



China – Pakistan Nexus and India’s National Security

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan nexus is a long-standing strategic relationship between the two countries that has grown in strength and intensity since the 1950s. This relationship has far-reaching implications for India's national security. First, it explores the impact of the China-Pakistan nexus on India's national security and provides suggestions for India to counter the effects of this relationship. Then it proceeds to analyze the two countries' military, economic and diplomatic ties. This paper further examines how India can respond to the China-Pakistan nexus, focusing on enhancing its economic, military, and diplomatic capabilities and improving its relations with other regional powers. Finally, it discusses the future of the China-Pakistan nexus and its potential implications for India's national security.

Key Words: China-Pakistan Nexus, Strategic Relationship, National Security, Regional Powers.

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1. ORIGIN AND CONTOURS OF CHINA PAKISTAN NEXUS

When Pakistan supported the outreach between the US under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and China under Mao and Zhou Enlai, the natural diplomatic goodwill between the two countries started to emerge. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, a friendship formed between the two nations. One of the fundamental cornerstones was collaboration in the nuclear energy sector, especially when India conducted its nuclear test in 1974. **One of the most significant bilateral ties in the world right now is the one between Pakistan and China. China has been a critical ally of Pakistan since the Cold War and has regularly provided the country with economic, military, and diplomatic support.** The two countries have also cooperated in nuclear technology, energy, infrastructure, and science and technology. Pakistan has benefited immensely from Chinese investment in its infrastructural projects like - the energy and military sectors, and both have signed several agreements to strengthen their relationship further. The relationship between China and Pakistan is an apt example of the cultural and political divergence between the two nations, an association of mutual dependence that has impacted the strong alliance signifying severe security implications for India.

The core of China-Pakistan relations is the military, and the army's top leaders are obsessed with nuclear weapons. Chinese collaboration with Pakistan's atomic energy program has ultimately led to Pakistan achieving a nuclear status signalling its enhanced military capability. It is obvious that stopping India's growth is a shared goal of China and Pakistan. They have used various means to do so in the bygone years. They are still pursuing by forming strategic partnerships, opposing India in international forums, and using Pakistan and other standards and measures to pressurize India to accept China's demands. The ever-increasing China-Pakistan nexus will indeed affect India as it is emerging as a stable power with economic and military capabilities that cannot be ignored. The recent uptick in Indo-Pak tension primarily emanates from China's role in Pakistan, which helps perpetuate its claim to be a leading nation and counterbalance India's rise.

The ever-increasing all-weather cooperation between China-Pakistan has undoubtedly enhanced the threat to India. The CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) has cemented its strategic and territorial interests. With its armed soldiers deployed on our northern, eastern, and western borders, China is actually seeking to straddle India with the flow of military and economic help it is providing to Pakistan. It puts China in a position to get involved in Kashmir and the surrounding area and raises the genuine possibility of a 'two-front' conflict. From India's perspective, both China and Pakistan represent potential dangers. It must be remembered that Pakistan and China have had the only 'all-weather strategic partnership' since 2010.

India has been encouraged to take geopolitical risks by China's extensive participation in Pakistan through the CPEC. India asserted that the CPEC breaches the disputed areas of Gilgit-Baltistan and Kashmir's sovereignty. The Kashmir problem is seen differently in both India and Pakistan. In contrast to India, which sees Kashmir as a representation of its secularism and composite nationalism, Pakistan views the Kashmir problem as more of an ideological than a geographical disagreement. After a long time, **India has revoked Art 370 (Kashmir's special position) and Art. 35A, which has given impetus to the militant proxies in Kashmir, has "highlighted as a tri-lateralization of the dispute over Kashmir between India, Pakistan and China" and added a**



"new edge to the strategic China-Pakistan nexus against India". China has always supported Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir issue in the past, and there is no good reason to see a change in the future.

Nevertheless, China, notably its increasing axis with Pakistan, was another reason the Modi Government changed the constitutional status of J&K. In the last ten years, China has frequently used the J&K card against India. China encouraged the insurrections in the Naga and Mizo regions and instructed its 'all-weather' partner Pakistan to fight for India through a proxy.

