

## China-Pakistan Defence and Security Cooperation: Its Implication for India

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### **Abstract**

*The relationship between China and Pakistan is often termed an 'all-weather' strategic friendship. Shared enmity with India, followed by the strong convergence of security interests drifted both countries towards each other and will continue to maintain a close relationship shortly. Taking into consideration its grand strategic interests, on one side, China wants to contain India in the South Asian region, on the other, Pakistan wants to seek its parity with India. For the containment of India, in the South Asian region, China will continue to help Pakistan militarily as well as financially and hence posing a security dilemma for India through the Sino-Pak military axis. Thus, it is in this background the present research paper seeks to analyze and evaluate in brief, the account of China-Pakistan defense and security collaboration and certain policy choices before India to mitigate the nexus.*

### **Keywords**

*China, Defence, Indian Ocean Region, Pakistan, Security.*

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## **Introduction**

National security is the prime national interest and guiding force behind the foreign policies of the nations. Keeping in view its limited conventional capacity and security interests Pakistan has always sought the help of an external balancer against its more powerful rival India in the South Asian region.<sup>1</sup> Firstly it sought help from the Muslim block and then joined the United States (U.S)-led western block and at last flowed towards China after initial hesitations. Convergence of the security interests drifted both nations towards each other during the Cold War era. On the other hand, China has always seen India as a potential challenger to its hegemonic aspiration in the Asian continent and with the help of Pakistan, China wants to contain India in the Indian subcontinent. A militarily strong Pakistan can best serve Chinese strategic Interests.

That is why despite different socio-cultural and political systems both nations have not only developed all-weather friendship but also further strengthened it in the changing geopolitics of the present century. Shared enmity with India has always been a gravitation point of this strategic axis between the two nations. Growing defense collaboration between the two countries is observed as a zero-sum game in India as it directly impacts Indian security.<sup>2</sup> Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to trace out the genesis and growth of this strategic axis and attempts to elaborate on various dimensions of the growing defense collaborations between the two nations and their potential implications for India's security in the present century.

## **Historical Background**

Pakistan was the first Muslim and third non-communist country to extend recognition to China in early 1950 and both nations established formal diplomatic connections in 1951.<sup>3</sup> Pakistan was searching for a credible external balancer that could provide security against her more powerful hypothetical rival India. On the other hand, internationally isolated China was also searching for a new partner in the South Asia region. China's unresolved border disputes with India, followed by armed skirmishes in 1962 consolidated its relationship with Pakistan. Both nations concluded a historical border agreement in March 1963. According to this agreement Pakistan ceded certain parts of Occupied Kashmir to China, while further strengthening their relationship through Air Transportation and trade agreements.<sup>4</sup> When the U.S. imposed a trade embargo upon South Asia during the Indo-Pak war of 1965, Islamabad turned to Beijing for help. China not only transferred certain crucial arms to Pakistan but also increased pressure on the Sikkim border by the movement of certain armed regiments when Indian forces were advancing towards Lahore. Beijing also sent an ultimatum to India asking to dismantle the military

posts on the Sikkim border or face ‘grave consequences’<sup>5</sup>. Till May 1966 Pakistan received 60 MIG19’s 10 IL-28 bomber jets, 100 mortars and five T-59 tanks from China.<sup>6</sup> Both nations also concluded an agreement regarding the Karakoram strategic highway on October 21, 1967.<sup>7</sup> On her part, Pakistan facilitated United States- China normalization and worked as a doorstep for China to the outside world during the years of isolation. China too extended ‘urgent help’ to Pakistan during and after Indo- the Pakistan war of 1971. After the emergence of Bangladesh China used her first-ever veto against the entry of Bangladesh into the United Nations and put Bangladesh’s membership on hold in the global body till the issue of prisoners of war (POW) was not resolved between India and Pakistan. In post 1971 period Beijing not only supplied crucial arms to Islamabad but also handed over crucial technology for indigenous production.<sup>8</sup> China also secretly helped Pakistan in the development of its ‘Islamic Bomb’.<sup>9</sup> Beijing not only helped Islamabad’s nuclear development program but also transferred crucial weapon delivery systems to her, especially missile technology. China- Pakistan defense relations in the post-Cold War period were further strengthened by transfers of crucial weapons, joint production, and joint training of the armed forces of the two nations.

