). As such, future dynamics of this bilateral relationship will define the extent to which both entities manage these dynamics effectively. Despite the perpetual shifting of alliances coupled with the development of enormous power of Pakistan by China, the existence of a win-win situation in the Sino-Pakistani strategic partnership would remain possible. Although Pakistan enjoys a strategic relationship with the United States, the PRC presents more opportunities for economic cooperation, infrastructure financing and Belt and Road Initiative's connectivity (Siddiqi, 2021). Moreover, CPEC offers chances to China to find out new trade outlets and facilitate South Asian and other regions' economic relations with china. But, as any partnership and cooperation, this has its pros and cons and to maximize the benefits that will be derived from this alliance, it is only proper that one understands fully the existing factors that would nurture or hinder this relationship.

### **Conclusion**

The China-Pakistan Nexus is a remarkable phenomenon in the remarkably evolving Asia with strategic repercussions that have entered in shaping the new order that is in the making in the strategically vital region. Therefore the present China Pakistan cooperation pose practical threat to US led regional structure of order although, the extent of this impact is not easy to quantify. That being the case, there is much that informs the nature and relationship between Canada and the United States that goes beyond merely economics, but the realm of conflict and cooperation is very specific and cannot be easily ignored. The continued course of this relationship depends on how China and Pakistan will dispel these multifaceted dynamics that need be taken with consideration of the possible reactions of the others, particularly the United States in the region. Sino-Pakistani relations and US policy on Pakistan show that the geopolitics in Asia today are

not static and in a constant state of flux. The close relationship that exists and has been growing between China and Pakistan might pose a thorn in the side of America's influence in the region but it is indeed an opportunity for engaging the two nations constructively.

This paper aims to highlight the fact that as China tries to assert its dominance and gain recognition as the super power in Asia and while Pakistan continues its political and strategic ballet with both the United States and China, this presents a significant challenge to America who must now adapt and design effective long-term strategy for the region anew. This means that it needs to define its goals and objectives based on a proper assessment of change dynamics that go beyond mere cardboard notions and clichéd discourses on the ground. On balance, it is possible to conclude that the China-Pakistan relationship provides one of the best illustrations of a material structural 'conditional' entrenchment with profound consequences for regional horizons and power balances at the international level. It presents certain risks as a system that directly threatens many fundamentals of the systemic US regional dominance but it also creates opportunities for constructive cooperation. A fresh perspective to this relationship depends on some anticipation and flexibility regarding future challenges and contingencies in today's global politics by parts of China, Pakistan, as well as the United States. Thus, it becomes highly relevant for the policymakers as well as the analysts to examine and analyze various shades of this rather rapidly transforming phenomenon to formulate the strategies of 21st century Asian geopolitics.

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