

Sino-Pak Relationship in the South Asia Region

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Abstract

This study tried to examine the nature and extent of Pakistan-China relationships with a particular focus on economic, military and diplomatic ties during the Pakistan People's Party era of 2008-2013. One major objective of the study revolves around finding out the impact of these relationships in accordance with the region of South Asia. The current research is based on qualitative research inquiry with a focus on descriptive and exploratory research designs. The participants of the current study were selected through purposive and sequential sampling techniques. The study finds the relationship between Pakistan and China was very significant and strong right from the beginning of the mutual relationship between both countries. This research also found that the role of CPEC and enhancement in military relations marks the key areas which helped in accelerating the ties between the two countries.

Key Words:

Pakistan, China, South Asia,
Bilateral relation, CPEC

Introduction

Bilateral relations have been an important aspect of theory and practice when it comes to international relations and peace studies. The world has shifted from bipolar to uni-polar and current trends show that it has shifted to multi-polar where different regions have gained much importance in line with the military and strategic policies. In the backdrop of a multi-polar world, the importance of bilateral ties between different countries has increased and experts from different disciplines analyze the impact of bilateral relations on the region and global politics. Research scholars from different disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science and international relations look into the impact and processes of bilateral relations among different countries. The major examples of such bilateral relations and their impact on global as well as regional politics are the relationships between US-Russia, US-UK, US-Japan and US-China relations. These relations not only shape the politics and significance of the region but also of the world (Hibbs, 2010).

In the same way, the bilateral relation between different regional powers in South Asia is also very important and shapes regional as well as global politics. In the current era, the relationship between China and Pakistan is on the rise with particular focus on economic development and ties between both countries. The emergence of CPEC is at the core of the relationship between both countries encompassing the economic, social, military and educational relationships between both countries. This increase in the relationship between Pakistan and China has many repercussions not only for both countries but also for the region of South Asia. The strategic importance of South Asia is an eye-opener due to the presence of India, Pakistan and China hence ties between China and Pakistan are of prime importance (Javed, 2016). However, in the current times, the stronger ties between Pakistan and China have triggered regional as well as global politics. Regional powers such as India and Iran and global powers such as Russia and the USA are closely looking at these relationships (Rana, 2015).

Objectives of the study

This study is of prime importance as the relationship between Pakistan and China is on the rise and scholars from different disciplines are eyeing these relationships and conducting empirical research to address different issues, misconceptions and implications of these relations. Empirical studies are being conducted on the nature of the relationship between China and Pakistan and how different areas are being affected by these relations hence conducting research on the implications of Pakistan.

This is the right time to conduct research on this field area as both regional and global powers are closely looking at these relations. These relations are also at their peak right after 2008 and after the start of the CPEC. So, it is the prime and right time to assess the relationship between China and Pakistan.

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Methods and Materials

The researcher used the qualitative research inquiry for the current study. This type of inquiry is finalized on the basis of the objectives of the study. The objectives of the study pertain to finding an in-depth understanding of Pak-China relations and how these ties have impacted the region of South Asia. Such objectives are not related to any causative variables and their relationships hence qualitative research inquiry is most suited for such topics and objectives (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

On the same token, the qualitative inquiry enables the researcher to get an in-depth understanding of the nature of the relationship between Pakistan and China with varying details. The nature of the relationship is quite wide ranging from diplomatic to social, economic and multi-relationships which can be investigated through qualitative inquiry in a better way. Hence, keeping in view the objectives and scope of the study that the researcher wants to investigate qualitative research inquiry is most suited and appropriate.

In addition to the qualitative research technique, the current study is based on a descriptive research design. The idea behind using descriptive research design is to describe the nature of the relationship between Pakistan and China.

Early Years of Sino - Sino-Pakistan Relationship

China and Pakistan have been enjoying a healthy bilateral relationship since last century. At the time of partition, Pakistan needed a strong ally that could help her politically and economically against India. So soon after independence, Pakistan established diplomatic relations with the United States. Pakistan had to be part of SEATO and CENTO to get more and more advantages from the US. At the same time, Pakistan also established diplomatic relations with China but at that time their interaction was minimal due to the strong influence of the US. China was not much stronger in the mid-fifties than it could be compared with the US. But with the passage of time, the priorities changed and the US started to treat both Pakistan and India in the same way. It provided an opportunity for Pakistan to look for another option, especially after the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965. The US did not provide help to Pakistan during this war which hurt Pakistani feelings (Shamsi et al, 2019). The uniqueness of the Pakistan and China relations is based on mutual trust and respect. China and Pakistan have many common interests in India is one of them. The whole of their major security and defence cooperation is based on the view of India (Hassan, 2018).

