

## **SINO - INDIAN - PAKISTAN TRIANGLE: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE ASIAN ORDER**

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The Asian order or security architecture, in particular, in the South Asian region, has been impacted by the behavior of China, Pakistan and India. India's growth, Pakistan's need for economic development and its struggle for containing terrorism as well as China's aggressive behavior in the South China Sea and the need for valuable points of entry into the Indian ocean region has resulted in the multiple formation of security ties in order to counter force another state's influence in the region. The interests shown by the United States in wanting to influence the security architecture in the region has equally contributed to competition and militarization of the region. India's pro active foreign policy under the Modi government and the support from the Trump administration has brought China and Pakistan closer. Therefore, the Asian order is unstable due to the divergences of interests among major stake holders of the Asian security architecture. The newly formed Indo Pacific strategy together with the emergence of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project and US influence in the South China Sea, the instability in the region will continue for the foreseeable future. Consequently, the Indo-Sino-Pakistan relations will be greatly affected due to the above features of the Asian order.

Keywords: China, Pakistan, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, South China Sea, India, United States

### **Introduction**

India and Pakistan came into being in 1947. China-Pakistan relations were less than cordial in the early years after independence. In fact, after winning the war, Pakistani military dictator, Field Marshall , Ayub Khan offered India a joint defense agreement against China in October 1958 merely because he perceived China as a common threat to South Asia. But Wilsonian idealist Indian PM, Jawaharlal Nehru rejected the proposal without considering the idea appropriately. It vindicates the kind of so-called knowledge Pandit Nehru had in the realm of foreign affairs which he was very proudly advocated. Earlier, Dr. Ambedkar warned Nehru during the debate in Rajya-Sabha (Upper House of Indian Parliament) just weeks before the signing of the 1954 treaty with China. But Nehru was too proud to heed this Kautilayan realist advise. In fact, Pandit Nehru tried to establish exclusive cordial relations with China

based on many idealistic nomenclatures. He tried his level best through the 1955 Bandung conference but eventually failed. He believed Chinese leadership is very much committed for the unity of developing and lesser developing countries. But the bubble burst when the Chinese army captured Tibet illegally in the late 1950s.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, one of the towering leaders of Indian independence had already warned Nehru.<sup>1</sup> Ambedkar was of the opinion that while China accepted the Panchsheel which promised non aggression on Tibet, it failed to uphold the panchsheel when it illegally occupied Tibet. Ambedkar further observed that Chinese aggression will have a serious impact on Indian national security. He postulated with the illegal occupation of Lhasa (Tibetan capital), Pandit Nehru has in a way helped the Chinese move closer to the Indian borders.<sup>2</sup> In actual fact, if Nehru had recognized Tibet as an independent state then, current Indian borders would be 1000km away from mainland China.

India's foreign policy decisions also resulted in China-Pakistan relations flourishing after the 1962 India-China war. Just after independence in 1947, initially Pakistan joined the American orbit and had apprehensions about China. The Tibetan issue was a cause for concern and as such the Pakistanis stood by Lhasa during early debates on illegal occupation of the city at the United Nations. After the 1962 war, understanding India's strained relations with Pakistan and the state's important geo-strategic location, Pakistan became an asset in China's containment policy towards India. In the Sino-Pakistan Agreement 1963 which aimed to establish borders between both states, Pakistan ceded a huge part of its territories to China. However, Pakistan rejected China's claim over Aksai Chin. During the Afghan war (1979), China shifted its foreign policy by supporting the American led block to contain the Soviets. Pakistan had no choice but to work with China as it was the base for the Americans to go against the invading red army. It is important to highlight that it was the peak of the Cold War and both China and the USSR shared a common ideology of advocating and spreading communism. As Kautilya observed, in war, common ideology cannot remain a determiner of foreign policy. However, the objective of this paper is to examine contemporary trends of Sino-Pakistan-India trilateral relationship and its implications. The growing Indian economic and New Delhi's strategic profile has transformed the relationship although underlying factors of this trilateral relationship remains the same.

