



CHINA - PAKISTAN NEXUS: IMPLICATION FOR 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 farreaching implications for India's national security. First, it explores the impact of the ChinaPakistan nexus on India's national security and provides suggestions for India to counter the effects of this relationship. Then it proceeds to analyse 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.

Origin and Contours of China Pakistan Nexus- The natural diplomatic bonhomie began in the 1970s when Pakistan facilitated the outreach between the US led by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger and China's Mao and Zhou Enlai. The bond between both countries developed over the 1970s and '80s. Nuclear energy cooperation was one of the key pillars, mainly after India tested its nuclear device in 1974. **The Pakistan-China nexus is one of the most important bilateral relationships in the world in the present scenario. 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 military relationship lies at the heart of China-Pakistan ties, and nuclear weapons lie at the soul of the army leadership. Chinese collaboration with Pakistan's atomic energy programme has ultimately led to Pakistan achieving a nuclear status signalling its enhanced military capability. It is clear that China and Pakistan both share a common objective - to prevent India's rise. 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 pressurise India to accept China's demands. The ever-increasing China-Pakistan nexus will indeed affect India 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 national and counterbalance India's rise.

The ever-increasing all-weather cooperation between China-Pakistan has undoubtedly enhanced the threat to India. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has cemented its strategic and territorial interests. With the flow of Chinese military and economic aid into Pakistan, China is veritably attempting to straddle India, with its armed forces present on our northern, eastern, and western borders. It raises the real spectre of a 'two-front' war and positions China to play a role in Kashmir and the region. Both China and Pakistan are potential threats from India's point of view. It must be kept in mind that, since 2010, Pakistan has been the only country with China with an "all-weather strategic partnership".

China's deep involvement in Pakistan through CPEC has provoked India to take geopolitical risks. India claimed the CPEC violates the autonomous status of the disputed territories of Kashmir and Gilgit - Baltistan. Both India and Pakistan have different perceptions about the Kashmir issue. From the Pakistani perspective, the Kashmir issue is more of an ideological rather than a territorial dispute, whereas India perceives Kashmir as a symbol of its secularism and composite nationalism. 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-lateralisation 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, another factor behind the Modi Government's rejigging of J&K's constitutional status was China, including its strengthening axis with Pakistan. China has increasingly played

the J&K card against India in the past decade. China fomented the Naga and Mizo insurgencies and taught its 'all-weather' client Pakistan to wage a proxy war against India.

China has been able to sustain its growth rate despite the global recession; it is also firmly projecting that growth into the strategic domain. China has emerged as Pakistan's most prominent defence supplier, with joint projects that produce armaments ranging from fighter jets to guided missile frigates and also helped in the Pakistani Space and Nuclear programme.¹ China and Pakistan have also survived many regional and international geostrategic changes, like improving Sino-Indian relations, the end of the Cold War, and post-9/11 Pakistan's role as a frontline state in the war on terror. Especially on the issue of J&K, China always chose to stand by Pakistan. By announcing the CPEC and making enormous investments, China ignored India's national threats and sovereignty issues on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the disputed area of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan's claim over these territories.

China supports many projects in Pakistan to overcome the latter's energy crises and stabilise its faltering economy. Some factors that have influenced China's aggression in the Indian Ocean Region are - first, the new world order around the Indo-Pacific; second, China needs the Indian Ocean Region to ensure its energy security and continue fuelling its growth, which defines its foreign policy and international leverage, and third, establishing new and alternative institutions with IOR countries helps China display its presence and influence from the China Sea to the Indian Ocean, reflecting its status as a significant power.

Moreover, China's Naval Base at Djibouti elevates the maritime threat. While looking closely at China - Pak bind in the strategic, diplomatic, economic, military and nuclear fields and the development of weapons systems are relatively well documented, their cooperation in the maritime domain is becoming a more significant and fatal security challenge for India's maritime security. In addition to jointly building frigates, there needs to be a mention of collaboration on submarines and Unmanned Underwater Vessels (UUVs). Suppose China continues to supply these technologies and arms to Pakistan. 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. They have also mentioned that ever-growing Chinese aid, like air force fighter aircraft, could be given to Pakistan in the event of the outbreak of hostilities with India. China's efforts to isolate India, restrict its robust rise, and expand Chinese military influence in our neighbourhood will continue. India must realise ever-increased ChinaPakistan ties on issues like Jammu & Kashmir, blocking its demand for the designation of persons like Masood Azhar and Zaki-ur-Rahman as international terrorists, Etc. The convergence of China

