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Sino-Pakistan Strategic Entente: Implications for Regional Security

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Abstract

Sino-Pakistan relations stand out as one of the few enduring friendships that have withstood the pressures of time and shifting geo-strategic conditions. This paper discusses the defence and security dimensions of the Sino-Pak relationship which have been based on shared strategic interests and geo-political goals. It analyses some of the important political and geo-strategic issues affecting this relationship. The paper also looks at the regional and international dimensions, in particular the relevance of India and the United States to Sino-Pak relations. It examines the trajectory of Indo-US strategic ties and the downward spiralling of US-Pak relations which triggers its own logic on Sino-Pak security dynamics. The paper argues that as long as India-Pakistan peace process remains grounded on the issue of terrorism and Kashmir, and Pakistan's relations with US are a downward spiral, Pakistan would continue to view China as its most strategic ally in counterbalancing India, and to some extent the US. China will also have an inherent stake in shoring Pakistan's political and military stability in terms of its long-term security interests in the South, Central and Western Asian region, and checking the rising presence and power profile of the US. Finally the paper concludes that notwithstanding some strains and pressures in the relationship, Sino-Pak friendship will endure in the foreseeable future.

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In the world of contemporary international politics, Sino-Pak relations stand out as one of the few enduring friendships that have withstood the pressures of time and shifting geo-strategic conditions. The two countries established diplomatic ties in 1951 and have never looked back. In 2011, they commemorated 60 years of diplomatic ties, which was also designated as the China-Pakistan Year of Friendship. As staunch allies and strategic partners for the past few decades, China and Pakistan have shared a friendship which has proved of great value in furtherance of their geo-political and strategic objectives. Their strong convergence in security interests has led to a multi-faceted strategic relationship which is reflected in a strong show of support for each other's positions across a wide spectrum of bilateral, regional and international issues. Recently Pakistan's Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani described the relationship between Pakistan and China as being 'higher than mountains, deeper than oceans, stronger than steel and sweeter than honey.'² In 2006, Chinese President Hu Jintao had declared equally evocatively that 'China can leave gold but not friendship with Pakistan'. Shorn of the hyperbole, these statements accurately capture the essence of the two countries' long-standing partnership based on mutual trust and understanding.³

From China's perspective, Pakistan serves many of its vital geo-strategic objectives in the region. First, friendship with Pakistan provides a useful counterbalance to India's pre-eminence in South Asia, helping to check India's growing presence and clout in the region. Second, Pakistan serves as an important gateway to the Muslim world. It also provides China an access to energy rich countries in Western Asia, helping China meet its growing energy requirements.⁴ It also provides a quick physical channel to China's relatively less developed Western parts, particularly spurring development in the restive province of Xinjiang, which is crucial to China's internal security. Third, it helps China in its long-term strategy of keeping US preponderant influence in the region at bay. From Pakistan's perspective, China is an indispensable ally in helping Pakistan counter India with which it has had an acrimonious and unequal relationship for the last six decades. In addition, given US fickle track record as an ally in the past, Pakistan has a stake in reducing its dependence on the US and cultivating China as a reliable strategic partner in the regional security scenario. Pakistan is also heavily dependent on China for its vital defence supplies and critical help in augmenting its technological and nuclear capabilities. Last, but not the least, China provides it crucial moral and diplomatic support in the international arena in its time of need.

² The statement was made during the visit of Chinese Public Security Minister, Meng Jianzho, to Pakistan in September 2011. See 'Ties with China hailed: Gilani cautions US on negative messaging' *Dawn* (28 September 2011) <http://www.dawn.com/2011/09/28/ties-with-china-hailed-gilani-cautions-us-on-negative-messaging.html> Accessed on 30 December 2011.

³ Hu Jintao said this during a state visit to Pakistan in November 2006. See *Dawn* (26 November 2006), <http://archives.dawn.com/2006/11/26/top3.htm>. Accessed 1 January 2012

⁴ Pakistan projects itself as an important country on the crossroads of Central, South and West Asia. As Pakistan's Ambassador to China, Masood Khan, succinctly observed, 'we are also a conduit for China to reach out to the Muslim world'. See 'Pakistan wants to develop further Gwadar port', *China Daily* (13 August, 2011) http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2011-08/13/content_13106717.htm Accessed 24 January 2012.

