

GEO-STRATEGIC RELATIONS OF CHINA-PAKISTAN (1962-2018): BILATERAL AND REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract: *The geo-strategic relations between China and Pakistan have not only bilateral significance but they are also important for regional stability and peace. Both countries have enjoyed cordial relations since 1950s, but got a huge uplift during 1960s after the resolution of territorial issues and Pakistan's efforts to make space for China in the international community. Pakistan and China has enhanced their ties for mutual benefits and to counter the Indo-US nexus in the South Asian region. For this purpose, both of them have mutually signed and collaborated in several economic, diplomatic, and military agreements and projects respectively. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft are the two major projects both sides have collaborated. In this paper, the significance of China-Pakistan ties, regional power politics between China and Pakistan and Indo-US alliances, and geo-strategic importance of the China-Pakistan ties will be discussed.*

Keywords: geo-strategy, Pakistan, China, CPEC, regional dominance, security

Introduction

Geopolitics is considered as a study of political science with main focus on implications of human and political geography on the domestic and international politics. It mainly talks about the types of countries (i.e., federation and confederation). It is also considered as a

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study of foreign policy which includes the water borders and territory of a country and its diplomatic ties with other states of the world.

Inspired from Hitler's idea, Karl Haushofer defines geopolitics as "the new national science of the state, a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography."¹ While Saul Bernard considers the idea as: "Geopolitics is the analysis of the interaction between, on the one hand, geographical settings and perspectives and, on the other hand, political processes. . . . Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and each influences and is influenced by the other. Geopolitics addresses the consequences of this interaction."²

After studying several scholars and ideas, geopolitics can be defined as the study of ties among countries based on geographical and diplomatic interests that can be regional, local, or both.

Theoretically, there is a debate in geopolitics between classical geopolitics and academic geopolitics. On one hand, the classical school of thought takes the idea in prism of traditional power, balance of power which is basically Eurocentric and have dominated the study of international relations during the early twentieth century and established a closer link with the geography – both unhappy and proud one – and studied under concepts of colonialism, nationalism, and imperialism.³

German Frederick Ratzel is among the pioneers of the traditional scholars who discusses the policies of Nazism and unrest related to it among European nations. Meanwhile Halford Mackinder's Heartland theory discusses the policies of England. The classical school of thought takes policies as practice for territorial integrity under which the states look for power over territory and

¹ Semra Rana Gökmen, "Geopolitics and the study of International Relations," *Middle East Technical University* (2010).

² Saul Bernard Cohen, *Geopolitics of the World System* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

³ John Agnew, "Mapping political power beyond state boundaries: territory, identity, and movement in world politics," *Millennium* 28, no. 3 (1999): 499–521.

resources linked to it which has close relation with the evolutionary struggle of the nations. Taking ideas from this classical aspect, Karl Haushofer, a German scholar, bases his ideas in the Third Reich and done his research on these traditional ideas.⁴

These traditional ideas led to its usage in the US geopolitical agenda and geography to reduce the impact of geopolitics and used it as policy of Nazi politics of expansion, although there was no concrete evidence that Hitler was influenced or impressed by the theories of Haushofer. Eventually, the study of geopolitics became one of the most controversial studies in modern global politics.⁵

In the post Cold War world, however, which was based on the territorial structure of the political thoughts for almost four decades, geopolitics established a serious anxiety about the spatial organization for traditional power. The modern scholars found it hard to present analyses that were analytically premised on superpowers' enmity in study of social sciences and reformed the sub-discipline of political geography. The modern international scholars developed the new work with broader concept of power. Further, the geopolitics also made its space especially in the Foucauldian genealogy.⁶

In the core of geopolitics theoretical debate, Ratzel introduces the famous phrase 'anthrogeographical' which discusses the combination of politics, anthropology, and geography combined. For this German scholar the state holds different types of characteristics, and says that every country has to grow and develop itself and needs expansion in its territorial borders. Meanwhile, Mackinder's Heartland theory did not get much attention in its earlier years, but with the passage of time scholars slowly stated that the theory is basically influenced by the foreign policies of the global powers. Even his critics later admitted that Mackinder's ideas were to

⁴ Mathew Coleman, "A geopolitics of engagement: Neoliberalism, the war on terrorism, and the reconfiguration of US immigration enforcement," *Geopolitics* 12, no. 4 (2007): 607–634.

⁵ Deborah Cowen and Emily Gilbert, eds. *War, citizenship, territory* (Routledge, 2008).

