



Comparative Analysis of the US and Chinese Foreign Policy Towards South Asia; Implications for Pakistan

Waseem Ishaque *

Rizwana Karim Abbasi†

Usha Rehman‡

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Abstract

South Asia has its geopolitical significance due to its proximity with the oil-rich Middle Eastern States, natural resource-rich Central Asia and economically developed states of South-East Asian States. South Asia has two nuclear states; Pakistan and India. Since the end of 2nd World War, the USA has been present which has provided stability to this region. The USA had extended its investment and aid to Pakistan in during cold war which had maintained a Balance of Power between India and Pakistan. U.S. articulated response against Soviet invasion in 1979 and later entered in Afghanistan in 2001 on the pretext of WoT. Chinese foreign policy has fostered stability in South Asian region. Through its “Win-Win” policy, China has very firm economic relations with all South Asian states. Through BRI, China wants economic prosperity in the South Asian region. In such environments, Pakistan must have to act pragmatically, avoiding zero-sum policy.

Key Words: Strategic Partnership, Balance of Power, Peaceful Co-Existence.

Introduction

South Asia is highly significant as it contains 1.6 billion people or 27% of the world's population. Secondly, it houses two nuclear powers; India and Pakistan. Thirdly, the poverty, instability in adjoining regions of the Middle East and Afghanistan and race for energy corridors both East-West and North-South have made it the fulcrum of great power's competition. After the 2nd World War, USA's presence in the Asia-Pacific region and support for the reconstruction of the war-ravaged region resulted in huge stability and economic prosperity. In particular, the South Asian region has been affected by negative fallout of Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, and international response in defeating communism, Talibanization of Afghanistan and the region in the era of 90s and later U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 on the pretext of War on Terrorism have kept the region embroiled in the fallout of kinetic actions of major powers for dominance. While the U.S. engagement in South Asia contained both hard and soft powers, the Chinese approach, in contrast, is in the soft power domain, especially in the last two decades. The USA rewarded India with the elevated position of strategic partner, while Pakistan despite being a frontally in the last four decades is being viewed with suspicions as an unreliable partner and facing unfounded allegations quite often. On the other hand, China professes economic development and creating the destiny of a shared future through win-win cooperation, while the USA has demonstrated its leaning more insecurity and military domains. The peaceful rise of China is irritant in U.S. strategic calculus; therefore, USA is leaning towards India to counterweight China, which in fact is also disturbing the strategic stability in South Asia between India and Pakistan. Both China and the USA are maintaining different levels of engagement with South Asian countries and the region as a whole, due to varying geopolitical and geo-economic considerations. The USA has also unfolded aggressive designs to contain China by manifesting Pivot to Asia, Indo-Pacific strategy

* Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad, Pakistan. Email: waseemishaque91@gmail.com

† Associate Professor/HOD, Department of International Relations, National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad, Pakistan.

‡ LLM Scholar, Department of Law, AWKUM Mardan, KP, Pakistan.

and Quadrilateral Alliance (QUAD), by aligning India, while China has also smartly rolled out Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) catering exclusively for South Asian countries, through economic corridors on land and developing ports and transit hubs through carefully articulating the route of Maritime Silk Road. Additionally, China is also involved in bilateral arrangements with South Asian countries, more significantly; with India through trade and multilateral forums like BRICS, ASEAN and SCO and with Pakistan through CPEC, ASEAN and SCO to name a few. The strategic location, effective geopolitical position, resource-rich countries and their access to sea contributes greatly to the power potential of South Asia. This research article is, therefore, contemporary and original contribution in exploring the foreign policy orientations of status quo power the USA and rising power China towards South Asia. The article examines the foreign policy of USA and China with individual countries and the region as a whole and also suggest policy measures for Pakistan for optimizing the prevailing geostrategic environments in diversifying her foreign policy for maximum dividends to serve the national interests.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

Theory of Complex Interdependence professed by Rober Keohane, and Joseph Nye has been applied in building the arguments and drawing incisive analyses. The theory postulates that the fortunes of nation-states are inextricably linked together in this globalized world; therefore, their interaction creates dependence and reciprocal reliance on each other, whereby, reducing negative competition and minimizing the conflicts. This is exploratory research; therefore, the article has been developed by using a qualitative research method. The primary and secondary data in the form of official statements, websites, transcripts, books and articles have been used by applying descriptive research design to build logical and incisive analysis.