This paper discusses the defence and security dimensions of the Sino-Pak relationship and analyses some of the important political and geo-strategic issues affecting this relationship. The paper then looks at the regional and international dimensions, in particular the relevance of India and the US to Sino-Pak relations. It examines the trajectory of Indo-US strategic ties and the downward spiralling of US-Pak relations which triggers its own logic on Sino-Pak security dynamics.

Defence Cooperation: Military Procurement and Assistance

The most consistent and enduring pillar of Sino-Pak relationship is the defence and nuclear cooperation between the two countries. Sino-Pak defence cooperation goes back to 1965, when, following an arms embargo imposed by the US in the wake of 1965 Indo-Pak war, China stepped in as a replacement for the US to supply arms to Pakistan. In 1966, China had supplied weapons to the tune of US\$250 million that included Chinese made F-6 fighter planes, T-59 tanks and anti-aircraft guns.⁵ China has not looked back since and over the past few decades, in addition to continuing with T-59 battle tanks and Chinese made A-5 and F-6 aircrafts, its armaments also included naval vessels, portable surface to air missiles (Anza-2) and the Red Arrow anti-tank missiles (Baktar Shikan).⁶ It may be noted here that although Chinese arms did not match the range and sophistication of US weaponry, the sheer size and magnitude of Chinese delivery of weapons played a significant role in augmenting Pakistan's military capabilities.⁷ From 1978-2008, the Chinese had sold US\$7 billion worth of equipment to Pakistan.⁸ Today, China has emerged as Pakistan's biggest arms supplier with almost 40 per cent of China's arms exports headed for Pakistan.

In addition to supplying arms to Pakistan, China has played an important role in the modernisation of its army, navy and air force. China has provided critical investment and technological support for Pakistan's military-industrial complex helping it to build defence industries and factories, shipyards, power plants and communication infrastructure.⁹ China and Pakistan have jointly developed fighter planes such as the FC-1 fighter planes (the equivalent of the F-16).¹⁰ China's Chengdu Aircraft Industry Cooperation and Pakistan's Aeronautical Complex are also co-producing the JF-17 single-engine, multi-role combat

⁵ Ahmad Faruqi, *Rethinking National Security of Pakistan: The Price of Strategic Myopia* (Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing, 2003), p.81.

⁶ The Stockholm Institute of Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), SIPRI Arms transfer database data, Transfers of major conventional weapons from China to Pakistan <http://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers> Accessed 30 December 2011.

⁷ Ahmad Faruqi, *Rethinking National Security of Pakistan*, op.cit., p.81.

⁸ Bruce Reidel and Pavneet Singh 'US-China Relations: Seeking Strategic Convergence in Pakistan', Foreign Policy at Brookings, Policy Paper (January 2010), p.4.

⁹ Rajshree Jetly and Iftikhar Lodhi, 'Pakistan-China Relations in the 21st Century: Retrospect and Prospect', in Tan Tai Yong ed., *South Asia: Societies in Political and Economic Transition*, (New Delhi, Manohar Publishers, 2010) p.164.

¹⁰ B.R Deepak, 'Sino-Pak 'Entente Cordiale' and India: A Look into the Past and Future', *China Report*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (2006), p.136

aircrafts which are considered more economical than the European/American models.¹¹ The first consignment was released in 2007 and it is anticipated that a total of 250 aircrafts may be in the pipeline. The closeness of Sino-Pak strategic and defence ties was proved yet again recently when Pakistan vulnerable in the wake of US unilateral action to strike at Osama Bin Laden's hideout, felt compelled to boost its military capabilities.¹² China brought forward the delivery date of 50 JF-17 aircrafts to shore Pakistan's air defence. In addition to the JF-17, it also agreed to deliver 36 CAC J-10 multipurpose fighter aircrafts to Pakistan. Both countries have also collaborated on projects such as the K-8 Karakorum advance training aircraft, Al Khalid Tanks, Babur cruise missiles, and AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System).¹³ Pakistan was also considering the purchase of surface to air missiles including the advanced HQ -18 from China.¹⁴