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-Pak interests on strategic, military and boundary issues to increased Chinese military presence on the Indian border, as presently seen in Ladakh and Tawang after the Doklam Issue. China could open hostilities through Pakistan, creating a "two-front war"² situation for India. These three countries are locked in complex relationships that pit China and Pakistan against India. The Sino-Pakistan strategic nexus is half a century old and growing stronger. China is Pakistan's biggest benefactor on the world stage because no other nation has given China the kind of strategic heft and politico-economic leverage. and Pakistan have also survived many regional and international geostrategic changes, like improving Sino-Indian relations, the end of the Cold War, and post-9/11 Pakistan's role as a frontline state in the war on terror. Especially on the issue of J&K, China always chose to stand by Pakistan. By announcing the CPEC and making enormous investments, China ignored India's national threats and sovereignty issues on Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the disputed area of Gilgit-Baltistan and Pakistan's claim over these territories. China supports many projects in Pakistan to overcome the latter's energy crises and stabilise its faltering economy. Some factors that have influenced China's aggression in the Indian Ocean Region are - first, the new world order around the Indo-Pacific; second, China needs the Indian Ocean Region to ensure its energy security and continue fuelling its growth, which defines its foreign policy and international leverage, and third, establishing new and alternative institutions with IOR countries helps China display its presence and influence from the China Sea to the Indian Ocean, reflecting its status as a significant power. Moreover, China's Naval Base at Djibouti elevates the maritime threat. While looking closely at China - Pak bind in the strategic, diplomatic, economic, military and nuclear fields and the development of weapons systems are relatively well documented, their cooperation in the maritime domain is becoming a more significant and fatal security challenge for India's maritime security. In addition to jointly building frigates, there needs to be a mention of collaboration on submarines and Unmanned Underwater Vessels (UUVs). Suppose China continues to supply these technologies and arms to Pakistan. 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. They have also mentioned that ever-growing Chinese aid, like air force fighter aircraft, could be given to Pakistan in the event of the outbreak of hostilities with India.

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designation of persons like Masood Azhar and Zaki-ur-Rahman as international terrorists, Etc. The convergence of China -Pak interests on strategic, military and boundary issues to increased Chinese military presence on the Indian border, as presently seen in Ladakh and Tawang after the Doklam Issue. China could open hostilities through Pakistan, creating a "two-front war"² situation for India.

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In 2022 China used its veto power in United Nations Security Council to put a hold on Al Qaida and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Sajid Mir, who was considered India's one of the most wanted in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Earlier, China also blocked listing US-designated terrorists Abdul Rehman Makki and Abdul Rauf Azhar from the terrorist organisation LeT and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). 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 Chinese and Pakistani belligerence. A definite strategic shift is visible to even a casual observer in the India-China-Pakistan relations. In 2020, China signed a defence pact defence and military cooperation between the Pakistan Army and the People's Liberation Army. Pakistan and China were always inimical and hostile towards India. Everything has stayed the same in their approach. Pakistan always boosts China's position on disputed issues, like Taiwan, the South China Sea, Xinjiang province and Tibet. After the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, China has now sensed an opportunity to Afghanistan for influence and resources with help from Pakistan. India has declared that the rules of the game have changed, and the costs of 'all actions against India' by China and Pakistan combined will be in quick time and much higher hither-tofore. The Indian approach has been action oriented. The days of rhetoric and 'dossier warfare' are gone. There has been a sustained campaign to harm India and Indian interests in all possible ways, including conventional, proxy and hybrid wars. The nexus is actively harming Indian interests in all possible domains of the modern-day conflict spectrum.

China - Pakistan Nexus: Implications for India-

Pakistan and China enjoy exemplary friendly ties, which have expanded and become even deeper with time. China's main geopolitical focus in South Asia is to restrain India as a competitor by using Pakistan as a proxy. China's growing economic and security relationship with Pakistan, and the unholy nexus between the two, remain a major worry for India as the growing Chinese involvement is bound to erode India's influence in the region. Another area of concern has been the lack of credible Indian deterrence to the hybrid threats that it faces as a result of such collaboration between Pakistan and China.

For contextualising 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, especially in influencing the narrative and Pakistan's policy on counterterrorism. The US relegates other nations to the backstage to establish a preponderance of its power. Even though the United States has funded billions in economic aid and military assistance, it has been unable to secure the kind of influence it desires over Pakistan. Pakistan considers China a more reliable and worthy ally than the United States, citing years of diplomatic manipulation and neglect on the part of Washington. China maintains a robust relationship with Pakistan and views a strong partnership as a valuable way to contain Indian power in the region and meet its quest to seek maritime and geographic access to bolster power. China-Pakistan partnership follows the realism paradigm by forming a de facto alliance against India. China also views a certain degree of India-Pakistan tension as advancing China-Pak relations. 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 motivations in transferring materials and technology to Pakistan derived primarily from Chinese concern about the regional balance of power. They are a part of the Chinese struggle to pursue a strategy of containment in its enduring rivalry with India.