On the other hand, China already had unstable relations with India due to the Sino-Indian War of 1962. Due to this enmity, China also supported Pakistan against India in the war of 1965. This was the first important time that both Pakistan and China gave special importance to this bilateral relationship (Hassan, 2018). Although Pakistan and China had established a bilateral relationship since the mid-fifties, it was just a formality. The real nature of the bilateral relationship flourished after the boundary agreement in 1963 and the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965 (Shamsi et al., 2019).

The diplomatic relations started in 1950 between Pakistan and India. But it was so early that both Pakistan and China took it for granted because at that time Pakistan did not pay much attention to China due to US influence. Later, the military assistance started in the sixties when China engaged in war with India and later Pakistan. This was the time when both China and Pakistan supported each other through military assistance. Furthermore, strategic closeness developed in 1972 and financial cooperation was initiated in 1979 (Shamsi et al., 2019).

Sino-Pakistan Diplomatic relations

The whole world is divided into seven broader continents. These continents are further divided into regions. A continent may be divided into two or more regions. For example, the Asian continent is divided into different regions i.e. South Asia, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia etc. Each region consists of different countries that together form a region. For example, the South Asia region is based on seven to eight countries. These countries are independent entities in the international platform where they can establish diplomatic relations with mutual understanding. A country has bilateral ties with as many countries in the world as it can manage. The region of South Asia is very significant and so is the presence of Pakistan in this region. Following are some of the key areas where the importance of Pakistan is established in accordance with South Asia.

- Pakistan is located near the sea to shows the importance of the Maritime, Pakistan also shares brooders with Iran, and Afghanistan has oil reservoirs.

- The peace talk in the region especially on account of the Afghanistan issue is useless without the support and positive contribution from Pakistan.
- Pakistan is the central point for both China and the USA in promoting peace and stability in the region as there is Indo-Pakistan hostility.
- Pakistan and India are hostile to each other.
- Overall extremism and terrorism in the region cannot be controlled without constructive intervention by Pakistan (Hartpence, 2011).

Strengthening Bilateral Relationship

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of the Cold War changed the diplomatic and political scenario of South Asia. During the war against communism in Afghanistan, the US was providing plenty of help to Pakistan but just after the withdrawal of Soviet troops US also turned against Pakistan. The US imposed harsh sanctions on Pakistan due to its nuclear program. All of the military aid to Pakistan was suspended. In such a critical situation once again China came forward to help Pakistan (Sangit, 2013). Under the Pressler Amendment, US sanctions were imposed on Pakistan when Pakistan needed her cooperation. At that time, China was able to build her own capacity and she gave 34 short-range ballistic missiles to Pakistan in 1992 (Lisa, 2009).

There were three major incidents during 1990-2001 which brought Pakistan and China closer. All of these three incidents were related to the Indo-Pakistan rivalry. These incidents were the confrontation between Pakistan and India on the line of control, the Kargil war in 1999 and attacks on the Indian parliament. During all of these incidents, China supported the Pakistani point of view which strengthened this bilateral relationship (Garver, 2004).

The policymakers of Pakistan have always laid greater emphasis on Pakistan and China relations. The trajectory of Pakistan and China relations always showed an upward trend right from the beginning of the relations and each successive government continued the trend of building stronger ties (Siddique, 2014). The importance of building a higher level of relations with China for Pakistan has multiple repercussions. It helps in building stronger regional cooperation and stronger international ties and pressure. It helps Pakistan in having a higher degree of ties and hegemony in the region as well as internationally (Ashraf, Jathol & Alam, 2018)

Military Relations

Rakisits (2012) elaborated that besides many other projects, Pakistan and China are also engaged in joint military operations. Since 2004, the forces of both countries have been participating in joint military exercises every year in which they exchange training techniques with each other. In 2011 three other MOUs were signed between them to enlarge this military cooperation (Rakisits, 2012). Although, in the initial years the bilateral ties were not warming these continued to crawl and today this bilateral association is known as most trustworthy for each other. The historical roots show that both of the countries neither cheated each other nor even tried (Khan & Kasi (2017)

This trustworthiness encouraged them to be closer to each other and to establish links in the different fields of the international relations system. Economic, trade, political and defence are the most prominent fields in which the countries bind one another. Pakistan and China have covered all of these fields, especially the defence category. The military and defence cooperation between Pakistan and China started in the last decades of the 20th century (Allauddin & Ahmed, 2020). Today, all of the major military and defence equipment of Pakistan are mainly assisted by China. Once, there was a time when Pakistan used to rely on the US for military purposes but now these military and defense needs of Pakistan and mainly being fulfilled by China. On the other side, Pakistan also helps China in the military field as long as it is possible (Allauddin & Ahmed, 2020).