⁶ Simon Dalby, *Creating the Second Cold War: The Discourse of Politics* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 1990).

establish a concrete foreign policy vision of the United Kingdom with his focus on European politics' historic analysis on geography.⁷

The US scholar Nicholar Spykman is follower and critique of Mackinder, as his work is based on similar ideas like that of Mackinder. Spykman agrees with Mackinder that sea power is deeply linked the global politics. He further enhanced his idea by adding the aspect of air power. He adopted the Mackinder's work and renamed with concepts like Rimland which is similar to Mackinder's inner crescent and is considered to be located between Heartland and marginal sea powers. He further adopted the idea of offshore islands and continents which again is same to outer crescent of Mackinder.⁸

The geopolitics was taken to new scholarly heights by Henry Kissinger and Brzezinski, who both remained the US security advisers during the Cold War era. Both worked for the containment of communism which ended ideologically in 1991. Through their works, 'Diplomacy' and 'The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geographic Imperatives, ' both former policy makers brought the Anglo-American classical geopolitical theories in international relations in a revived form. Both the scholars advocate the policies of American during the Cold War and discuss the success of the US during this era with the context of control of Eurasia revived. Meanwhile, French, who are against the German geo-politik of expanding the set territory, also presented their school of thought for geopolitics along with Russian scholars. The Russian doctrine is considered to be rather contemporary in the international relations which focus both on domestic and global aspects of the study.⁹

⁷ Werner J. Cahnman, "The Concept of raum and the Theory of Regionalism," *American Sociological Review* 9, no. 5 (1944): 455–462; Cohen, *Geopolitics*.

⁸ Homer Lea, *The Day of the Saxon* (New York: Harper Bros., 1912); Geoffrey Sloan, "Sir Halford J. Mackinder: the heartland theory then and now," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 22, no. 2-3 (1999): 15–38

⁹ Paul Claval, "Hérodote and the French left," *Geopolitical Traditions. A Century of Geopolitical Thought*, Routledge, Reino Unido (2000); Cohen, *Geopolitics*.

Pakistan China Ties (1962-2018)

Historically, both Pakistan and China have enjoyed cordial ties since 1950s, but the relations got a huge push during 1960s when both sides resolved their border issues, and Pakistan played a role of bridge between China and the western countries. The border issues between both the countries were resolved in 1963, military ties started in 1966, bilateral strategic alliance was formed in 1972, and economic relations reached to peak in 1979. Over the last seven decades, China has become Pakistan's biggest supplier of military equipment and is now the third biggest trade ally.¹⁰

Furthermore, both the sides have always supported each other in international forums and different issues. China has always supported Pakistan's stance on the issue of Kashmir, while Pakistan has extended its support to China on the issues of Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. With the passage of time, the military and economic cooperation has increased immensely between both the sides and the projects like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and development of fighter jet JF-17 Thunder are the major examples of the cordial ties between the two.¹¹

According to a BBC 2014 survey, 75% Pakistanis view China's influence in Pakistan positively while 13% do not take it in a positive way. In the Asia-Pacific region, Chinese people have the third most positive view about Pakistan and its influence in global politics, after Pakistan itself and Indonesia.

Historically, both the sides had the cordial ties but in the earlier times Pakistan was an ally of the US in the Cold War and had signed agreements like SEATO and CENTO, but in 1954, in Bandung Conference, Pakistan assured China that it has signed these agreements for its own security from India and has no intention to use

¹⁰ BBC News, "Pakistani Pm Hails China as His Country's 'Best Friend'," *BBC News* May 17, 2011.

¹¹ Umbreen Javaid and Asifa Jahangir, "Pakistan-China Strategic Relationship: A Glorious Journey of 55 Years," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 52, no. 1 (2015); Shahid Amin, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reprisal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

them against China. During that time period, China was passing through a revolution and was facing issues like underdevelopment and isolation in the global sphere. Pakistan played a vital role during 1960s to end this isolation of the People's Republic of China.¹²

Pakistan prides itself for playing a role of bridge between China and western countries especially with the United States. Islamabad also worked on diplomatic front to get China its rightful place in the United Nations. In China, those efforts of Islamabad are still considered as the bridge with which it crossed the river. During the regime of military ruler General Ayub Khan, Pakistan lobbied and supported China for its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, as Islamabad at the time understood the importance of China in being the UNSC and its place in the global politics.¹³