## **Complicated Trilateral Relations**

Several incidents have contributed to a complex security architecture of this trilateral relationship. In 1999, Pakistani actions of attacking Indian soldiers in Kargil district in Jammu Kashmir, triggered tensions between India and Pakistan. Though China supported

<sup>1</sup> Sudhir Singh, *Relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Today*, Pentagon Press, New Delhi, 2017, pp.11-12.

<sup>2</sup> Sudhir Singh, *Relevance of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Today*, pp.11-12.

Pakistan, yet Beijing remain steady in its principle that the incident was a bilateral issue and must be resolved by New Delhi and Islamabad respectively. Twenty years down the line in 2019 when Indo-Pakistani relations became worse following a militant attack by Pakistan in the Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir which saw dozens of death of Indian soldiers, New Delhi retaliated with airstrikes on Pakistan. Islamabad hit back by dropping bombs near military installation inside Jammu and Kashmir as well as shooting down an Indian jet. Despite always supporting Pakistan, similar to the 1999 incident in Kargil, China's response was muted in that Beijing maintained that worsening relations must be resolved bilaterally.

In the post-Cold War era, Sino-Pakistan relations have been rather cordial and is viewed as an 'all weather friendship' because China chose not to ignore Islamabad. Former Pakistani Prime Minister, Yusuf Raza Gillani once referred to bilateral relations as 'Sino-Pakistan relations are deeper than sea, bigger than Himalayas and sweeter than honey.'<sup>3</sup> Therefore, it is hardly surprising that since 2006 every top Chinese leader, has visited Pakistan while visiting India. More importantly, the maiden visit of almost every Pakistani Foreign Minister is to Beijing. However, between 2008 and 2013, Pakistani Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar broke the tradition when she visited New Delhi first but it the action has been regarded as a mere coincidence.

Such close relations is a clear message to India that, Pakistan is special friend to China. Since the 2008 nuclear deal with between India and the United States, China progressed quickly to deepen its relations with Pakistan while managing a delicate relationship with India despite barrage of divergences. Meanwhile, in order to encircle India, Chinese imprint in South Asia is expanded rapidly. The Chinese have established their maritime presence in Hambantota, Sri-Lanka, Male, Maldives, Chittagong, Bangladesh and Sittwe in Myanmar. It can be safely assumed that the prevailing trend of encircling India within this trilateral ambit is set to continue in the foreseeable future.

Against this backdrop, Pakistan remains a vital ally of China. Since 9/11, Pakistan and China have developed greater strategic as well as defense cooperation. The convergence of interests between the two states has resulted in increasing the frequency of high-level exchanges to discuss major developments that have taken place at the global and regional levels.<sup>4</sup> More importantly, President Xi Jinping launched the Belt and Road initiative after realising that in order to sustain China's growth, Beijing must sustain a continuous energy

<sup>3</sup> 'Pakistan-China friendship is higher than mountains, deeper than ocean and sweeter than honey: Prime Minister', *The Nation*, 19 December 2010, <https://nation.com.pk/19-Dec-2010/pakchina-friendship-is-higher-than-mountains-deeper-than-ocean-and-sweeter-than-honey-pm>.

<sup>4</sup> Pakistan favoured American policies to counter the Soviet Union. Simultaneously, India was better off militarily and financially, Pakistan sought American aid in preserving its security in the face of Indian aggression.

supply. The deepening Indo-US relations has further complicated the security architecture in the Indian Ocean Region for China, especially in terms of access to maritime space. Against this backdrop, the Belt and Road initiative has been established to maintain China's influence in South Asia. In other words, China has abandoned Deng Xiaoping's mantra of "hide your strength, bide your time" in order to adopt a more proactive role in regional and global affairs.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1990s, India shifted the low annual growth rate of the economy phase to liberating its economy in 1991 and moving away from a non-aligned foreign policy. Such a pro active stance also coincided with the arrival of the Narendra Modi government decades later in 2014. Modi adopted the Kautilayan notion of alignment with the countries of Southeast and East Asia, which have closer relations with China. Mistrust in India - China relations has grown due to India's expansion to China's traditional neighbourhoods, the growing clout of both states' economies, compounded by unresolved core grievances in long-standing territorial as well as trade disputes. It is predicted that relations will worsen and both states will continue to drift apart.