Research Questions

The article provides answers to the following research questions;

- Q-1 What is the significance of South Asia and how it figures out as the center of gravity for major power's competition?
- Q-2 What is U.S. foreign policy towards South Asia and how it is manifested, especially in the last two decades?
- Q-3 What is Chinese foreign policy towards South Asia and how it is manifested, especially in the last two decades?
- Q-4 How Pakistan should position its foreign policy in adjusting towards evolving regional order avoiding major power's competition?

Literature Review

The foreign policy priorities are determined by the national interests of nation-states. The U.S. has remained engaged with south Asia since the end of 2nd world war with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The policy of regional engagement with South Asian countries serves U.S. national interests ([Kochanek, 1993, p. 19](#)) in terms of energy security, counter-terrorism efforts and nuclear safety and security. However, since the revolution in Iran and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the U.S. has demonstrated a greater degree of involvement; first against the defeat of Soviet expansionism and later in War on Terrorism in 2001. In the last four decades, South Asia has remained on great power's radar screen on the issues of terrorism, nuclear security, capacity building and economic development of South Asian countries. This time period has also witnessed great power's competition in Afghanistan, where through a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic means, the region has been under transformation. Both the USA and China have demonstrated a greater degree of involvement in South Asia for bringing stability, reconstruction and economic development of war-torn in Afghanistan. Both great powers have maintained close relations with Pakistan and India being key players in South Asia to suit their national interests. The United States' drawdown from Afghanistan "is a major political shift, which the U.S. wants to rebalance to combat the terrorist network" ([M. Khan, 2020](#)). The U.S. is also calibrating growing Chinese influence due to soft power in terms of economic engagement in Afghanistan, a special type of relations with Pakistan and also constructive engagement with India at bilateral and multilateral levels. Therefore, the U.S. is also is endeavouring

to build a strong partnership with India ([Trump, 2017a, p. 50](#)). The Indo-US civil nuclear deal, strategic partnership, Pivot to Asia, Indo Pacific strategy and membership of QUAD alliance are manifestations of U.S. foreign policy. Similarly, in the last four decades, the U.S. has also maintained a strong relationship with Pakistan by declaring front line state and non-NATO ally in the international coalition against terrorism and extremism. However, the trajectory remained on a roller coaster ride wavering from front line ally to untrusted partner ([Trump, 2017a, p. 53](#)). The USA actively pursues the “balancing of regional geopolitical equation among the three key players; Afghanistan, India and Pakistan” ([Khaliq, 2017, p. 4](#)). The Chinese interests revolve around South Asian regional stability as it lies on the inner circle of the mainland. China has, therefore adopted a pragmatic foreign policy of maintaining relevance with all South Asian countries. China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and economic corridors cater for all countries and want to build the regional integration framework whereby, prosperity, development and complex interdependence is established for lasting peace. China is maintaining very good relations with Pakistan, India and Afghanistan at bilateral and multilateral forums ([Kaura, 2018, p. 10](#)). China has initiated mega-development project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for Pakistan extending it to Afghanistan and the Middle East, Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM) for India and Bangladesh and also Maritime Silk Road passing through Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Maldives and Pakistan. China is the biggest investor in Afghanistan ([R. M. Khan, 2015](#)). With respect to India, their trade volume is touching US\$ 100 billion and both countries are members of BRICS, SCO and APEC ([Malik, 2001, p. 74](#)). While China is also mindful of Indian leaning towards the U.S., however, through proactive diplomacy, the relations are being managed in a reasonable manner.

Investigating the U.S. Foreign Policy Towards South Asia

This section examines the U.S. foreign policy towards Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and South Asian region as a whole in order to draw incisive analyses towards the end on the U.S. leaning towards South Asia. It must be noted that India -Pakistan have figured out prominently in major power’s interests and engagement towards South Asia, therefore, the core arguments revolve around the interplay of major power’s interest towards India and Pakistan, while Afghanistan has also been deliberated at length due to four decades of instability and USA’s involvement in varying dimensions.