One of the major diplomatic developments between both the sides was the visit of then US Secretary Henry Kissinger to China. In 1971, Kissinger came on an official visit to Pakistan; during the visit Pakistani government especially facilitated the US Secretary of State's visit to Beijing. The visit established the foundation of a relationship between China and the US relations and an eventual visit of the US President Nixon, and opening up of the Beijing to rest of the globe. At the time, Pakistan knew the importance of US-China relations during Cold War; hence, it played that vital role. China has also not forgotten the episode, and still appreciates the Islamabad's policy at the time of need.¹⁴

Since then, the relationship between both the sides at diplomatic level has remained closed and friendly. In the recent times, China has supported Pakistan in the ongoing war against

¹² Birendra Nath Goswami, *Pakistan and China: A Study of Their Relations* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1971); William J. Barnds, "China's relations with Pakistan: durability amidst discontinuity," *The China Quarterly* 63, (1975): 463–489.

¹³ P. L. Bhola, *Pakistan-China Relations: Search for Politico-Strategic Relationship* (RBSA Publishers, 1986); Muhammad Ijaz Butt, *Focus on China: Relations with Pakistan, Domestic Concerns* (Advance Publishers, 2007).

¹⁴ Rajendra Kumar Jain, ed., *China South Asian Relations, 1947-1980: India* (Radiant, 1981).

terrorism. Although, Pakistan has given immense sacrifices and faced heavy financial losses in this war, but still international community does not recognize its services, and Islamabad feels dejected. In these hard times, Beijing has always stood by Pakistan and supported its stance on both regional and international levels; in fact, China has expressed its sympathies with Islamabad when it was labeled as ‘sponsor of terrorism’. In 2011, after the US operation in Pakistan against Osama Bin Laden, Islamabad faced tough time from the global states, but at that time, too, China supported Pakistan and favored its stance on the issue.¹⁵

Both sides have also enjoyed good relations on economic front, as by 2012, the bilateral trade between both the sides have reached \$22billion with a huge increase of 48%, as Chinese investment surpassed \$12 billion in Pakistan. In first decade of the 21st century, both sides have increased the ties under several agreements and bodies like Economic Cooperation, Joint Economic Commission, Joint Energy Commission, Joint Investment, and above all China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Both the sides have agreed to increase the economic and trade relations under 2006 Bilateral Economic and Trade Cooperation, 2006 Free Trade Agreement, and CPEC which was started in 2013. Currently, Pakistan is the only South Asian state which has signed a free trade agreement along with a currency exchange program with China. These deals include the annexes that included the end of tariff reduction and custom duties on imports, signed in 2012.¹⁶

On the front of defense and military ties, China has supported and assisted Pakistan’s naval, army and air forces over the years. The state-of-the-art JF-17 Thunder is one major example. The jet which is developed by both Pakistan and Chinese Air Forces have become a huge boost for Pakistani forces especially in context of its ongoing war against terrorism. Furthermore, both sides have established

¹⁵ Jon Halliday and Jung Chang, *Mao: The Unknown Story* (Random House, 2012).

¹⁶ Hasib Rahman, “Deepening Banking Cooperation of Pakistan and China,” *Youlin Magazine*, April 9, 2013; Atul Kumar, “China-Pakistan economic relations,” *Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies*, Special Report 30 (2006): 6

Defense and Security Talk forum in 2002, and signed a landmark military cooperation deal in 2008. Under these agreements, between 2008–2021, Chinese weapons exports to Pakistan will increase by 162% leading China to become 5th largest arms exporter in international market.¹⁷

. The military ties have also been established and developed with a close eye on India and the US nexus, as both the states want to maintain the balance of power in the South Asian region, and the military and defence cooperation is one of the major aspects of achieving it. In the light of India-US nuclear deal in 2006, China and Pakistan have also increased their nuclear ties, and both sides have signed new civil deal in 2010 to develop more nuclear power plants in Pakistan.¹⁸

Pakistan-China Ties: Indo-US Nexus and Regional Implications

As mentioned earlier, Pakistan and China has established and developed their ties for both bilateral and regional aspects. To maintain the balance of power in South Asia, it is highly essential for both the states to maintain these ties, especially in context of increasing US-India ties in the 21st century. Since 1990s, the US is increasing its ties with India, despite Pakistan being its front ally in the war against terrorism. The ties between the US and India reached to their peak during George W. Bush administration after 9/11, as he saw India as a perfect balancer against China and a close ally in South Asia.¹⁹

¹⁷ Global Security, “Al Khalid Mbt-2000/Type 2000 Main Battle Tank,” *Global Security* (2005); IRNA, “Pakistan Enjoys Strong Ties with China,” (2010); T. Niazi, “Gwadar: China’s Naval Outpost on the Indian Ocean,” *Association for Asian Research* (2005).