To counter India, these days China has deepened its relations with Pakistan. This has suited Pakistani's national interests as the US has become an unpredictable ally. For the US, Pakistan failed to be a part of the resolution for the Afghan problem as Washington perceives Islamabad playing a double game in the conflict. James Mattis, who led the US forces into Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks observes that Pakistan is unreliable, dangerous as well as too radicalized.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, American journalist Carlotta Gall who wrote a book entitled *The Wrong Enemy; America in Afghanistan 2001-2004*, believes that Pakistani military and intelligence services were involved in attacks on Washington's assets in Afghanistan. Gall concludes that "at the core of Pakistan's thinking was an obsessive desire to dominate Afghanistan in order to protect its own rear flank from India. In that way of thinking, the Taliban were guarantors of Pakistan's national strategic interests."<sup>7</sup>

Such a perspective has resulted in Pakistan being isolated. For example, though China says it still supports Pakistan but on the issue of the abrogation of article 370 relating to Kashmir, it is clear Beijing has not done anything tangible to indicate so. The editorial comment of the prestigious Pakistani daily *Dawn* further postulated that,

5 Michael Pillsbury, *China Debates the Future Security Environment*, Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 2000.

6 "Pakistan Was Born With No Affection For Itself": Ex-US Defence Secretary, *Press Trust of India*, 5 September, 2019,

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/pakistan-is-a-country-born-with-no-affection-for-itself-says-jim-mattis-2096160>

7 Lalit K. Jha, "ISI executed Kabul Indian Embassy attack, US couldn't stop it," *The Indian Express*, 24 March, 2014, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/asia/isi-executed-kabul-indian-embassy-attack-us-couldnt-stop-it/>

The crisis in India-held Kashmir could trigger global consequences, yet the world has not responded to Pakistan's urgent exhortations with the level of robustness as situation warrants. Instead of full-throated condemnation, there is a language of equivocation. Indeed, some countries, most notably US and UAE, have even gone along with India's brazenly false assertion that stripping Kashmir, an internationally recognised disputed territory, of its special status is an "internal matter". Saudi Arabia's bland reaction thus far avoids expressing any opinion whatsoever.<sup>8</sup>

According to the eminent Pakistani strategic thinker Pervez Hood-boy, Pakistan's status at the global stage has taken a hit as allies have ceased to stand by Islamabad. Due to the proactive foreign policy of the Modi government, India has successfully shown the world Pakistan's activities as a major source of international terrorism. Evidence suggests that Iran, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and many other important countries including Russia have strongly supported India in targeting Pakistani based terror training camps. Pervez Hood-boy is of the opinion that China's silence on Kashmir and its reaction towards the the issue of Masood Azhar's blacklisting at the United Nations shows Beijing will always prioritize its own national interests.<sup>9</sup> While in the beginning China continuously blocked the designation of Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations, but in May 2019, abruptly China lifted its veto and Azhar was declared a global terrorist. China's reaction cemented the Indian perception that Pakistan has ties with terror networks within its surrounding borders. Moreover, Beijing's reaction provided India one of the most significant diplomatic victories over Pakistan in recent years.

For the last three decades, the idea of the 21st century being an Asian century has been widely debated though it has not been realized. With American influence declining in Asia, China has been more than willing to fill the vacuum. China has seized the opportunity to expand its influence through the Belt and Road initiative and its close contacts with Asian states. Against this backdrop, interestingly, China does not want to witness the erosion of Pakistan's influence in South Asia. China still wants Pakistan to contain India in the Indian Ocean Region. However, China understands that Pakistan has limitations given India's phenomenal economic and strategic achievements under the Modi government.