Besides this, the navies of the two countries have also been working closely with each other. Following an agreement signed by both countries in 2005, China agreed to supply four frigate ships to the Pakistan navy; three have been delivered since (the first was delivered in 2009) and the last is to be delivered by 2013.¹⁵ The agreement also envisaged the upgrading of the Karachi dockyard, assistance in the modernisation of Pakistan's surface fleet and transfer of technology.¹⁶ Islamabad is also in the process of buying six new submarines from Beijing.¹⁷ China is also assisting Pakistan with space technology and has helped launch its first communications satellite PAKSAT-IR) in August 2011.¹⁸ According to some reports, Pakistan also has a functioning space communication facility in Karachi.¹⁹

Apart from close coordination in defence matters, mutual consultations and reciprocal visits by military delegations, defence cooperation is also buttressed through regular holding of

¹¹ Pakistan Defence Forum, 'China -Pak in MOU to develop stealth variant on JF-17 thunder' <http://www.defence.pk/forums/jf-17-thunder/66236-china-pak-mou-develop-stealth-variant-jf-17-thunder-3.html> Accessed 21 January 2011.

¹² 'China to expedite delivery of 50 fighter jets to Pakistan', *Dawn* (20 May 2011), <http://www.dawn.com/2011/05/20/china-to-expedite-delivery-of-50-fighter-jets-to-pakistan.html> Accessed 12 January 2012.

¹³ The first of four Chinese ZDK-03 AWACS aircraft for the Pakistani air force was reportedly completed in November 2011.

¹⁴ Wang Huazhong and Li Xiaokun, 'Pakistan seeks closer military ties with China', *China Daily* (18 November 2010) http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/2010-11/18/content_11570282.htm. Accessed 12 January 2012.

¹⁵ Eric Wertheim, 'World Navies in Review', (March 2010), pp. 47-48, http://www.ericwertheim.com/Wertheim_Mar_10.pdf. Accessed 12 January 2012.

¹⁶ Shahzad Akhtar, 'Sino-Pakistani Relations: An assessment' Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad http://www.issi.org.pk/old-site/ss_Detail.php?dataId=501 Accessed 26 January 2012.

¹⁷ 'Pakistan moving closer to China: US Congressional Report' *The Nation* (28 October 2011) <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Politics/28-Oct-2011/Pakistan-moving-closer-to-China-US-Congressional-report> Accessed 26 January 2012. Also see Harsh V. Pant, 'The Pakistan Thorn in China-India-US Relations' *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.35, no.1 (2012), p.85.

¹⁸ 'PakSat-IR symbol of Pak-China cooperation in Space, Science and Technology : Masood Khan' *The Nation* (8 August 2011) <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/politics/08-Aug-2011/PakSatIR-symbol-of-PakChina-cooperation-in-space-science--technology-Masood-Khan> Accessed 25 January 2012.

¹⁹ Harsh V. Pant, 'The Pakistan Thorn in China-India-US Relations' op.cit., p. 84.

joint military exercises. Pakistan and China recently concluded the fourth counter-terrorism friendship exercise in November 2011 involving as many as 260 Chinese and 230 Pakistani soldiers.²⁰ The Joint Anti-terrorism Friendship Exercise commenced in 2004 which according to one report was also the first time that China invited another country's army to participate in a joint military drill in its territory.²¹