USA Foreign Policy Towards Pakistan

The end of 2nd World War in 1945, where U.S. and allies emerged as victors after successfully defeating Nazi and Japanese onslaught, a new round of power politics emerged between the USA and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) for global domination, thus paving the way to the cold war, which dominated the global order for next four decades. At the time of independence of Pakistan in 1947, a rational decision to serve the supreme national interests of Pakistan was taken to join U.S. led camp as the nascent country was facing enormous economic and defence challenges in the face of aggressive India vying to undo the division of the subcontinent. While from the U.S. perspective, during the period of the cold war, U.S. foreign policy relied heavily on creating a coalition of willing against Soviet expansionist designs and defeating the communism. In that context, Pakistan assumed a pivotal position as it aligned with U.S. foreign policy goals for South Asia. It was, in fact, an unprecedented equation that aligned U.S. and Pakistani interests; therefore, Pakistan willingly joined U.S. alliance system of South-East Asian Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1954 and later Baghdad Pact or Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in 1955 ([Jabeen & Mazhar, n.d., p. 110](#)). From Pakistan’s perspective, reliance on the U.S. led military alliance would have helped in neutralizing Indian aggressive posturing, building requisite defence capability for meeting external and internal threats, resolution of Kashmir and avoiding two-front war, i.e., India from the east and ever-expanding USSR from the west and also catering for the economic development of Pakistan. Such an alliance partnership through the periods of cold war proved beneficial for Pakistan due to enormous defence and economic support provided by the USA. The trajectory of the last 70 years of US-Pakistan relations has witnessed a roller coaster ride due to differing national security priorities but managed very well with marked statesmanship and apt diplomacy demonstrated by both allies.

It is important to note that since the start of the cold war, U.S. national security priorities focused on containing Soviet expansionism only. While acting as a front line state in support of U.S. anti-Soviet strategy,

Pakistan sincerely supported U.S. overtures and facilitated the U.S. operations at the cost of serious diplomatic backlash with USSR after U2 incident in 1960 ([Encyclopedia, 2020, p. 1](#)). However, the international response and outcome of 1965 and 1971 wars left Pakistan to review its policy of alliance partnership and later left SEATO in 1973 and CENTO in 1979 ([M. A. Khan, 2009, p. 2](#)). The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a watershed movement for South Asia. There were growing concerns among U.S. allies including Pakistan that long drawn and rehearsed hypotheses of export of Soviet ideology and reach to warm waters of Arabian Sea through Afghanistan now became a reality as events in Afghanistan started to unfold. Pakistan faced a security dilemma due to vulnerable western borders, therefore, became a frontline state against Soviet expansionist designs. The U.S. gave preferential treatment to Pakistan, and Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) became the epicentre of coordinating international efforts against Soviet occupation ([Wriggins, 1984, p. 11](#)). South Asia came in the international spotlight from a neglected region to the fulcrum of great power's competition, where Pakistan assumed a pivotal role ([Baxter, 1985](#)). The ensuing years witnessed U.S. commitment in coordinating global efforts through Pakistan in defeating Soviets and also dismemberment of the Soviet empire in 1990/91 ([Britannica, 2021](#)). The demise of the Soviet Union led to the creation of unipolar world order where the U.S. emerged as the sole superpower and later years witnessed downward spiral in U.S. interest towards Pakistan. The era of 90s witnessed difficult US-Pakistan relations as the U.S. branded Pakistan as state sponsoring terrorists and nuclear proliferator and put under series of sanctions, which were multiplied in 1998 after Pakistan tested nuclear capability and 1999 when a military coup happened ([Pandy, 2018, p. 2](#)). The unfortunate incidents of 9/11 in 2001 sent global shock waves, and U.S. demonstrated determination to defeat the terrorists by forming a coalition of willing, where Pakistan once again assumed the status of frontline non-NATO ally and offered intelligence, logistic and counter-terrorism support to U.S. and coalition forces operating in Afghanistan. This unstinted support proved very expensive in terms of human and economic losses for Pakistan. This time war did not confine to borders of Afghanistan but passed through Pakistan's former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and entered every corner of the country, with suicide bombers played havoc with all segments of Pakistani society. Pakistan suffered human losses to the tune of 74000 personnel and economic losses of US\$ 123 billion ([Iqbal, 2018, p. 5](#)). Despite unprecedented sacrifices, Pakistan is once again facing the old practices and distrust from the USA as state sponsoring terrorism and untrustworthy ally.