¹⁸ Khawaja Haq, “Economic Relations between China and Pakistan,” (Phd thesis, South China University of Technology, China, 2015), https://www.academia.edu/19219619/Economic_relation_between_China_and_Pakistan; Rob Crilly, “Us Finds New Friend in Uzbekistan after Pakistan Fallout,” *Telegraph*, September 30, 2011.

¹⁹ Syeda Aysha Bokhari, *Pak-China, India-US Strategic Quadrilateral* (Islamabad: LAP Academic Publishing, 2012); Asifa, “Changing dynamics of South Asian.”

The study of power politics and geostrategic alliance in South Asia has expanded to other fields of nuclear cooperation, military enhancement and expenditure, and increasing hostility between the arch rivals –Pakistan and India –and global rivals–the US and China. Therefore, the geostrategic balance of power politics in South Asia need to be more critical and vital as compared to other regions of the world.²⁰

The basic aspects of geostrategic power politics in South Asia are although different from old European model, but in its core, the concept of the game is same. In South Asia, the game of geostrategic balance of power has remained vague under the whole sub-system under which the US or China play the role as per their interests. It is also to be noted that, however, in the sector of nuclear power game between India and Pakistan, China has played the role of un-balancer for India, balancer for Pakistan, while America has done the same for New Delhi.²¹

In the heart of this whole geostrategic game, there are three main players: India, Pakistan, and China, as these three countries have established and formed the three-sided South Asian Strategic Triangle (SAST) since 1950s. Over the years, and also currently, these three actors have remained engaged in political and economic battles of dominance alongside the non-conventional arms race. In this triangular game of power, there is flexibility between India and China, while Pakistan and India are having a rigid angle of the ties.

In this whole context, Pakistan and China has developed their ties based on common interests against India and its alliance with United States. The major aspect of Pak-China ties is to keep a close eye on the Indian military expenditure and expansion, which it has been doing to gain dominance in the region. On the other hand, Pak-China relations, Chinese nuclear support to Pakistan and Beijing's

²⁰Merrington Louise, "The India-US-China-Pakistan Strategic Quadrilateral," *Asia Pacific* (2012); Ahmad Shamshad, "A Special Friend Comes Calling," *The Nation*, November 25, 2006.

²¹Jaspal Zafar Nawaz, "The Indo-US Strategic Relationship and Pakistan's Security," *South Asian Strategic Stability Institute Research* (2013); Asifa, "Changing dynamics of South Asian."

rise as regional and global economic power has created a direct threat for Indian politics of supremacy; henceforth, India has to develop close ties with the US as a counter to Pak-China alliance.²²

Meanwhile, the rapid closeness between India and the US, especially after nuclear agreement in 2005, has increased the political gap between China and Pakistan, and has enhanced the geostrategic alliance between Pakistan and China. The nuclear deal between the US and India has led to major changes in the South Asian power politics and the strategic positioning of actors involved in it. The US tends to further strengthen its relation with India, which has caused a well-built Pak-China alliance against the threat of the Indo-US nexus.

India is basing the SAST of South Asia on the ancient rule of Kautliya's balance of power which is "enemy of my enemy is my friend," while John H. Tkacik said that Pak-China geostrategic ties are simply based on countering India and the US. This kind of strategic balance is rather suitable for nuclear countries of South Asia as it will maintain the balanced ties, establish deterrence among them and will lead to relations based on cooperation and confrontation among these states of the region.²³

On nuclear front, China has been criticized by the world community for providing nuclear assistance to Pakistan, but Beijing has rejected it stating that Indian nuclear test of 1998 was the actual factor for regional and global non-proliferation of nuclear weapons as well as a direct threat to the stability and peace of South Asia; henceforth, in hindsight of India-US nuclear deal, China and Pakistan has increased their nuclear cooperation targeting the energy sector in Pakistan, which will also play a tool of strategic balancer against New Delhi.²⁴

²² Louise, *The India-US-China-Pakistan*; Shamshad, "A Special Friend Comes Calling."

²³ Asifa, "Changing dynamics of South Asian"; Nawaz, "The Indo-US Strategic Relationship."

²⁴ Dan Markey, Paul Haenle, and Lora Saalman, "Partners in Peril: US-India-China-Pakistan" *Report of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (2011); Robert Jervis, "The Compulsive Empire," *Foreign Policy* (2003): 83–87.