Building Pakistan's Nuclear Capability

It is widely accepted among informed circles that nuclear cooperation is a significant part of the ongoing Sino-Pak defence cooperation and China has contributed significantly to the development of Pakistan's nuclear capability. Both China and Pakistan have, however, vociferously denied these charges. Given the lack of documented evidence and the two countries' consistent denial, it is difficult to ascertain the extent of nuclear cooperation between the two countries. However, it is generally believed that Chinese nuclear assistance to Pakistan started in the 1970s and grew steadily in the 1980s and 1990s. India's nuclear explosion in 1974 served as a further catalyst in Pakistan's quest for nuclear prowess to counter India's potential dominance in the region.²² During the 1980s, the US, which was wary of Soviet advancement in Afghanistan, chose to conveniently overlook Chinese nuclear assistance to Pakistan but by the 1990s, it mounted pressure on China to conform to international laws on exchange of nuclear technology and parts. China signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1992 and 1996 respectively, undertaking to only make safeguarded nuclear transfers. However, despite these declarations, there has been widespread speculation that China continued to assist Pakistan. There were reports of 5,000 unsafeguarded ring magnets being sold to Pakistan in 1994/1995 to be used as gas centrifuges to enrich uranium.²³ Other transfers included heavy water and high tech diagnostic equipment to build Pakistan's nuclear capability.

There have also been reports of China's help in the development of missiles and transfer of technology to Pakistan.²⁴ Both Pakistan and China have repeatedly denied these charges. Pakistan maintains that it has an indigenously developed missile programme. As a press

²⁰ Samantha Hoffman, 'China and Pakistan: Evolving Focus on Stability within Continuity', *China Brief*, Volume XI, Issue 22 (30 November 2011), p.6.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² See Shahid M. Amin, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), p.78. Also see George Perkovich, 'The Nuclear and Security Balance', in Francine Frankel and Harry Harding eds, *The India-China Relationship* (New Delhi, Oxford University Press, 2004) p. 200.

²³ Kan, A. Shirley, 'China and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles: Policy Issues' CRS Report for Congress RL 31555, (Updated 9 November 2011), p.3 <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuk e/RL31555.pdf>. Accessed 20 December 2011.

²⁴ Despite lack of hard data or evidence, it is believed that Pakistan's short and medium term ballistic missiles such as Shaheen (1 and 2) and Ghauri (1 and 2) were developed with active assistance of the Chinese. China has also helped Pakistan build the delivery systems for its nuclear weapons starting from Hatf-I and Hatf-II to ANZA. See Bhumitra Chakma, 'Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons', (New Delhi, Routledge, 2009), pp.68-71. Also see Arpit Rajain, *Nuclear Deterrence in Southern Asia: China, India and Pakistan*, (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2005), p. 159.

release from Pakistan stated, 'Pakistan has an indigenous missile development programme which is part of our nuclear deterrent and indispensable to our security. This programme will be maintained and will not be affected by any discriminatory regimes such as MTCR'.²⁵ Some Pakistani scholars also argue that the Western and Indian accounts of Sino-Pak nuclear collusion are exaggerated and not based on concrete evidence.²⁶ Both Pakistan and China have also steadfastly maintained that all missile technology transfer from China has been within the ambit of Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Despite these claims, the Clinton administration went ahead and imposed sanctions on China in 1993 for transferring some of the M-11 missile equipment to Pakistan.²⁷ Presently, Chinese transfers to Pakistan are reportedly confined to dual use items in missile technology to keep within the letter of the law.²⁸

In addition to transfer of technology and materials, China has also contributed to the development of nuclear power plants in Pakistan. Apart from its widely speculated help with the construction of the unsafeguarded Khushab reactor which produces weapons grade plutonium in 1995²⁹ China has built two nuclear plants (Chashma I and II). Interestingly, China agreed to build Chashma II in May 2004, just prior to it joining the NSG. In 2010, China agreed to sell two additional plutonium producing heavy water reactors (Chashma 3 and Chashma 4) to Pakistan despite international concerns that China was flouting NSG rules.³⁰ Beijing, however, stood up to the pressure and justified the deals on the basis that they were grandfathered at the time of the 2003 agreement, prior to China joining the NSG.³¹ That it chose to go ahead with the deal, despite international pressure, underlines its unwavering commitment to Pakistan's security in the overall framework of its own strategic vision for the region.

²⁵ Cited in Naeem Salik, *The Genesis of South Asian Nuclear Deterrence: Pakistan's Perspective* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 213.