The discord in the Sino-Indian relationship is most evident in the unresolved territorial

<sup>8</sup> "A Tepid Response," *Dawn*, 9 August, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1498903>

<sup>9</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Client and Patrons," *Dawn*, 6 July, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1492430>

dispute along the 4,000 km border in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh.<sup>10</sup> When Tibetan spiritual guru, Dalai Lama visited Arunachal Pradesh in March 2017, the visit was condemned by the Chinese on the basis that it is a disputed territory therefore Dalai Lama had no legal rights to visit the state. In October 2016, American Ambassador to India, Richard Verma visited the state and it was also opposed by the Chinese on the same grounds. Under the special representative s' framework adopted in 2003 and 21 years of joint working group meetings, hardly any progress have been made in resolving the territorial dispute. Recently, the Chinese army even had a scuffle with the Indian army in the Laddakh sector in September 2019. Meanwhile, the dispute has transmuted due to both a change in strategic significance and the expanded instruments available to both countries. One reason for this is when India abrogated article 370 status to Kashmir and bifurcated the state, Laddakh was made as a separate union territory. This was opposed by China. India asserted that it is an internal matter and others had no right to intervene. In a veiled threat India also stressed that if others commented on India's internal matters then New Delhi would also reciprocate.

Despite territorial issues, Indian and Chinese leaders have always visited each other. Prime Minister Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping have met 13 times in the last 5 years and President Xi is slated to visit India in the later part of 2019 for an informal summit. After the 2017 Doklam crisis between India and China which lasted for 70 days, Modi visited China in April 2018 for the summit level talk with Xi Jinping. Both leaders had six rounds of exclusive summit level talks. Xi sought to open a "new chapter" in relations between China and India aimed at mending ties strained by a border dispute. Modi thanked Xi for meeting him twice outside Beijing, telling the Chinese leader: "this in itself shows love and affection towards India." Invoking Xi's political slogan and his own, Modi said: "Together your 'new era' dream and our 'new India' effort will be the right step for the benefit of the world." But neither leader directly mentioned the border row or other sources of tension in their remarks.<sup>11</sup>

But China's interests lie elsewhere despite Xi's overture. This Chinese strategic calculation was tested in February when Indian air force targeted terrorist training center at Balakot in Mansera district through where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is also passing. China was forced to openly take side with Pakistan and vetoed US and France move at the UN to declare Masood Azhar ( J-e-M) as global terrorist. This sequence was

<sup>10</sup> India claims 38,000 square km of territory in Aksai Chin (in Jammu and Kashmir) that is held by China. In contrast, China claims 90,000 km of Arunachal Pradesh (originally the North East Frontier Agency) that was granted statehood by India in 1986, which led to skirmishes between both countries at Sumdurong Chu Valley the following year. China refuses recognition of the 1914 Simla Accord that demarcated the China-India border on the grounds of challenging the legitimacy of Tibetan and British Indian interlocutors.

<sup>11</sup> "Xi Jinping meets Modi, eyes 'new chapter in China-India ties," *Dawn*, 27 April 2018, <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/wcB4AZjWSbepQov8HVduKI/Xi-Jinping-meets-Narendra-Modi-eyes-new-chapter-in-China.html>

tested after Kargil (1999) and Chinese had to choose Pakistani side. It has resulted into the widening of the trust deficit between India and China.

Further, in 2013, China launched the China Pakistan Corridor (CPEC) to expand its connectivity with Pakistan and extended it up to Gwadar, which is situated at the mouth of the Persian Gulf just 60 kilometres east to the Iranian border. CPEC however is an infrastructure project, to upgrade Beijing's links with Pakistan and through the Persian Gulf with the wider spectrum of the Islamic world. President Xi, during his 2016 Islamabad visit indicated that CPEC is an ambitious project which will bring economic prosperity in the region. But it is an open secret that it has an economic component its strategic aspects attached to it.