Beside nuclear front, China and Pakistan has been countering the India-US nexus in the Indian Ocean region (IOR), which is one of the main trade sea routes of the international trade. India considers the IOR as its backyard and along with United States has been conducting several military exercises (e.g., Malabbar) since 2004.²⁵ To counter this nexus, Pakistan and China have taken a major step of developing Pakistan's deep sea port of Gwadar under its CPEC project. The Gwadar port, which is strategically very important, will not only give Pakistan and China an economic boost, but will also help both the countries in keeping a close monitoring on the US and India movements in the IOR. Although, India and America have alleged both China and Pakistan for developing Gwadar port as a military base, but both countries have rejected these allegations. The operational Gwadar port and CEPC will definitely give Pakistan and China an upper hand over India and the US as it will not only be the only deep sea port of the region, but it will also help these countries to reach mineral and energy rich Central Asian states, which is becoming the battle field of new great game for the regional and international powers. To counter CPEC and Gwadar port, India is heavily investing in Iranian port of Chahbahar, so that it can gain economic benefit and strategic dominance over Pakistan and China along with reducing Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan's Karachi port. The Indian investment in Chahbahar port has been seen by both Pakistan and China with an eye of concern.²⁶

CPEC vs. Chahbahar: The Game of Regional and Geostrategic Dominance

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the Chinese vision of reintroducing the ancient Silk Route through its mega plan of 'One Belt One Road'. The CPEC is considered to be a pilot project of OBOR, and it is not just a single road – the project is comprised extensive road and railway link, pipelines, which will be connected through several means. The development of infrastructure, especially in Pakistan, is the major goal of this project as it is based on proper

²⁵ Mukherjee Krittiwas, "China's Growing Focus on Indian Ocean Irks India," *Reuters* (2010).

²⁶ Ibid.

scientific research and planning guidelines and based on step by step approach.²⁷

After stealing title of the world's biggest economy from the US, which it has been holding since last 140 years, China has decided to take a huge leap in the context of interdependent development. China, for years, has worked as a factory for the world but this cannot be sustained in longer run and to counter this issue, Beijing has decided to revive the ancient Silk Route, which was unveiled by the President Xi Jinping in 2013. It will connect large parts of Asia, Europe, and Africa, and CPEC is one of major project of this initiative.²⁸

CPEC is considered to be a Chinese dream shaped into reality by both China and Pakistan. CPEC is the choke point of OBOR, and it connects the Road and the Belt and become a Silk Road. Through this project, Chinese dependence on sea lanes communications for the trade will be reduced immensely as it will be the shortest route to Middle East for China, of just 2500 kilometers. CPEC is the bilateral project between China and Pakistan initiated with \$46 billion but its actual worth cannot be estimated yet. Furthermore, CPEC will also give China the shortest route to the Indian Ocean through Pakistan's deep sea port of Gwadar, leading to countering India and the US in the IOR.²⁹

The project of CPEC was considered during the President Li Keqiang's visit of Pakistan in 2013, where he discussed the initial details of the project with the caretaker prime minister of Pakistan. Post 2013 elections, the newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went to China on several occasions to finalize the mega project. In 2013, both the countries formed a Joint Cooperation Committee to discuss the further details and modalities of the projects under CPEC

²⁷ UNESCO, "The Silk Roads Project-Integral Study of the Silk Route: Roads of Dialogue," (2008); Salman Rafi, "A New 'East India Company' in the Making?" *Asia Times*, October 23, 2016.

²⁸ Shafei Moiz Hali, Tan Shukui, and Sumera Iqbal, "One Belt and One Road: Impact on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Strategic Studies* 34, no. 4 (2015): 147–164.

²⁹ Ibid.

in both the countries. After much negotiation and dialogue, CPEC was formally initiated in April 2015, when Chinese President Xi reached Pakistan to attend the signing ceremony.³⁰

The Chinese vision of OBOR is hollow with CPEC, as this corridor holds the top priority and importance which is integral to the operationalization of the whole project. Moreover, through CPEC, Pakistan has received its biggest ever foreign investment in history, and it has come at a time when its economy is weak and fragile mainly because of the US war against terrorism, where it has lost almost \$70 billion in last decade or so.³¹

Meanwhile, to counter the CPEC, India is investing heavily in Iran's Chahbahar port, which is located on the Gulf of Oman. The port has two separate ports, Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantri., with five berths each. To develop the port, India, Iran, and Afghanistan has signed an MoU under which \$21 billion have been allocated for Chahbahar-Hajigak road alongside \$85 million for the port development by Indian government. Similarly, \$ 8 billion has been set for the port's Special Economic Zone (SEZ) by Indian industrial companies, and \$150 million are being handed over to Iran by India for the port, \$11 billion Hajigak Steel and Iron mining project in Afghanistan has been handed over to the seven Indian companies. Along with that India has promised to provide \$2 billion to Afghanistan for the construction of infrastructure including the Chahbahar-Hajigak railway line, keeping in view the potential trade worth billions through 72,000 kilometer long Multi Mode North South Transport Corridor (INSTC).³²