²⁶ Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, 'The China Threat: A View from Pakistan' in Herbery Yee and Ian Storey eds, *The China Threat: Perceptions, Myths and Reality* (New York, Routledge Curzon, 2002), p. 305.

²⁷ Kan, A. Shirley, 'China and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles: Policy Issues' op.cit, pp.8-9.

²⁸ By some accounts, Chinese nuclear transfers to Pakistan have reduced of late in the wake of greater international scrutiny accounts. Some believe that this is because Pakistan may not be critically as dependent on Chinese assistance as in the past. TV Paul, 'Chinese-Pakistani Nuclear/Missile Ties and Balance of Power Politics', *The Nonproliferation Review* Vol.10, no.2 (2003), p.25.

²⁹ Brahma Challaney, 'Pak fuel Chinese Bomb', *The Hindustan Times* cited in Swaran Singh, *China-South Asia: Issues, Equations, Policies*, op. cit, pp. 196-97.

³⁰ Under NSG rules, China is obliged to not supply nuclear fuel, reactors and technology to countries that do not have full-scope safeguards.

³¹ China, however took a cautious approach, and did not fight for broad NSG exemption like the US did for India following the Indo-US nuclear deal. See Sharad Joshi, 'The China-Pakistan Nuclear Deal: a Realpolitique Fait Accompli' (11 December 2011), <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/china-pakistan-nuclear-deal-realpolitique-fait-accompl-1/>. Accessed 23 December 2011, p.4.

All-Weather Partners

China and Pakistan have an enviable record of shared geopolitical goals which is amply reflected in their mutual support for each other in regional and international affairs. A highpoint of this cooperation has been the landmark ‘Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighbourly relations’ signed by the two countries in January 2005 underlining the ‘all-weather friendship’ and ‘all direction cooperation’ between the two countries. The treaty stipulates that ‘neither party will join any alliance or bloc which infringes upon the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other side’ and bound both countries to ‘not conclude treaties of this nature with any third party.’³²

Pakistan has been an unequivocal supporter of China on issues of vital interest to it including Taiwan, Tibet, human rights and East Turkestan. China, likewise, has stood behind Pakistan on its most important security issues like Kashmir, Afghanistan and rising Islamist militancy. At a time, when Pakistan has come under intense international pressure for its inability to root out terrorism, China has proved a staunch ally and stood up for Pakistan, firmly supporting it on its counter-terrorism strategies. It has categorically affirmed that it would ‘continue to staunchly support Pakistan formulating and implementing counter-terrorism strategies based on its own national conditions’.³³

The two countries have also supported each other’s position in various regional and international groupings. Pakistan pushed China’s case for membership of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) - it was later admitted as an external observer - while China extended full support to Pakistan’s entry into the ASEAN Regional Forum, Asia Europe Summit and as an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).³⁴

Energy Cooperation

Given its critical and spiralling demand for energy resources, energy security has emerged as a top priority concern for China in its regional strategic vision. By some accounts, China is expected to become the largest consumer of the global supplies of oil and gas in the coming years. Pakistan’s strategic location at the gateway to energy rich regions and along the major sea lanes is thus an important factor for China seeking close cooperation with it. China’s heavy investment in the deep sea port of Gwadar that was inaugurated with great fanfare by

³² See People’s Daily (6 April 2005) http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200504/06/eng20050406_17962.html Accessed 12 January 2012. Also see Du Youkang , 60 years of Friendship, China Daily, 17 May 2011. http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2011-05/17/content_12523535_2.htm Accessed 20 December 2011.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People’s Republic of China, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Jiang Yu’s Regular Press Conference (3 May 2011) <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/2511/t820162.htm> Accessed 12 May 2011.

³⁴ Mohan Malik, ‘The China-Pakistan Nexus’ in John Wilson ed., Pakistan: The Struggle Within, (Pearson Longman, Delhi, 2009), p. 182.

former Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf in 2007 highlights growing Sino-Pak cooperation in this sector.³⁵ Gwadar is important by virtue of its unique strategic location, straddling Central, Western and South Asia, and is envisioned as a major trade and energy hub for the region. Through a rich overlay of roads, railways, and oil and gas pipelines, it is expected to become a conduit for trade and energy to the landlocked Central Asian states, as well as Iran and China. This will in the process open up tremendous opportunities for both Pakistan and China.