The US NSS 2018, issued by President Trump after taking over office provides a discriminatory assessment of South Asia, where India has been granted the status of strategic partner, while Pakistan as always has been asked to do more on terrorism, nuclear security and positive role in bringing stability in Afghanistan ([Trump, 2017b, p. 53](#)). Such developments cast a negative shadow on bilateral relations, and despite U.S. support to Pakistan in defence and economic domains since the establishment of diplomatic relations and more recently in the post-conflict economic development of FATA, where President Trump Twitted that US\$ 33 Billion have been given to Pakistan since the beginning of War on Terror but also accused of deceit and lies ([I. A. Khan & Iqbal, 2018](#)), therefore, the trajectory of relations is once again witnessing a downward trend.

USA Foreign Policy Towards India

Since independence on 15 August 1948, India has demonstrated marked statesmanship in managing foreign relations, especially the great powers. While being part of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), India established very strong relations with the USSR and also maintained positive relations with the USA. While China during the early years of revolution was not strong enough, and no one could predict the phenomenal rise just in seven decades, India maintained good communication with China as well. Therefore, in the overall context, India maintained a balanced foreign policy of engagement and relevance. During the period of Cold War, India and USSR maintained a defence and economic relations and also formalized treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in 1971 ([Chari, 1979, p. 231](#)), which implied that in case of any war, the USSR would support India in all domains. However, due to its geographical location, access to the sea and large population made India relevant to the USA as well, and at no stage, the diplomatic channels ever stopped. During Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, India maintained a principal stance of support to Afghanistan and to USSR, while avoiding any confrontationalist posture towards the USA. Therefore, soon after the demise of Soviet Union, USA and India found a new type of relations where India was awarded the incentives of strategic partnership and the civil nuclear

deal. Since 2001, the successive U.S. governments have accorded a very high priority to relations with India as enunciated in US NSS 2000 and later in 2018. From President Clinton onward, every U.S. President has visited India and Indian leadership has also paid reciprocal visits to the USA. The contemporary U.S. interest on relations with India is to create a bulwark against China; therefore, India is getting preferential treatment in U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Quadrilateral Alliance (QUAD) alliance system. The U.S. has three core interests for leaning towards India; the first one is strategic in a sense to counter the peaceful rise of China, second is to enhance the economic and trade cooperation, and the third one is cherishing the shared democratic values being the largest democracies of the world. The United States support Indian desire for a permanent seat in the Security Council and in nuclear supplier group (NSG) as well. In the defence domain, the U.S. and India have agreed on a framework of bilateral security in 2005 ([Kronstadt, 2012, p. 3](#)), which was agreed for 10 years. In 2015 the communication compatibility and security agreement (COMCASA) was signed for facilitation and interoperability between their armies and provision of high technology equipment ([Peri, 2018](#)). The convergence of interests between the U.S. and India regarding China's rise is one of the important sources for their strategic convergence and Corporation. When President Trump came into power in 2017, he had increased cooperation with India and demonstrated a very tough stance against China. He also emphasized on free and open Indo-pacific region. In the same context, India also aspires to become a regional hegemon; therefore, US-India strategic partnership is natural outcome of means towards that end.