The Chinese are the second largest global energy consumer. Hence, when the CPEC is completed, it will reduce China's 'Malacca Dilemma' and ensure free and early flow of energy supply. Therefore, the Chinese openly support Pakistan. For instance, during the September 2016 Indian surgical strike on Pakistan, the Chinese tacitly supported Pakistan. During the Kargil incursion (1999) the Chinese openly advised Pakistan to resolve the matter amicably through dialogue. More interestingly, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and General Pervez Musharraf visited Beijing during the Kargil crisis to garner Chinese support.

## **India – China - ASEAN Nexus**

Since China is close to Pakistan, India has now consciously diversified its foreign partners by looking east. India's relationship with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries has huge imprint of its overall foreign policy direction. The Modi government has upgraded 'Look East Policy' into 'Act East Policy' and extended it to East Asia and even up to Australia as well.<sup>12</sup> Undoubtedly, China is concerned of India's look East Policy. For China, India is encroaching into its territory especially the South China Sea (SCS). China has declared SCS as its backyard and is unwilling to obey the norms of the UNCLOS (1982). Despite high robust trade relations with China, ASEAN and East Asian countries are concerned at China's lack of compliance of international laws in the dispute. Beijing is aware that all members of the ASEAN grouping are not always on the same page on all issues. As the ASEAN Way follows a consensus approach, any member can exercise veto over the group's decisions and declarations. Since China is closer to Laos and Cambodia, these countries have managed to create disunity in ASEAN where the SCS dispute is concerned. Therefore, China enjoys an edge in imposing its will on the others in the region.

Given the non-cooperation by some ASEAN member nations, Vietnam is now operating outside the conventional ASEAN framework by forming a de facto maritime bloc with

<sup>12</sup> Dai Bing, "India and China's great game in full swing", *China Internet Information Center*, 22 October, 2010, [http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-10/22/content\\_21181802.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/opinion/2010-10/22/content_21181802.htm). Accessed on 8 January, 2011.

Indonesia and the Philippines. India now supports Vietnam in its maritime strategy. India's naval capability is strong enough to intervene to restore maritime order if needed. Not surprisingly, India-Vietnam relations has deepened enormously in the last two decades and Hanoi has emerged as an important fulcrum of India's 'Act East Policy'. Vietnam and India are engaged in oil exploration in the SCS. Vietnam has also provided exclusive entry to visiting Indian navy ships into its most important harbours which coincidentally are situated in the SCS. Since the Look East Policy began, despite low trade volume, relations are better than ever.

China is unhappy with the more proactive Indian presence in the Southeast Asian region. Hence, the future will see ASEAN-India-China trilateral relationships reshaping a new era of geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific region. The problem of Indo-Pacific is that majority of the countries involved are engaged in trying to dominate the region. It is the root of prevailing trust deficits in Indo-Pacific. India and ASEAN along with Japan, South Korea and Australia are together in this evolving power equilibrium in Indo-Pacific and China remains in opposition together with Pakistan, North Korea and Cambodia. The main friction will be how India manages to expand its influence in the region. India already has cordial relations with Southeast and East Asia. It can be argued that India's post-Cold War Look East Policy can be traced back to the ideals of the Indian national movement when it was already viewed as the engine of Asian growth by its colonial master.

China is ASEAN's largest trading partner for nine consecutive years since 2018. By 2019, ASEAN had become China's second-largest trading partner.<sup>13</sup> Despite robust trade relations, trust deficit prevails between China with ASEAN, Japan, the United States and India. This prevailing trust deficit has been vindicated on the issues of claims on the SCS, terrorism, and territorial disputes. India and China are largest economies of the contemporary globe beside the United States. The prevailing hegemony of the US in Southeast Asia is sustained by the existence of trust deficit between New Delhi and Beijing. More importantly, where ASEAN is concerned the SCS dispute has emerged as a bitter global flashpoint with China. The worry is that growing tensions might result in potential among conflicting parties due to miscalculation.