The Iranian port is located at Makran coast of Sistan and Balochistan provinces of the country, which is adjacent to Gulf of Oman and is at the tip of Strait of Hormuz. Chahbahar is the only

³⁰ Mantraya, "One Belt One Road, One Singapore Analysis," *The Eurasia Review* (2016); Peter Ferdinand, "Westward ho— the China dream and 'one belt, one road': Chinese foreign policy under Xi Jinping," *International Affairs* 92, no. 4 (2016): 941–957.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Seas Ark, *Chahbahar Port* (2018); Aneja, "Atulindia to Develop Iranian Port," *The Hindu*, May 5, 2013.

Iranian sea port with direct access to Indian Ocean. Due to its strategic location with closeness to Central Asian region and Afghanistan, the port has been termed as ‘Golden Gate’ for the landlocked states of Central Asia and Afghanistan.³³

Through Chahbahar port and its linkage roads and rails network in Afghanistan, India wants to increase its influence in the region especially in Afghanistan. In 2016, India signed a Transit Trilateral Agreement with Iran and Afghanistan to allow its goods to reach Afghanistan through Iran. Under this agreement, the Indian western coast will be linked to Chahbahar and will cover the distance through rail tracks and roads between Chahbahar and Afghan border. Meanwhile, a 900 kilometer long Chahabhar-Zahedan-Hajigak road will link the Iranian port with Hajigak region of Afghanistan, which is a mineral rich area. In 2011, India and Afghanistan signed an agreement under which seven Indian companies got the right to mine in this central region of Afghanistan, which has the largest deposit of iron ore.³⁴ Through these developments and agreements, India wants to increase its presence in the war torn country, mainly to reduce Pakistan and Chinese influence in the region and Afghanistan. In 2016, India started the trade through Chahbahar as containers full of Indian wheat were docked at the port and were transported to Afghanistan. The Chahbahar port is set to reduce Afghan dependence on Pakistan’s Karachi port, which has remained the main source of link to the outer world and trade for landlocked country, but the unstable relations have affected the trade and India is looking to take advantage of this situation. Henceforth, India is establishing its

³³ Meena Singh Roy, “Iran: India’s Gateway to Central Asia,” *Strategic Analysis* 36, no. 6 (2012): 957–975; Rorry Daniels, “Strategic competition in South Asia: Gwadar, Chabahar, and the risks of infrastructure development,” *American Foreign Policy Interests* 35, no. 2 (2013): 93–100.

³⁴ “Afghanistan Starts Railway That Will Link It to the World,” *GCR*, September 20, 2016.

foothold in Kabul diplomatically, economically, and most importantly geo-strategically.³⁵

Indian Presence in Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan and China

Indian Objectives in Afghanistan: India and Afghanistan has enjoyed cordial ties, especially after 9/11 when Taliban regime was toppled over by the US forces. Before that India was supporting the enemy of Taliban, Northern Alliance, as Taliban were supported by Pakistan. India has signed several agreements and deals with Afghanistan to increase its influence diplomatically as well as economically. India has been propagating that its interest in Afghanistan and policies towards the country is to bring peace and stability, but the real motives of the Indian government has not yet been revealed to the international community.

Dr. Shubhash Kapila believes that Afghanistan is a vital geostrategic point for Pakistan and its military, while Indian interests in the country are the same as the Central Asian states and Russia, which clearly draw the Indian motives of the economic interests there. For India, Afghanistan is a road to Central Asia, a strong foothold to counter Chinese influence in South Asian region and to reduce Pakistan's influential sphere in Kabul.³⁶

The economical and political objectives of India are among the top priorities of the policymakers; therefore, it has involved Afghanistan at Regional Economic Cooperation Conference in Afghanistan (RECCA) and 'Heart of Asia' dialogue process. To achieve its goals, India has to take major step to seek the increase in support of global community to provide more financial support to Afghanistan to help it to tackle its economic and financial issues and

³⁵ Raghavan Srinath, "The Takeaway from Tehran," *The Hindu*, May 26, 2016; "India Eyes Iran's Energy Resources, Commits over Rs 1 Lakh Crore Investment in Chahbahar," *First Post*, May 23, 2016.