Pakistan is China's land corridor to the Indian Ocean and line to the gulf and West Asia. China has gained commensurate maritime access with a possibility of surging into the Indian Ocean through Gwadar port. Gwadar is situated on the Arabian Sea in the Balochistan province of Pakistan, just 180 nautical miles from the Strait of Hormuz, through which a third of the world's oil supply passes. It offers a prime location to monitor shipping passing through the Strait of Hormuz from the Persian Gulf and access to cheap land routes through Pakistan into western

China and Central Asia. The port is a foremost destination in CPEC. China always refers to Gwadar port as a "logistics base" and Karachi as a "naval base"!

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

Historically, **India has had tense political relations with Pakistan and China. It has fought wars with both countries and faces similar problems: disputed borders, competition over natural resources, and the threat of Islamic militancy.** India is still regarded as the biggest threat to Pakistan – a perception reflected in its foreign policy. The clandestine nature of SinoPak relations has promoted a culture of mistrust and disbelief in the minds of Indians First, India is concerned about the sharing of intelligence, military technology and defence cooperation between its nuclear-armed neighbours and reports of China wanting to construct military bases in Pakistan. Second, India is worried about China's drive to secure energy and trade supply routes in Central Asia and the Indian Ocean, where India can witness the Chinese building a 'string of pearls that would encircle their country.

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. It is crucial that India's maritime strategy considers the expansion of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and seeks to mitigate Chinese ambitions. For India, CPEC means that China shall have the upper hand in the Arabian Sea as it will have complete control over the Straits of Hormuz through Gwadar's seaport. The convergence of oil lines into Gwadar signals Pakistani intent to emerge as a pivotal link between Central Asia and the Arabian Sea, attempting to scuttle the India-Iranian undersea pipelines that skirt Pakistani territorial control. It is likely to adversely affect India's trade route, which is why India has started working with Iran to make the Chabahar seaport.

Another line of argument presumes India is building military relations with key countries in the Indian and Pacific oceans, its neighbouring countries, and any regional Chinese initiatives. India is trying to expand its influence from Northeast Asia to Southeast Asia by gaining access to Singapore's naval facility for staging operations in the Malacca strait to gain strategic access.

India commissioned NAS Baaz, India's first naval air station, at Campbell Bay, the

southernmost island of Andaman and Nicobar. Also, it commissioned its first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant in Indian Ocean Region, enhancing its surveillance capacity in the Straits of Malacca and the Straits of Sunda and Lombok. 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.

Conclusion:

China's latest red rag to India is not a failure of the Modi government's China policy. At best, it constitutes a reality check and a challenge, a stiff one at that. It only underlines the need for India to stay engaged with China, despite the inevitable and expected brickbats from China now and then. India's best bet is to fast-track its economic growth and modernise its defence programme. How Asia's geopolitical landscape will evolve over the next decades is challenging to foresee. However, an increasingly assertive China unwittingly reinforces America's role in Asia as the implicit guarantor of security and stability. India has chosen to be proactive and pragmatic. During the last five years, actions have spoken louder than rhetoric and dossiers. We need to prepare for the long haul. The emphasis would generally be in the areas where military power remains a threat in being, and counteractions and counteroffensives are in the ambiguous region where attribution and accountability are difficult. The China-Pakistan nexus has further increased tensions between India and Pakistan, as the two countries 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.

The Government's current engagement with the key powers in West Asia. It should strengthen to ensure energy security, increase maritime cooperation and enhance goodwill in the extended neighbourhood. For India, the Indo-Pacific Region. Involving the US, Australia, Japan, and European partners is a crucial bulwark against the axis. 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. Within days of the beginning of the new year, China made clear that its attitude towards India will not change. The all-spectrum China-Pakistan compact will stay intact and further consolidate through closer diplomatic and military

coordination. At the same time, China will retain, as cosmetic window dressing, the semblance of politeness in bilateral relations with India through summits and official-level meetings, which have yielded negligible results. Besides its security relationship with Pakistan, China's primary regional tools are still diplomatic and economic. Nevertheless, the scale of its financial resources and the nature of the investments are consequential to India's stability if China chooses to deploy them more actively with strategic goals in mind.

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