USA Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan

The diplomatic relations between the USA and Afghanistan commenced in 1921, soon after the Rawalpindi Treaty between Afghanistan and Colonial British Government ([Britannica, 2020](#)). Relations between the USA and Afghanistan became very important in the early stages of the Cold War when President Truman said that “this friendship would be preserved and strengthened in future”. President Dwight Eisenhower visited Afghanistan in December 1959 and felt that Afghanistan is safe from the Communist influence and granted \$500 million in loans ([Brinkley, 2002, p. 5](#)). After the Saur revolution in Afghanistan, USSR succeeded to stage a pro-socialist party in Afghanistan and later on, in December 1979, the USSR invaded Afghanistan ([Hilali, 2005, p. 675](#)). This complete intervention by USSR in Afghanistan was a big blow for the USA because already a great ally Iran turned into a hostile state after “Islamic Revolution” in Iran in 1979. Secondly, the USSR was one step away from the strategic oil reserves of the Gulf States. The U.S. President Jimmy Carter during State of the Union Address in 1980, highlighted the cardinal aspects of Carter Doctrine according to which, the “USA will use military force against any aggressor to secure its interests in the Persian Gulf” ([Samual, 2005](#)). This was considered as a direct response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. However, unlike Vietnam, the USA decided to support Mujahideen factions through Pakistan to form an anti-communist alliance, instead of direct military confrontation with USSR. The USA convinced Muslim countries like; Saudi Arabia and Egypt to support the international efforts to defeat communism. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet empire, the USA disassociated from developments in Afghanistan, which eventually led to the 9/11 incidents in 2001. On 7th October 2001, the Bush Administration launched “Operation Enduring Freedom” on the soil of Afghanistan with the help of Britain, Australia, Canada, France, Germany and Pakistan. In November 2001, the USA installed the government of President Hamid Karzai, and with the help of U.N. Resolution 3886, the U.S. also deployed International Security Assistance Force (ISAAF) in Afghanistan. On April 17, 2002, U.S. President Bush announced the reconstruction of Afghanistan and \$38 billion were allocated for this purpose from 2002 to 2009 ([CFR, 2020](#)). The U.S. is consistently giving economic assistance for institutional building, infrastructure development, health, education and employment generation in Afghanistan, apart from military assistance for Afghan Defence Forces. The contemporary U.S. foreign policy on Afghanistan caters for US-Taliban rapprochement, grand reconciliation, stable political system and viable economy along-with drawdown of U.S. Forces. However, Pakistani Prime Minister Mr Imran Khan has suggested that a hasty withdrawal might create a security vacuum, which nascent Afghan institutions may not be able to handle and endure; therefore, sustained U.S. engagement is required ([Iqbal, 2020](#)). The U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has provided a degree of stability and post-war development, which is hard-earned; therefore, a repeat of post-Soviet withdrawal situation is not in favour of relevant countries and the region as a whole. The U.S. has demonstrated resolve for sustained

engagement and support for the Government of Afghanistan and not allowing it to fall in the hands of terrorists, which is highly appreciated.

U.S. Foreign Policy Towards Other South Asian Countries

The U.S. foreign policy towards other South Asian countries is of friendliness and support for economic development and strengthening of democratic institutions. The U.S. has remained engaged with South Asia in the context of terrorism, nuclearization and strategic stability. However, being in the Chinese periphery, the U.S. is also concerned about growing Chinese influence by way of economic and diplomatic engagement. The U.S. was compelled to adopt the offensive approach in the form of Pivot to Asia in 2012, later U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018 very recently QUAD-in 2020 aimed at creating a network of friendly countries to support U.S. ambitions of China containment. Therefore, the U.S. granted preferential treatment to India to act as a bulwark against China which has been willingly embraced by India. President Clinton was more assertive towards global affairs and wanted a multilateral approach for global governance. It is also worth noting that post overt nuclearization, both India and Pakistan were put under sanctions; however, the U.S. kept all avenues open for India, while Pakistan was denied such treatment and rather isolated regionally and globally.

Examining the Chinese Foreign Policy Towards South Asia

This section examines the Chinese foreign policy towards Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and the region as a whole and draws incisive analyses towards the end on Chinese policy preferences towards South Asia. While in the South Asian context, China's inner circle foreign policy priorities endorse constructive engagement and economic development of the region and maintain balanced foreign policy leaning out of the zero-sum prism. China is also aware of the U.S. interests and engagements with the South Asian countries; therefore, has adopted pragmatic policies avoiding confrontation and negative competition with the USA. The current economic engagement and multilateral diplomatic support of China are aimed at creating the environments of enduring strategic stability in South Asia.