#### **China-Pakistan Military Collaboration**

Keeping in view its strategy to contain India within the South Asian region China has been continuously supplying crucial weapons to Pakistan since 1965. From 1968 to 1980 about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of Pakistan’s total arms imports came from China.<sup>10</sup> Till 1982 Pakistan emerged as the largest beneficiary of China’s arms and around 75 percent of Pakistan’s total tanks were imported from China.<sup>11</sup> China not only supplied significant numbers of arms to Pakistan but also helped Pakistan’s indigenous arms industry by transferring crucial technology and various joint development projects. For the production of T-59 tanks, the ‘Heavy Rebuild Factory’ at Taxila was built with Chinese assistance in the 1980s. This complex was later on upgraded with Chinese help and became the backbone of Pakistan’s defense production and also worked as a center of the development and up-gradation of a variety of weapons. A gun factory was also established with Chinese help in 1994.<sup>12</sup> Strategic friendship between two nations is still growing in the present century. The armed forces of both nations are conducting joint annual training sessions. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, both nations concluded a joint exercise on 2 December 2020 named as “Warrior VII” at Cherat in Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> This year, just a few days before the first anniversary of the Galwan Valley skirmishes. The Western ‘theatre command’ of China organized a week-long joint exercise with the Pakistani army along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Tibet.<sup>14</sup> China’s arms and arms-related

technology transfer to Pakistan are continuously growing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More than 70 percent of Pakistan's total arms are of Chinese origin. According to Stockholm International Peace Research Institution (SIPRI) reports in 2021, China emerged as the 5<sup>th</sup> largest exporter of the world and the lion's share of about (38 percent of China's total arms exports) goes to Pakistan. About 74 percent of Islamabad's total arms imports from 2016 to 2020 came from Beijing.<sup>15</sup>

### **Increasing Cooperation Among the Air Force**

Collaboration between the air forces of both nations also began after Indo-Pakistan war of 1965; when China supplied fighter jets to Pakistan. During the national day celebration on 23 March, 1966, 4 Mig19s supplied by China participated in the parade.<sup>16</sup> Pakistan received 60 MIG-19, 10 Il-28 bombers and 30 Mig-17s fighter jets till January 1968 from China.<sup>17</sup> . After the 1971 debacle, Islamabad's shattered air force received considerable help from Beijing. By 1971-72 Pakistan received 175 F-6 fighter jets, four Il-28/Beagle bombers, 4 trainer aircraft and 12 patrol crafts from China. Further, China also extended help to Pakistan in the establishment of an F-6 aircraft production and repair facility known as 'Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC)' Kamra in 1971. Later on, this facility was upgraded with Chinese help for the production of jointly developed JF-17 fighter jets.<sup>18</sup> Kamra has emerged as the main center of joint ventures in the field of air defense technologies between two nations and providing facilities for the production of jointly developed JF-17/ Chengdu FC-1/ Super-7 fighter jets and K-8 Karakoram/Hongdu JL-8 intermediate/ advance jet trainers.<sup>19</sup> Beijing agreed to supply 36 more advanced fourth-generation fighter jets JL-10 to Islamabad in 2009. Pakistan's unnamed aerial vehicles Burraq and Shahpar are copies of China's Rainbow CH-3.<sup>20</sup> Air forces of both nations also conduct an annual Shaheen exercise since 2011 known as Eagle or Shaheen.<sup>21</sup>

### **Growing Naval Cooperation**

China- Pakistan naval collaboration started in the early 1970s, when Islamabad imported 12 Type-062/Shanghai class patrol crafts and 4 type-025/Huchuan FAC from Beijing. From 1975 to 1980 China supplied 4 type-037 patrol craft to Pakistan. Naval cooperation continued to grow in the 1980s and China supplied 4 type-024/Hegu FAC in 1980-81, 4 type-021/Huangfen FAC in 1983-84, one 'Fuqing Replenishment' ship in 1987 and 4 P-58A patrol craft between 1988-90 to Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> Naval cooperation between the two nations further intensified in the post-cold period with the rise of China as the second-largest power after the U.S. In 1995 Islamabad imported 2, type-76A, 37mm naval guns for 2 Jalalat FAC manufactured in Pakistan.<sup>23</sup> In 2005 Pakistan concluded a \$500-750 million deal for

4 F-22P (Zulfiqar Frigate) in which 1 was produced under licence in Pakistan. From 2010 to 2020 China supplied 1 Azmat Corvette and 3 others were manufactured under licence in Pakistan. Both nations concluded a most crucial naval deal in 2015 when China agreed to supply 4 type-041, (probably S-20 versions) submarines to Pakistan and 4 others will be produced under licenses in Pakistan; delivery is expected by 2028. China is also supplying 4 type-054A/P Frigates to Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> China has also developed the Gwadar deep seaport in Pakistan and controlled it, which can be easily converted into a naval base. Pakistan is playing a very crucial role in China's 'Maritime Silk Route' strategy and becoming a facilitation center for the People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) blue water aspirations in the Indian Ocean region and in the Persian Gulf. Naval forces of both nations have been conducting annual exercises since 2013 known as Sea Guardian.<sup>25</sup>