## **The US Factor**

The growing bonhomie between United States and India has certainly created further tensions in the South Asian region. China is willing to keep India neutral and does not wish her to go in to close embrace of the United States. According to Munir Akram, an eminent strategic thinker from Pakistan,

<sup>13</sup> China-ASEAN trade continues to boom amid global growth slowdown, uncertainties, *China Daily*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201907/23/WS5d367792a310d8305640082a.html>



Pakistan is near if not in the eye of the brewing Sino-US storm. Neutrality is not an option for Pakistan. The US has already chosen India as its strategic partner to counter China across the 'Indo-Pacific' and South Asia...Notwithstanding India's trade squabbles with Donald Trump, the US establishment is committed to building up India militarily to counter China. On the other hand, strategic partnership with China is the bedrock of Pakistan's security and foreign policy. The Indo-US alliance will compel further intensification of the Pakistan-China partnership.<sup>14</sup>

The closeness between Modi and the President of the US Donald Trump could be seen when Modi visited the US in September 2019. The "Howdy, Modi!" event on 22 September was transformative for many reasons. It was the first time a US president and an Indian Prime Minister jointly addressed a rally. More than 50,000 Indian-Americans from across the US participated in the "Howdy, Modi! Shared Dreams, Bright Futures" event held at the NRG Stadium in Houston, Texas. In a statement days before the event, White House Press Secretary Stephanie Grisham remarked that the joint rally "will be a great opportunity to emphasize the their energy and trade relationship."<sup>15</sup> More importantly, the event showed Trump that ethnic Indian citizens in America supported his administration. Traditionally, they were known to support the Democrat Party in the US. At the same time, the event witnessed the bi-partisan participation from American both Democrats and Republican lawmakers reflecting consensus for the improvement of Indo-US relationship.

The Indo-pacific strategy reflects the US commitment in Asia which India has endorsed. The United States has challenged the might of the Chinese in the SCS and has executed many joint naval exercises with like-minded countries in this disputed water including with India. The US, unlike China, has long had military bases or similar arrangements in countries bordering the SCS, including the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. Moreover, the US has recently significantly increased its naval and air operations in and over the SCS, including conducting the freedom of navigation exercises. The warships and planes the US sends on such operations challenge China's territorial and judicial claims. China sees the US' freedom of navigation patrols as "gunboat diplomacy" or even bullying. As a senior US naval officer has put it, the freedom of navigation exercise is "an 'in your face', 'rub your nose in it' operation, that lets people know who is the boss" of the seas.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Munir Akram, "Pakistan and Sino-US Cold War," *Dawn*, 9 June, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1487040>

<sup>15</sup> Geeta Mohan, "Trump, Modi to address 50,000 Indian -Americans at 'Howdy Modi' mega event in Houston," *India Today*, 16 September, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Mark J. Valencia, "The US-China problem in the South China Sea: One man's militarisation is another man's

China is of the view that the SCS, an adjacent area to Indian Ocean, is part of its core national interest and the Yellow Sea as its military operation zone. For the last few years India and US have participated in joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean. The Malabar naval exercise in which India and US participate has not been well received by China. US troops and ships exhibiting fire power right at the doorstep of China is something Beijing opposes. Sino-Indian relations is influenced by US actions and military strength in Asia. Now that India is engaged with the US actively via multiple agreements, the US wants to send a message to China by being closer to India.

## **The CPEC and Sino-Pakistan Relations**

Although the CPEC has been discussed briefly above but the implications of it for Pakistan-Sino Relations will be further examined in this section. President Xi who will be ruling China till death, declared his ambitious plan to expand infrastructure projects abroad in March 2012. The ambition morphed into the popularly known initiative 'One Belt, One Road' (OBOR). Within the ambit of this plan, he declared the CPEC. It is intended to connect the western Chinese town of Kashgar of turbulent Xingjinag province to Gwador, which is situated into the turbulent Pakistani province of Baluchistan. The CPEC is expected to provide strategic naval platforms to China in the western Indian Ocean and in the Gulf. This corridor has strategic implications for India, particularly where maritime interests are concerned in the Indian Ocean Region. China has pledged to spend over \$ 65 billion over the project. The Pakistani government expects more investments from Chinese companies to help support industrialisation and greater agricultural productivity and innovation. In other words, the CPEC is a chance for Pakistan to revitalize its economy. However, there are too many problems in the project implementation stage.