³⁶ Dr. Subhash Kapila, "Afghanistan: India Has Legitimate Strategic Interests in Its Stability," *South Asian Analysis Group*, 2008, <http://www.southasiananalysis.org>.

to run the state affairs. For its economical interests, India has become the highest financial aid provider to Afghanistan in South Asia.³⁷

After 9/11 and establishment of Hamid Karzai government, India has reinforced its economic policies in Afghanistan by taking up different policies. India is using politics as a leverage to dominate the Afghan goods market because it wants to establish Afghan dependency on Indian exports, through controlling the flow of capital and investment in the country. Furthermore, to strengthen its control on the neighbor country, India is investing in power, infrastructure, water, agricultural, and natural resources sectors in Afghanistan.³⁸

Another major goal of India in Afghanistan is to counter Pakistan's presence in Kabul, and it has also been propagating anti-Pakistan policy. It is quite essential for India that Pakistan does not get a strong presence in Kabul; therefore, India is preventing Pakistan to dominate the politics and the strategic issues in Kabul. The Indian policies have proved to be rather successful, as former government of Karzai and present Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani is speaking the language of India which is beneficial for New Delhi as it does not want the regime of Taliban to come back to Kabul.

Pakistan has always viewed Afghanistan as a vital balancer mean against Indian policies to get an upper hand and dominate geostrategic South Asia. Afghanistan is critical for Pakistan because an unstable and Indian dominant Afghanistan will create uncertainty for Islamabad on its western border, as the eastern border is already hostile due to India. A cordial presence in Kabul is seen by Pakistan as necessary to avoid the strategic dilemma of being stuck between two the hostile sides.³⁹

³⁷ Haideri Ashraf, "Afghanistan in 2017: Achievements and Challenges," *The Diplomat*, 2017.

³⁸ Sushant K. Singh, "Indian presence essential in Afghanistan," *International Relations and Security Network (ISN)* 6, (2008); Lakshman Kanchan, *Fault Lines* (Mumbai: ICMA, 2008).

³⁹ Harsh V. Pant, "India in Afghanistan: A Rising Power or a Hesitant Power?," *CIPSS Speaker Series on International Security and Economy, McGill University* 5, (2012); Marvin G. Weinbaum,

The India presence in Afghanistan is also to counter the Chinese influence in South Asia as well as Kabul; therefore, it has been focusing on its aid policy. As all the major South Asian regional states tend to use the territory of other states by different means and methods, New Delhi is trying to achieve it through intervention in Afghanistan against China. A geostrategic race is underway between China and India in the region, and Afghanistan is one of the main battlegrounds for their interests. China is an emerging regional and global power, and it is way ahead of India both economically and militarily, but some Indian scholars and policy makers believe that India has the capability to counter Chinese influence; hence, the Kabul dominance battle is underway.⁴⁰

Another major goal for India in Afghanistan is to get access to Central Asia, mainly due its mineral rich states. India has a rapid growing economy and to meet its oil and gas demands, the Indian government is looking towards Central Asia through Afghanistan. In a rare occurrence, both Pakistan and India has agreed on 1,000 miles, \$7.6billion worth, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which is to meet the energy needs of these countries. For a successful and operational TAPI line, both India and Pakistan need a stable Afghanistan, as major part of this line will pass through its territory. Meanwhile, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan has proved to be beneficial for the country, as it, now, see more opportunities in the Central Asian region.⁴¹

Besides countering China, India wants to dominate the South Asian region and to increase its influence in the region through investment and providing aid to Afghanistan. India tends to show the world that it has the ability to be a regional power. Through its aid to Kabul, New Delhi is trying to promote itself as a big and stable economy that can give aid to the needy states in this region.

“Pakistan and Afghanistan: The strategic relationship,” *Asian Survey* 31, no. 6 (1991): 496–511.

⁴⁰ Tagotra Niahrika, *How India Can Counter China's Growing Influence in Asia* (WION, 2017); Miani Tridivesh, “China and India: Competing for Influence in Afghanistan,” *The Diplomat*, 2015.

⁴¹ Rahul Bedi, “India and Central Asia,” *Frontline* 19, no. 19 (2002):14–27.