### **Collaboration in Nuclear and Missile Technology**

China's help was very crucial for the development of Pakistan's 'Islamic Bomb'. A secret agreement regarding cooperation in nuclear science was signed during Bhutto's China visit in 1976. Bhutto termed this agreement as his "*greatest achievement and contribution to the survival of our people and our nation*".<sup>26</sup> Later as revealed by the father of Pakistani nuclear programme A Q Khan, in 1982 that China not only supplied 50 kg enriched weapons-grade uranium sufficient for two weapons but also sent a blueprint of a nuclear weapon already tested by China. In return, AQ Khan helped Beijing's lagging uranium enrichment program and helped set up a centrifuge plant with more advanced Western technology. China also supplied crucial uranium hexafluoride (UF<sub>6</sub>).<sup>27</sup> According to some reports China also tested a Pakistani bomb at its facility in Lop Nur in Xinjiang province in 1990.<sup>28</sup> China has also helped Pakistan in its development of smaller tactical nuclear weapons and due to China's help, Pakistan has more nuclear weapons than India. China is also helping Pakistan's civil nuclear sector while providing fuel, finance, and reactors. Karachi nuclear power plant was constructed with Chinese help and both nations have signed a deal for the development of a Chasma-5 nuclear reactor (Chasma-I to IV has already been developed with Chinese help).<sup>29</sup>

Not only the weapons development program but China has also helped Pakistan's weapon delivery systems, especially missiles. China supplied crucial M-9 and M-11 technology to Pakistan in 1992. About all of Pakistan's missiles are either imported from China or prototypes of Chinese missiles or developed with Chinese help. Pakistan's Shaheen-1 missile is a copy of China's M-9 missile, and Shaheen-2 is based on the technology of China's M-18 missile. Similarly, the Babur cruise missile is based on China's DH-10 missile, and even Pakistan's air defense

system uses China's HQ-9 surface-to-air missiles.<sup>30</sup> Pakistan also gets some crucial systems from North Korea in exchange for its nuclear design.

### **Security Implication and Options for India**

China-Pakistan strategic collaboration presents serious security challenges to India as they present two fronts of risk at the time of conflicts. As Garver points out; a strong and independent Pakistan antagonistic to India, is in China's interest because it limits India's ability to distillate its forces along the China border at the time of clash with China. Further, China can intervene in any war that Pakistan appears to lose against India. Similarly, during the time of Indo-China conflicts, Pakistan can also utilize the opportunity in its favor.<sup>31</sup> India has experienced China's ultimatum to India in the middle of the Indo-Pak war of 1965, however, China never actively participated in any Indo-Pakistan conflicts but such future possibilities cannot be denied. The China-Pakistan friendship treaty of 2005 has raised Indian apprehensions. Increasing armed border skirmishes with both countries have presented new challenges to Indian security. India must prepare a multi-dimensional national security strategy to tackle these challenges. Militarily, India must modernize its forces and strengthen its 'Mountain Strike Corps'. Economically, India needs to maintain an impressive growth rate of about double-digit and must tackle its trade deficit so that an additional budget can be arranged for the infrastructure development along with the border and for the modernization drive of its forces. Diplomatically, India continuously needs to engage China on the issues of mutual interests like trade, terrorism, and the environment bilaterally and multilaterally. Strategically, India continuously needs to strengthen its relations with major powers like the United States, Russia, Britain, and France as well as like-minded resident powers of Asia such as; Japan, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, and Vietnam etc. Increased engagement with democratic QUAD is a good step in this direction. India also needs to spend a considerable amount on research and development of new technologies and develop indigenous modern weapon industry and joint development projects, as we are still importing more than 70 percent of our defense needs.

### **Conclusion: Looking forward**

There is no permanent friend or enemy in international relations, only national interests are permanent. Shared border disputes and enmity with India, followed by a strong convergence of strategic interests have brought both the nations together against India during and after the Cold War period. And they are bound to remain together, due to the strong convergence of their security and strategic interests. As an emerging superpower, China wants to dominate Asia and contain its potential

challenger India within the South Asian region. On the other hand, Pakistan wants parity with India. Thereby strategic relationships between the two nations will continue to grow in the near future and hence continue to present challenges to Indian security. 'The Middle Kingdom' led by its modern emperor is desperate to fulfill its 'China dream'. Pakistan has emerged as a centre point of China's flagship enlargement programme 'One Belt One Road Initiative'. By construction of the China- Pakistan Economic Corridor, (CPEC) China has de-facto recognized Pakistan's claim over occupied Kashmir. Gwadar can be easily converted into a naval base for the Chinese navy. Rising powers tend to fall into confrontation with their neighbourhood, due to an unending quest for more strategic space. Further, as China's economy is booming at a faster rate, therefore it will continue to grow its defense budget and modernize its forces especially the Navy (PLAN) and will continue to challenge the status quo along the Indian border and even in the India Ocean region with the help of Pakistan. India needs to engage China in issues of mutual interest as well as increase its comprehensive national power through continuous impressive economic growth. It also needs modernization of its armed forces and develops indigenous weapons industry while strengthening its relations with major external powers as well as like-minded resident powers.

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