Chinese Foreign Policy Towards Pakistan

The China-Pakistan amity goes back to the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in October 1949 as Pakistan was one of the first countries who recognized the PRC and firmly established diplomatic relations in May 1951. High-level exchanges were initiated in the late 1950s at the time when the world was witnessing the height of Cold War tension. The boundary agreement between Pakistan and China of 1963 can be quoted as an unblemished example of cordiality and goodwill prevailing among the two countries. In the contemporary era, both countries are trying to strengthen economic ties to new extraordinary heights. Bilateral trade has crossed US\$12 billion in 2019, which was around \$4.6 billion in 2008. Currently, Chinese exports to Pakistan are around US\$ 10 billion, whereas Pakistani exports to China are under US\$ 2 billion ([Ahmed, 2020, p. 6](#)). The proposed China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is likely to attract massive investment from China, for which institutional arrangements are put in place. Through this economic venture, China has pledged US\$ 62 billion ([Rafiq, 2017](#)) for investment in different domains like infrastructure development, Gwadar Port and Airport, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and energy-related projects. The two countries have signed up mutual cooperation agreements such as "Sino-Pak 'friendship, cooperation and good neighbourly relations' and 'combating terrorism, separatism and extremism' agreements" in 2005 and 2006. Pakistan - China engagements have generally been limited to inter-governmental contacts, with relatively low people-to-people interactions, which has been identified as one of the core challenges in the durability of both countries relations and passing it on to the next generation. Over the decades, China and Pakistan's respective governments have managed their relationship in an exceptional manner. The media in both countries have assumed a pivotal role in promoting the image of strong bondage. The influence of Chinese soft power in Pakistan is immense, yet curtailed by the limited people-to-people contacts, and its heavy reliance on official, military and governmental level links. China has a special place in the heart of the Pakistani nation and palpable foreign policy orientation of every government. This exemplary relationship has grown with spectacular success over the last seven decades. From Pakistan's

perspective, the relationship with China is considered as one of the core National Interests. The relations between Pakistan and China have endured the tests of times and can be termed as the most exemplary interstate relations in the contemporary study of international relations (I.R.). President Xi Jinping elevated Pakistan-China relations as “Iron Brothers” ([Jinping, 2015](#)) during his address to Pakistani Parliament. The China and Pakistan have enjoyed unanimity of views on regional issues, especially Kashmir issue, terrorism and stability in Afghanistan. Despite unique relations with Pakistan, China has avoided the zero-sum approach between India and Pakistan and has maintained a policy of balancing acts. From Pakistan’s perspective, despite being in U.S. camp during cold war periods, relations with both China and the USA have been managed very well. China appreciates Pakistan’s role during periods of post-revolution isolation and Sino-US rapprochement ([H.-R. Khan, 1961, p. 215](#)). Therefore, China has huge stakes in South Asia and Pakistan due to evolving regional and global landscape. Pakistan is a conduit to China’s shortest access to the Arabian Sea through CPEC, which also aims to serve as a means for South Asian regional integration ([Habibi & Zhu, 2020](#)).