Furthermore, to make itself as a regional power, India has strengthened its ties with the United States and has been supporting its policies regarding Afghanistan. According to some Indian experts, however, India in the long run has to take some alternative choices as now the US commitment to establish a stable Afghanistan has reduced, and it is planning to abandon the country completely. In that case, India can find itself in a difficult place because it will lose a strong ally in Kabul, and Taliban will increase their influence in Afghanistan in the absence of the US forces, as the newly trained Afghan military does not have enough ability to control the Taliban.⁴²

Implications for Pakistan and China: Security dilemma is one of the biggest implications Pakistan has to face due to Indian presence in Afghanistan. The reason is that Indian presence in Kabul makes its western border unstable and volatile, which is not in the interest of the country which is already fighting against terrorism in its own land. This creates a serious issue for Pakistan, as foreign minister of Pakistan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, says, “If you want Pakistan focused more on the [threat from Afghanistan in the] west, then we have to feel more secure on the east. There is a linkage there.”⁴³

The unstable border means more terrorism, and Pakistan has been blaming India for sending and sponsoring terrorists to its territory through Afghan border. According to Islamabad, India through its consulates in Herat and regions adjacent to Pak-Afghan border has been sending the militants in Pakistan to spread the terrorism, especially in its tribal areas of FATA and Balochistan. Moreover, Indian made weapons are being flooded inside Pakistan for militants, which are used to destabilize the country.

Meanwhile, on diplomatic front, Indian wants a reduction in Pakistan’s diplomatic and political influence in Kabul. For the purpose, it has been increasing its ties with Kabul’s rulers. On economic front, India wants to end the dependency of Afghanistan on

⁴² US Energy Information Administration, *India: Country Brief* (Washington DC: US EIA, 2010).

⁴³ Gulshan Majeed, *Genesis of Indian Ambition in Afghanistan: Implications for Pakistan* (Islamabad: IPRI, 2014).

Pakistan, as Kabul conducts its most of trade through Pakistan, but through development of Chahbahar port and routes in Afghanistan, India wants to affect economic benefit for Islamabad.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, major implications for China are effects on CPEC, as India has been opposing this mega project, and it can affect it in long run. China wants to extend the CPEC to Central Asia to Europe under OBOR, and its presence in Afghanistan is essential for this project. India is trying its best to counter the influence of China in Kabul and supporting anti-China policies. Through its presence in Kabul, India is trying to counter Chinese regional influence and wants to counter Chinese dominance.⁴⁵

Findings

Following are the findings of this research work:

1. Pakistan China relations are geo-strategically significant not only for the both states but for regional power politics and stability.
2. Since 1960s, both Pakistan and China have enjoyed immensely cordial relations, and projects like CPEC and JF-17 Thunder are major examples of this friendship.
3. CPEC is not only a game changer for Pakistan, but this mega project will also boost up the regional integration between South Asia and Central Asia.
4. To counter CPEC and deep sea Gwadar port, India is investing in Iranian Chahbahar port to increase its regional influence and to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan for trade.

⁴⁴ Rajghatta Chidanand, "America Persuades India to Expand Afghan Footprint," *Times of India*, 2012.

⁴⁵ Christine Fair, "India in Afghanistan and Beyond: Opportunities and Constraints," (2010).

5. India is using its foreign aid to tool to establish a strong foothold in Kabul to counter Pakistani influence in the country to tackle Chinese regional dominance and to get direct access to Central Asia.
6. The presence of India is creating serious implications for Pakistan and China including security, economic, and diplomatic.

Recommendations

Following are the recommendations in the context of this research article:

1. Pakistan and China need to further enhance their relationship for mutual benefits and regional stability
2. CPEC is the project which must be used by both China and Pakistan to attract more investors from the region including India, as it will play a major role in increasing the interdependence among these states
3. Pakistan needs to engage with India on both economical and diplomatic fronts so that not only its eastern but also the western border could be stable
4. Pakistan should bridge the communication gap with Kabul so that the lack of trust be reduced, which will be highly vital for war against militancy in border area of both the states
5. Pakistan and China should show interest in the development of Chahbahar port to increase their ties with Iran and counter the complete dominance of India in the country and the project
6. Pakistan needs to use its diplomatic tool to show the world Indian-sponsored terrorism on its territory so that the international community may know about the real face of India

Conclusion

Pakistan-China bilateral ties are highly essential for mutual interests and for regional stability, as both states are geo-strategically strong. Their relations have strengthened over the years and with the advent of CPEC, it will get a boost. Furthermore, to counter the India-US nexus in the Indian Ocean and South Asia, both Pakistan and China need to enhance their economic and military cooperation along with nuclear collaboration. Through CPEC, both the countries can get a direct access to the Central Asian region and tackle the dominant policies of India and the United States. Moreover, the stability and peace in Afghanistan is vital for whole South Asian region, therefore, Pakistan, China, India, and the US need to decrease the lack of trust among them.