Despite the global economic downturn, China has been able to maintain its development rate, and it is also firmly projecting that expansion into the strategic sphere. With cooperative ventures that manufacture weapons ranging from fighter planes to guided missile frigates and assistance with Pakistani space and nuclear programs, China has emerged as Pakistan's leading defense supplier.¹ The improvement of Sino-Indian ties, the end of the Cold War, and Pakistan's position as a frontline state in the war on terror following 9/11 are just a few of the regional and global geostrategic developments that China and Pakistan have endured. Especially on the issue of J&K, China always chose to stand by Pakistan. China disregarded India's national security and sovereignty concerns on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the disputed region of Gilgit-Baltistan, and Pakistan's claim over these areas by launching the CPEC and making large investments.

In order to help Pakistan overcome its energy crisis and stabilize its ailing economy, China sponsors many initiatives there. China's aggression in the Indian Ocean Region has been influenced by a number of factors, including the new Indo-Pacific order, the need for the region to ensure its energy security and continue fuelling its growth, which defines its foreign policy and international leverage, and third, the establishment of new and alternative institutions with IOR countries, which allows China to demonstrate its presence and influence from the China Sea to the Indian Ocean.

Moreover, the maritime danger is increased by China's naval base in Djibouti. While the geopolitical, diplomatic, economic, military, and nuclear ties between China and Pakistan are fairly well known, as is their collaboration in the development of weapons systems, India's maritime security is increasingly at risk due to this cooperation. It is necessary to highlight cooperation on submarines and unmanned underwater vehicles in addition to cooperatively producing frigates (UUVs). Imagine China continues to give Pakistan these tools and weapons. In that case, they will surely increase the maritime security concerns for India's western region coast, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean Region. In the event that hostilities between India and Pakistan break out, they have also highlighted the possibility of Pakistan receiving ever-increasing Chinese help, such as air force fighter aircraft.

China will continue to work to isolate India, stifle its rapid growth, and increase Chinese military dominance in our neighbourhood. India must understand that ever-growing relations between China and Pakistan on topics like Jammu and Kashmir are impeding its demand that people like Masood Azhar and Zaki-ur-Rahman be classified as international terrorists, among

¹P.K.S. Namboodiri, "China-Pakistan nuclear axis", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 6, No. 7, October 1982, pp. 407-47.

other things. The Doklam Issue led to an expansion of Chinese military presence on the Indian border, which is currently visible in Ladakh and Tawang. This was caused by the convergence of China and Pakistan's interests on strategic, military, and border concerns. China could open hostilities through Pakistan, creating a "two-front war"² situation for India.

These three nations are involved in intricate alliances that place Pakistan and China against India. Over the past 50 years, a strategic alliance has grown between China and Pakistan. Because no other country has given China the type of strategic heft and politico-economic leverage that China has, China is Pakistan's strongest supporter on the international stage.

Sajid Mir, an Al Qaida and LeT (Lashkar-e-Taiba) terrorist who was one of India's most wanted in connection with the 2008 Mumbai attacks, was just detained in 2022 due to China's exercise of its veto power in the UN Security Council. Prior to this, China prevented the terrorist organization's LeT and JeM (Jaish-e-Mohammed) from naming Abdul Rehman Makki and Abdul Rauf Azhar, who were classified by the United States as terrorists. **On 17th January 2023, the United Nations security council declared Abdul Rahman Makki, a global terrorist. This move of the UNSC has been hailed and appreciated by the Government of India.** The Surgical Strike in Uri Sector (2016)³, the Doklam standoff (2017)⁴ and the airstrike in Balakot⁵ have portrayed a strong and proactive Indian response to the Pakistani and Chinese belligerence. Even a casual observer can see that there has been a clear strategic change in the ties between India, China, and Pakistan. A defense agreement was struck by China in 2020 between the People's Liberation Army and the Pakistani Army.