There are frequent reports appearing in the Pakistani and international media that CPEC is not materializing as per expectations of China and Chinese companies are taking adequate steps to minimize the loss incurred due to the slow growth of the project. Recent report indicate that China's COSCO Shipping Lines terminated its container liner services between Karachi and Gwadar. Slow construction of the Gwadar Free Trade Zone has resulted in the decrease of export and import volume at the port terminal. COSCO also felt that there the Gwadar customs was inefficient, the higher inland shipping costs and by the Karachi Port authorities further compounded the problem. Port operator Gwadar International Terminal Limited, the subsidy of China Overseas Port Holdings Corporation (COPHC) and COSCO allege various reasons for the termination, in particular Pakistani inadequate policies that have

self-defence," *South China Morning Post*, 20 August 2019,

<https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3023431/us-china-problem-south-china-sea-one-mans-militarisation-another>

impacted annual yields.<sup>17</sup>

From the Pakistani side, anti Chinese sentiment is prevailing. There is fierce opposition by the Baluch groups who perceive CPEC as Chinese colonialism. They believe, when completed, the CPEC will make the locals a minority within their own homeland. They are opposing the project with violence and killings. A number of Chinese engineers and other workers in Baluchistan have been murdered the last few years. Interestingly the Baloch groups have been indirectly supporting India's stand on Kashmir and attacking China's atrocities in Xinjiang. For instance, the Baloch leader - Mehran Marri slammed Islamabad for committing "genocide and human rights violation in Balochistan" yet they go to the international community with a "facade of caring about human rights in Kashmir".<sup>18</sup> Mehran Marri made the remark after Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's invitation to the world media and the international community to visit Pakistani occupied Kashmir (PoK) to see how "happy" people there were.<sup>19</sup> Pakistan was also accused of ignoring human rights abuses committed by China in Xinjiang province against Uighur Muslims. Mehran Marri observed that,

Pakistan has given the rights to itself the position of international policeman for safeguarding the rights of Muslims around the world. Is it too blind to see what's happening to the Muslims in China because China is a partner in crime for carrying out crime in Balochistan? They can't see millions of Muslims living in China in destitute."<sup>20</sup>

It is a fact that Pakistan has lost its support from the Muslim world, especially on the Kashmir dispute. The Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) has not condemned Indian action on Kashmir. Even with the on going Kashmir conflict, Saudi Arabia vowed to invest US\$100 billion in India by 2021. In many instances, the Saudi government has supported India more than Pakistan, especially in trade and remittances. Latest figures show Pakistan-Saudi trade volume between 2017 and 2018 were at US\$7.5 billion while India-Saudi trade in the

<sup>17</sup> Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China-Pakistan Gwadar Port Runs into Rough Weather," *Economic Times*, 10 September, 2019.

<https://m.economictimes.com/news/international/world-news/pakistan-china-gwadar-port-runs-into-rough-weather/articleshow/71041565.cms>

<sup>18</sup> "What about genocide in Balochistan: Pakistan called out by Baloch leader," *India Today*, September 11, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> "What about genocide in Balochistan: Pakistan called out by Baloch leader."