Pakistan's military turn came after the 1974 nuclear tests of India. This nuclear power unbalanced the deterrence system in South Asia. Pakistan set for the establishment of nuclear weapons as Bhutto's prime objective was to gain nuclear technology. At that time, Pakistan did not have warm relations with the US but the desire for nuclear power brought closer to China. Bhutto considered that the survival of Pakistan lies in the attainment of nuclear power otherwise India will pressurize Pakistan due to nuclear supremacy. Hence, Pakistan and China started a nuclear cooperation. Later, the US was aware of this nuclear plan but she did not bother about it due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Sino-Pakistan Relationship and CPEC

The world is a game of politics and geography. Geography is not static but is part of dynamics as it changes over time. The history of the world's geography also shows that it has been changing with the passage of time. The multilateral and bilateral alliances also change with the geographical dynamics. One thing remains constant which is territorial statics because the part of land remains constant only the rules over it change. Likewise, the piece of land which constitutes South Asia has been here since the emergence of Earth but it has been under the rule of different dynasties and the same is the case with China and Pakistan. The relationship between these two parts of territorial lands existed for centuries but now in modern times, Pakistan and China are collaborating through bilateral relations (Mahdi, 1986).

Cultural Ties

There is much similarity between the art and culture which exists in the Gandhara civilization in the northern parts of Pakistan and China. There are also historical trade and road linkages which the primitive people used to travel to visit these areas. In recent times, the Karakorum Highway has been constructed which is helpful for the cultural and economic purposes between Pakistan and China. This economic linkage between Pakistan and China has been growing with the passage of time which has shifted from a minimal economic relationship to mega economic collaboration like CPEC. This is because now China has proved herself the largest economic power across the globe. China's volume of economic activities increased especially in the twenty-first century. In the first decade, both countries signed different agreements about trade which mobilized the bilateral trade. Similarly, China also helped Pakistan in the culminating the wave of terrorism which adversely affected the economy of Pakistan (Ibrar, 2016)

the mutual closeness between Pakistan and China also helped to develop a bilateral relationship with Russia. As Russia had always been a close ally of India Pakistan could not maintain warm relations with Russia but now the changing geostrategic dynamics both Pakistan and Russia are coming closer only due to China. One Belt One Route initiative of China is the key predictor of Pakistan-Russia closeness because CPEC is also a significant part of OBOR (Siddiqi, 2017)

the initial arrangements of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that in April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and laid the foundation of the historical economic project between China and Pakistan. CPEC is the notion of the long-lasting bilateral relationship between China and Pakistan which is sustained despite all circumstances. This project is not confined to the bilateral benefits only but it also has global economic benefits because after its completion it would be the hub of regional and global markets as a trade route (Hussain, 2017).

Current Scene of the Relations between China and Pakistan

In the last decade of the 20th century, the US evidently aligned with India which disturbed the balance of power in South Asia. The Indian nuclear tests of 1974 also played a role in the disturbance of power in the region. Later, China and Pakistan made a civil nuclear deal to maintain the balance of power which was disturbed in 1974. Due to two rival nuclear powers, South Asia attracted the attention of the global powers (Jiegen, 2013). The Pak-China bilateral alliance is viewed from the military point of view only which has deep impacts on South Asia. The Pak-China association is being balanced with Indo-US relations. The basic objective of the Indo-US alliance is to control the Chinese expansion in this region. On the other hand, India views herself as a regional power that has some reservations regarding the Chinese influence in South Asia (Noonari & Memon, 2015).

In the current scenario, the Pakistan-China relationship is judged from the perspective of CPEC. This project will construct a new road map in the region. It will connect the whole South Asian region through road infrastructure. This road infrastructure is beneficial for trade. On the other hand, CPEC is also helpful for education, infrastructure development and energy systems. In short, this project is like a game changer in the region. The Chinese influence is increasing due to CPEC which is the main bone of contention between China and the US (Noonari & Memon, 2015).