China and Pakistan have long been hostile against India. Everything has stayed the same in their approach. Pakistan always boosts China's position on disputed issues, like the South China Sea, Taiwan, Tibet and Xinjiang province. Following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, China has seen a chance to use Pakistan to gain influence and resources in Afghanistan. India has stated that the stakes have shifted and that China and Pakistan acting jointly against it will incur immediate consequences that are far greater than they have in the past. Action-oriented thinking has been used in India. Rhetoric and 'dossier warfare' are no longer used. A persistent effort has been

² Army Prepared for two and half front war General Rawat <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/army-prepared-for-two-and-a-half-front-war-gen-Rawat/article18867921.ece>

³ 4 Hours choppers and 38 Kills: How India avenged Uri Attack <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/army-conducted-surgical-strikes-on-terror-launch-pads-on-loc-significant-casualties-caused-dgmo/articleshow/54579855.cms>.

⁴ The Doklam Stando Takeaways for India <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/doklam-stando-the-takeaways-for-india/>

⁵ Balakot How India planned IAF Strike in Pakistan and Inside Story <https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/cover-story/story/20190325-balakot-airstrikes-pulwama-terror-attack-abhinandan-varthaman-narendra-modi-masood-azhar-1478511-2019-03-15>.

made to undermine India and Indian interests in every manner imaginable, including through proxy, conventional, and hybrid conflicts. The nexus actively works against Indian interests throughout the whole range of contemporary conflict.

2. CHINA - PAKISTAN NEXUS: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Excellent cordial connections between Pakistan and China have grown and been even stronger over time. China's primary geopolitical objective in South Asia is to use Pakistan as a proxy to constrain India as a rival. India continues to be very concerned about China's expanding economic and security ties to Pakistan and their unholy alliance since these ties would inevitably weaken India's regional dominance. Concerns have also been raised about India's inability to effectively resist the hybrid threats that it confronts as a result of this cooperation between China and Pakistan.

For contextualizing Sino-Pak strategies, it is crucial to consider the changing nature of Sino-US relations. In the beginning, The US was the first to have established peaceful relations with Pakistan, but the ulterior motive with which the US provided financial aid and support had its limitations, specifically in affecting the narrative and Pakistan's policy on counterterrorism. The US relegates other nations to the backstage to establish a preponderance of its power. Despite spending billions on military aid and economic support, the United States has been unable to exert the type of influence it wants on Pakistan. Pakistan cites years of American diplomatic manipulation and neglect as the reason why it views China as a more trustworthy and valuable friend than the United States. China continues to have a close connection with Pakistan and sees that relationship as a key tool for both containing Indian influence in the area and assisting China's drive for geographic and marine access to increase its strength. China-Pakistan partnership follows the realism paradigm by forming a de facto alliance against India. Additionally, China sees some conflict between India and Pakistan as enhancing China-Pakistan ties. In this regard, the nuclear alliance between China and Pakistan followed India's nuclear test in 1974. The interpretation of the China-Pakistan atomic relations can be made from the traditional realist point of view with "Balance of power"⁶ as its core conception. Beijing's objectives for providing Pakistan with materials and technology stemmed mostly from Chinese concerns over the balance of power in the area. They are a component of China's attempt to pursue a containment strategy in its protracted conflict with India.

Pakistan serves as China's land border with the Gulf and West Asia. China has gained commensurate maritime access with a possibility of surging into the Indian Ocean through Gwadar port. A third of the world's oil supply goes through the Strait of Hormuz, which is only 180 nautical miles from Gwadar, which is located on the Arabian Sea in Pakistan's Balochistan region. It provides access to inexpensive road routes through Pakistan into western China and Central Asia, as well as a good site to watch ships going through the Strait of Hormuz from the Persian Gulf. The port is a key location for CPEC. China always refers to Karachi as a "naval base" and Gwadar port as a "logistics base"!

⁶ The Heritage Foundation, Lisa Curtis and Derek Scissors, "The limits of China-Pak alliance", "Nuclear and ballistic missile cooperation"

Moreover, Gwadar also offers a staging area for launching missiles against enemy ships which have been a serious concern for Japanese, Indian, US, and Malaysian SLOCs in the region. Gwadar offers geo-strategic and geo-economic pivots to both Pakistan and China.