<sup>20</sup> "What about genocide in Balochistan: Pakistan called out by Baloch leader."

same year was \$27.5 billion. In terms of remittances, in 2018, Pakistani workers in KSA sent \$4.9 billion compared to Indian workers at \$12.2 billion.<sup>21</sup>

Pakistani recent actions have not been supportive of Muslims either. In order to make the CPEC successful, Islamabad does not comment on Uighur Muslims who are sent to re-education camps in China and it does not speak of the destruction taking place in Yemen for fear of angering Saudi Arabia.<sup>22</sup>

## **Indo-US Nuclear Deal and Pakistan**

The cooperation between the US and India strengthened and intensified after the conclusion of Indo-US Civilian Nuclear Deal of 2008. The deal allowed for the lifting of nuclear sanctions against New Delhi and India was allowed to have civilian nuclear trade along with its nuclear weapons program. The Indo-US Deal saw the US recognizing India as a leading power in the region. This was against the background of being a close partner of the US in the war against terrorism. India's geopolitical and geo-strategic objectives were achieved, its nuclear and missile predominance became established through the deal. The deal placed Pakistan in an awkward position in the South Asian region. As a result, Pakistan explored several options to safeguard its security interests in the region. The first option was to acquire the same nuclear and missile capability in order to counter India. Pakistan was worried that India might convert its civilian nuclear program into a clandestine nuclear arms program, which will have serious security implications for Pakistani security. After the 9/11 incident and the rise of global terrorism, the US chose to support India as a major regional power in South Asia in order to contain China. This ultimately resulted in Pakistan and China working together to contain Indian might and US influence in the region. More significantly, China became a major contributor to Pakistan's nuclear developments in order to balance India's hegemony in the region. <sup>23</sup>

## **Concluding Remarks**

The Asian order is unstable and will remain so due to divergences of interests among major stakeholders of the Asian security architecture. The basic premise of India-China-Pakistan triangle relationship has been turbulent and will remain the same in the foreseeable future. The newly formed Indo Pacific strategy together with the emergence of CPEC and US

<sup>21</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Ditched by the Ummah," *Dawn*, 7 September, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1504003>

<sup>22</sup> Pervez Hoodbhoy, "Promises broken and kept," *Dawn*, August 17, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1499969>

<sup>23</sup> Amin, Shahid M., *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2000, p.78.

influence in the SCS, the instability in the region will continue for the foreseeable future. More significantly, the Indo-Sino-Pakistan relations will be affected due to the above features of the Asian order.

It seems logical to conclude that the India factor might have played a role in strengthening Sino–Pakistan relations, though growing Indo-US relations were also of immense importance in bringing the two countries closer to each other. China’s relations with Pakistan will continue to flourish, and, China will be in a better position to exhort India to moderate its policy towards Pakistan. Chinese support to Pakistan is a constant factor in as much as the core Pakistani and Chinese interests are concerned.

Right now, convergences of interests between China and Pakistan relates to containing India. Since the arrival of Modi, China has taken direct steps to help Pakistan to contain India within South Asia. Given the growth trajectory India has achieved and its presence at the global table of governance, the deepening Pakistani and Chinese nexus is not only detrimental for Indian interests in South Asia but at the global level as well. It is one of the serious challenges for the Modi government. Not surprisingly, the Modi government has adopted proactive foreign policy. It has worked well for Modi as China’s aggressive behavior in foreign policy has been a plus point in countering Beijing and in attracting allies. The SCS Sea dispute has evoked a gamut of dissent among regional countries against China. India has taken a principle stand to support relevant international laws in these disputes and this will serve Indian interest and ensure justice based international order.

China ignoring its Muslims is another factor to consider. Although China is aware that Pakistani based terror groups are behind Xinjiang turbulence but due to their security interests to contain India within South Asia, they are supporting Pakistan. This Chinese attitude is also going to be sustainable due to prevailing contours of security architecture of the Indo-Pacific. Chinese support to Pakistan is bound to continue because India’s rise has remained phenomenal. Through its proactive foreign policy in Indo-Pacific, India perceives it can meet these emerging challenges and ensure its national interests are safeguarded.

The US factor is another factor why China feels threatened by India. China perceives India as its only challenge in Asia. Modi’s meetings with Trump many times has assisted in the Indo Pacific strategy materializing. Together with Japan, ASEAN and Australia, India has joined the strategy to contain China. But the China-Pakistan nexus is all set to be sustainable to counter the Indo Pacific strategy in the face of a resurgent Indian administration.

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