Chinese Foreign Policy towards India

The establishment of PRC in 1949 was cautiously welcomed by India. While India maintained Non-Aligned posture, yet her relations with USSR were on a positive trajectory. In that context, PRC bordering India was not anxiety for Indian leadership at that time. Secondly, China did not demonstrate any geopolitical ambitions nor was in a position to pose any direct military threat to India; therefore, India embraced and recognized PRC in 1949 and established formal diplomatic relations in 1950. In 1954, both the countries formulated Panchsheel, five principles of peaceful coexistence and also the slogan of “Hindi-Chini Bahi Bahi” and Premier Zhou Enlai also visited India ([Weidong, 2020](#)). The first setback to their mutual relationship happened, when the spiritual leader of Tibet, Dalai Lama established a self-exile government in India in 1959. Border issues have remained bone of contention between the two states, and the 1962 war proved a temporary setback to bilateral relations. In the 1980s the relationship started trajectory upward when Indian Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited China, and Chinese Foreign Minister paid a reciprocal visit. In 1984 both the countries signed the agreement of most favoured nation (MFN). In 1988 Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited China to set up a joint commission for the settlement of border disputes. In 1991, Premier Li Peng paid an official visit to India. The Indian nuclear tests in 1998 were viewed with scepticism in Beijing, as the strategic stability in China’s near abroad and wider South Asia was disturbed, and fears of new arms race grew in already fragile security region. Despite having good relations with India, China maintains a position based on international law and the United Nations (U.N.) charter and supports Pakistan’s position on Kashmir. In 2009, Indian PM Manmohan Singh visited China, increased bilateral trade to US\$50 billion and China became one of the biggest trading partners of China. In 2013, President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Modi mutually initiated “hometown diplomacy” ([Dongjie, 2015](#)) for strengthening the bonds of relationship. The current trade volume between China and India is touching US\$ 100 billion. China and India are maintaining good ties at multilateral forums like Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Brazil-India- China- South Africa (BRICS), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) etc. The Chinese BRI also caters the exclusive economic corridor linking India through Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM). Additionally, the alignment of maritime silk road also caters Indian ports; therefore, the trajectory of economic, trade and bilateral relations is on the rise. Both countries have realized the importance of maintaining cordial relations, therefore, are also managing conflicts like the one in Ladakh in 2020 in a befitting manner. However, at the military level, scenarios of a two-front war and border skirmishes spiralling into wider conflicts keep making occasional headlines in Indian and international press. The crystallized Chinese policy towards India is to maintain constructive engagement, enhance economic cooperation, resolve border issues peacefully and make Asia as an economic powerhouse with a collaborative approach.

Chinese Foreign Policy Towards Afghanistan

China and Afghanistan relations have witnessed the period of stability and one of friendliness since the time Afghanistan recognized founding of PRC in 1950 and established formal diplomatic relations in 1955 and also settled the boundary demarcation in 1963 ([Dai, 1966, p. 214](#)). From the Chinese perspective, Afghanistan has enormous significance. During the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, China adopted a cautious approach and

maintained a position based on international law, respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, while maintaining friendly posture towards USSR and USA. Additionally, China has also maintained relevance with all Afghan factions during Jihad and even during the Taliban regime. The core Chinese interest was to bring stability in the war-torn country through open dialogue and let the people and government of Afghanistan decided about their future and adhered to the policy of non-interference. In post-2001 scenario, China remained engaged in Afghanistan mainly to stop the influx of terrorists to the vulnerable Chinese region of Xinjiang and also bringing stability for eventual economic development, driven by the liberal paradigm, which China advocates as most enduring. Such a constructive engagement has helped in improving the security situation, and China today is the biggest investor in Afghanistan. China is engaged with the Afghan government for participating in BRI and CPEC, which has been enthusiastically responded. Chinese other investments include US\$ 3.4 billion in copper and US\$ 400 million in the oil sector ([Azad, 2020](#)). China is also participating in multilateral forums aimed at stability and economic development. President Hamid Karzai, Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah have paid several visits to China, and constructive engagement at all levels is moving forward in a systematic manner.

Chinese Foreign Policy Towards Other South Asian Countries

The Chinese foreign policy towards other South Asian countries is based on constructive engagement and win-win cooperation. Due to the immediate neighbourhood, South Asia occupies inner ring in Chinese foreign policy orientation. While avoiding zero-sum approach especially in Pakistan and Indian context, China has adopted a pragmatic policy and has carted for integrating all South Asian countries into the mega project of BRI and relevant economic corridors both on bilateral and multilateral levels. China is also mindful of avoiding confrontation with the USA because of overlapping interests, especially in the case of India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Chinese foreign policy is one of friendliness and support for economic development and strengthening of democratic institutions. While the US NSS 2018 clearly indicates major power's competition with China and Russia as an existential threat to U.S. national security, which in-fact paved the way for offensive U.S. posturing against China by engaging India in Indo-Pacific Strategy and QUAD. However, China also raised its stakes with India by way of economic interdependence to neutralize the military posturing with the USA. Similarly, for absorbing more diplomatic space in South Asia, China has initiated BCIM Economic Corridor catering for Bangladesh, India and Myanmar. Similarly, China has invested US\$ 7 billion in Hambantota Port, and other developmental activities in Sri Lanka and also the alignment of maritime silk road links Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. China is well poised for creating regional harmony in South Asia and the wider Asia-Pacific region by shelving the disputes for common development and creating a community with a shared future and destiny ([Mardell, 2017](#)).