CPEC is no doubt a landmark and quite comprehensive way of assessing the Pakistan and China ties but recent developments are also very important apart from CPEC. Recent and latest development in the region particularly the Afghanistan chapter is very significant as the cooperation level between Pakistan and China has again paced up a lot. However, the latest trends also show some negative instances which have somewhat hurt the progress

and development of relations between Pakistan and China. The most obvious is the doubts regarding CPEC and its progress. Since the start of the government of PTI in Pakistan some of the issues are on the stage and some doubts are revolving around it. However, despite all such negative propaganda and doubts the relations between both countries are quite significant in the region and a visit of the PM of Pakistan and the foreign minister has been very important in this regard (Alam & Jathol, [2018](#))

Impact on South Asia

China has a futuristic approach which is based on the expansion of the soft economic policy. This Chinese policy is contrary to the Indian and US coercive policies. This is the main point of the tussle between China and the US. Both of them are the major global powers that have special attention in the South Asian region. One Belt One Road Initiative and China-Pakistan Economic CPEC

In the last decades, China has normalized bilateral relations with India as well. China had started to deal with both India and Pakistan from a similar point of view. The same Chinese foreign policy was practised till the initiation of CPEC. When CPEC was started, the Indo-US policies changed regarding China. This economic project further provided a way of closeness between Pakistan and China. As soon as CPEC was initiated, a new war started between Pakistan-China and Indo-US groups. The recent military clashes between China and India at Doklam is also concerned with CPEC. After this clash, the tightness has created between these two alliances (Yun Sun & Haegeland, 2018).

The US has been playing a major role in South Asia since the Cold War era. This influence further improved when the US became the sole superpower of the world. But now with the advent of the 21st century, the role of the US is being challenged due to improving Chinese expansion in South Asia. The US has prepared India as the regional power in the same region but India has been controlled by the Pak-China association. It posed major concerns for the US and India in South Asia. This is the main reason that the Pak-China alliance and CPEC are portrayed negatively by India and the US (Yun Sun & Haegeland, 2018).

Some Obstacles in Pakistan-China Relations

Pakistan and China relations have become much visible to the world community and there are many threats and obstacles to these relations. The political and diplomatic interests of both the countries are same so are the nature and level of threats to these common interests. The geographical, regional and international actors are often seen as conflicting with these common interests and try to sabotage the ongoing relations between Pakistan and China. This section of the chapter analyzes the key areas of concern for Pakistan and China relations (Rana, 2014).

The most important and significant threat and obstacle to the Pakistan and China relationship is the India factor. The growing influence of India in the region and continued efforts to sabotage the increasing relations between Pakistan and China is very important. It has been observed that India continually tries at all levels i.e. military, social and most importantly diplomatic level to create hurdles and obstacles in Pakistan and China relations (Schaffer, 2011). India's boundaries with Pakistan and China especially at the Kargil and Siachin are very important areas. In addition to that India's influence at the international forums and the South China Sea also poses problems and threats to the growing relations between Pakistan and China (Ramachandran, [2015](#)).

Another important threat and challenge to Pakistan and China relations is the regional challenges. China's focus in region and bilateral relations is trade and economic ties but the tendencies and magnitude of military relations with Pakistan are also very high which creates a misbalance of China's relations with other countries and also creates a misbalance in the region (Shah, 2018). Apart from India, regional actors and powers such as Iran and Afghanistan also see the relations between Pakistan and China with greater insight into a balance of power in the region. Hence, all the important actors in the region try to some extent to negate the growing relations between both countries.

Third and another important factor which is much the talk of the town now is the international community and global politics that see the growing relations between Pakistan and China with a critical stance. The importance of the South Asia region is very much in the limelight owing to the presence of China and India and also it is the focus of Global actors mainly the USA. The interest of the USA in the region is never overlooked as they tend to support and try to increase the role of India in the region. Contrary to that China's support to Pakistan is also very important. Hence, international actors try to damage the relations between Pakistan and China (Small, 2015).

Conclusion

The study concludes that the relationship between Pakistan and China was very significant and strong right from the beginning of the mutual relationship between both countries. However, the military, economic and cultural association improved between Pakistan and China. This research also found that the role of CPEC and enhancement in military relations marks the key areas which helped in accelerating the ties between the two countries. The study further concludes that the impact of such a relationship is beyond these two countries and encompasses the region of South Asia and the world. The study significantly attributed the role. On the same line, the current study evaluates the impact of the Pakistan-China relationship on South Asia. The study concludes that the Pakistan-China relationship is the major part of the balance of power in the region. There are other areas of concern which have been addressed in the previous objectives of the study but in this objective, the study concludes that Pakistan and China relations are very important in addressing the interest of the Pakistan in region as well as globally hence balance of power is what the most significant impact of such relations in the region of South Asia. It is also concluded from the present study that the Pakistan-China relationship is also helping the minor states of South Asia who had been fed up with the coercive and hegemonic Indian policies in this region.

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