India has always had difficult political relations with China and Pakistan. It has fought wars with both nations and deals with issues that are comparable to those of both nations, such as disputed boundaries, competition over natural resources, and the danger of Islamic militancy. India continues to be seen as Pakistan's main danger, and this perspective is reflected in its foreign policy. The clandestine nature of Sino-Pak relations has promoted a culture of mistrust and disbelief in the minds of Indians. First, India is concerned about claims that China wants to build military bases in Pakistan and the intelligence sharing, military technology, and defense collaboration between its nuclear-armed neighbours. India is concerned about China's efforts to secure commerce and energy supply channels in Central Asia and the Indian Ocean because it can see the Chinese constructing a string of pearls that would encircle their nation.

The China-Pak strategic convergence in maritime dimensions opened a new gambit against India. China has gone out of its way to countries in India's periphery, like Myanmar, Bangladesh and Nepal, to employ its "String of Pearls" strategy that would substantially isolate India by strengthening Chinese trade relations with South Asian countries, thereby guaranteeing Beijing an economic influence that can easily be transposed into political and military influence. India's maritime policy must take into account how Chinese influence is growing in the Indian Ocean and work to contain Chinese ambitions. China will have the upper hand in the Arabian Sea due to the CPEC, which gives China entire control over the Straits of Hormuz through the seaport of Gwadar. In an effort to stop the India-Iran undersea pipelines that avoid Pakistani territorial authority, the oil lines' confluence in Gwadar indicates Pakistan's intention to establish itself as a key connection between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea. It is likely to adversely affect India's trade route, which is why India has started working with Iran to make the Chabahar seaport.

A different viewpoint assumes that India is developing military ties with important nations in the Indian and Pacific seas, its neighbours, and any regional Chinese activities. By acquiring access to Singapore's naval base for staging operations in the Malacca Strait to acquire strategic access, India is attempting to extend its influence from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia. **At Campbell Bay, the southernmost island of the Andaman and Nicobar chain, India officially opened NAS Baaz, the country's first naval air station. Also, it commissioned its first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant in Indian Ocean Region, enhancing its surveillance capacity in the Straits of Sunda and Lombok and Malacca.** India has also established relations with Vietnam as it offers a window to monitor Chinese naval activity in the South China Sea that serves as a strategic listening post for maritime activity east of the Malacca Strait. India recently sought to build drones by partnering with key Middle Eastern player Israel. Hence India needs to safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity by evolving a better understanding of the threats posed and thereby issuing an effective policy to counter them.

3. CONCLUSION

The Modi administration's stance with China has not failed as a result of China's most recent red rag to India. It serves as, at best, a harsh reality check and challenge. It simply serves to

emphasize the importance of India continuing its diplomatic relations with China, despite the occasional jabs that are inevitable and to be anticipated. The greatest option for India is to accelerate its economic development and modernize its military strategy. It is difficult to predict how Asia's geopolitical environment will change over the coming decades. However, a more adamant China unintentionally strengthens America's role in the region as the implicit provider of security and stability. India has made the decision to be proactive and practical. **Over the past five years, actions rather than words and dossiers have spoken. We must get ready for a lengthy journey. The focus would typically be on the regions where military force still poses a danger, and counteractions and counteroffensives would typically take place in a grey area where attribution and accountability are challenging.** The China-Pakistan nexus has further increased tensions between Pakistan and India, as the two nations have been involved in several military skirmishes.

Moreover, the presence of China in the region has allowed Pakistan to strengthen its influence and gain access to Chinese military technology, which has further increased the threat posed to India.

Current interactions between the government and the main figures in West Asia. In order to guarantee energy security, improve marine cooperation, and foster goodwill in the wider neighbourhood, it should be strengthened. The Indo-Pacific region is for India. An important defense against the Axis is the involvement of the US, Australia, Japan, and European allies. **The most significant development of 2022 reference to the China - Pak nexus was the re-coronation of Xi Jinping's third term as Chinese President of the People's Republic of China. Days before the new year officially began, China made it very clear that its stance toward India would not change.** The comprehensive China-Pakistan agreement would be preserved and strengthened via improved diplomatic and military collaboration. At the same time, China will continue to use summits and official-level meetings—which have produced few results—to maintain the appearance of courtesy in bilateral ties with India. Besides its security relationship with Pakistan, China's primary regional tools are still diplomatic and economic. The size of China's financial resources and the type of investments it makes, nevertheless, have an impact on India's stability if China decides to use them more aggressively for strategic purposes.

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