Implications of the U.S. and Chinese Foreign Policy for South Asia and Pakistan

Both China and the USA have remained engaged in South Asia at varying degrees and national interest preferences. During the last four decades, the USA has remained involved due to wars and instability in Afghanistan and India-Pakistan tension and overt nuclearization, while terrorism has always been on the agenda in the last 20 years. The U.S. policies have generally remained zero-sum between India and Pakistan, while other South Asian countries have also endured Indian influence. The Chinese engagement has been a factor of stability, due to cooperative engagement and non-interference in internal affairs of South Asian countries, therefore, enjoy the status of the credible partner. Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) along with economic corridors, is also aimed at regional connectivity, economic development and bringing prosperity to the region. China is also improving bilateral economic and trade relations with all the countries of South Asia without bringing conflicts to the front. South Asia being the immediate periphery of China, has huge stakes for stability; therefore, China is putting special focus and policy priority on this region. The Theory of Complex Interdependence highlights that when the stakes among the nations grow, they are likely to get involved in mutually beneficial undertakings, which minimize the chances of negative competition and help in developing a positive atmosphere of mutual trust avoiding conflict. In this backdrop, the Chinese engagement in South Asia manifests constructive and cooperative engagement, which help in developing a stable environment, while the U.S. involvement though cooperative, yet it generates tinge of negative competition. Pakistan is desirous of strong and cooperative relations with China

and USA and has demonstrated apt diplomacy in skillfully managing relations with both even during heightened periods of the cold war. However, the roller coaster ride and dwindling status from front line ally to untrusted partner has generated anxiety among Pakistani policy circles that despite sacrifices for the USA, Pakistan has always been labelled as state sponsoring terrorism in sharp contrast with ground realities. The evolving regional and global order warrant carefully calibrating foreign policy options for adjusting to emerging realities, where apart from being relevant, Pakistan's relations with great powers and the region as a whole should be of friendliness and out of zero-sum contexts. Similarly, Pakistan is now at the epicentre of energy and trade corridors, like CPEC, CASA 1000, TAPI and I.P. The prospects of regional integration through CPEC and energy projects promise enormous potentials for Pakistan and the region. Pakistan can serve as a conduit for East-West and North-South linkages; therefore, pragmatic foreign policy and relevance with the great powers and harmonious relations with all the regional countries will pay rich dividends for Pakistan's regional and global standing essentially required for development and prosperity of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Today South Asia figures out as fulcrum of world geostrategic competition and great power's attention. The instability in Afghanistan and adjoining Middle East has receded to a great extent, and the world is now transiting towards reconstruction, common development and creating the destiny of mankind with shared future, where the interests are intertwined for common goods. There is no denying the fact that realist power politics is still a reality, yet complex interdependence is gaining currency, where states are willing to cooperate instead of conflicts. The U.S. and Chinese foreign policy preferences towards South Asia have been analyzed at length and in the overall contexts, the U.S. prefers to adopt a more aggressive approach towards Pakistan and supports India for economic benefits and bulwark against China. In contrast, China has maintained benign posturing of win-win cooperation and common development and is upholding a constructive engagement with all the regional countries and also with the USA, for avoiding any confrontationist approach and caters for U.S. sensitivities and policy orientations. The evolving regional order offer tremendous opportunities to Pakistan being the heartland of energy corridors and demand pragmatic foreign policy for maintaining relevance and reposition itself to get the maximum dividends.

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