As a key transit actor, Pakistan can amass huge revenues in transit fees. Also, as a third port, (the other two being Karachi and Qasim) Gwadar would allow Pakistan to diversify its options in the event of a naval blockade from India, as it occurred during the 1971 crisis, and as it was feared during the Kargil crisis in 1999. From China's perspective, Gwadar could serve an alternative energy supply route from the Middle East to western China. Presently, most of Chinese supplies flow through the Malacca Straits, which is vulnerable to piracy. The Gwadar port could open another route for movement of energy and other resources to China, circumventing Indian and US influence in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea.³⁶ Shipments carrying oil from the Persian Gulf to China via Gwadar (only 400 km away from the Straits of Hormuz where 80% of the world's energy supplies pass) are also expected greatly to benefit China in terms of cutting down considerably on travel time and costs.

Additionally, it helps China to develop its relatively backward Western provinces through increase in trade and developmental activity. China hopes that the physical proximity of the Western provinces with Gwadar could help in the transformation of its backward areas to more developed regions.³⁷ China has invested heavily in the construction of the Gwadar port and other infrastructural projects in Pakistan. It provided 80 per cent of the US\$248 million for the first phase of the project.³⁸ China has also provided US\$200 million for the construction of the Coastal Highway linking Gwadar with Karachi in addition to the financial and technical assistance for the upgrading of the Karakoram highway and Pakistan railways. It may be noted in passing that the construction of the Gwadar port has not been without problems for China. There have been instances of attacks on Chinese workers by Baluch

³⁵ For details on other notable Sino-Pak infrastructural projects see Mathias Hartpence, 'The Economic Dimension of Sino-Pakistani Relations: An Overview', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.20, no.71, (2011), pp. 587-92.

³⁶ Rosheen Kabraji, 'All Weather Friendship?' *The World Today*, Volume 67, Number 12 (January 2012), p. 8. <http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/TWT0112p7PakChin.pdf> Accessed 25 December 2011.

³⁷ To give an example, the distance between the city of Kashgar on the Western side of China to the Eastern side is 3,500 km as compared to Gwadar which is only 1,500 km. See Jian Yang and Rashid Ahmed Siddiqi, 'About an All Weather Relationship: Security foundations of Sino-Pak relations since 9/11' *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol.20, no.71 (2011), p.575.

³⁸ According to one source, out of the US\$248 million extended by China, US\$50 million was given as a grant and US\$198 million was given as soft loan. See Durnaz Baloch, 'Gwadar port issue becomes knotty, trickier', *Pulse (Islamabad)* (10 June 2011) <http://www.weeklypulse.org/details.aspx?contentID=789&storylist=16>. Accessed 24 January 2012.

insurgents, who are demanding a greater share from the Gwadar project for Baluchistan.³⁹ Despite the risks to its own nationals, China is persevering with the Gwadar project and overlooking the short-term obstacles for longer-term benefits in terms of trade, investments and energy routes. It also remains keenly aware of the fact that disturbances in Xinjiang, stemming partly from its isolation and relative under-development, if left unchecked would not only threaten its internal security, but also disturb its trade and access to vital energy routes in the Middle East.

Xinjiang and Counter-terrorism

An issue which has acquired urgency in recent years and can have long-term security implications for China is the rising extremism in Pakistan, and its spread to China's Xinjiang province, bordering Pakistan. Xinjiang is China's largest province and the second largest producer of gas and oil respectively and therefore its importance to China is critical in more ways than one.

Xinjiang is an autonomous region of China, that houses over 40 ethnic groups, the largest being the Uighurs, who are mainly followers of Islam. The Uighurs have been fighting for a separatist state for a long time, but in the last few years, Xinjiang has visibly become the centre of revolt against the Chinese central authorities. China fears that religious fervour could further inflame separatist sentiments among the Uighurs against it, and undermine its national integrity and control. It is particularly wary of violent incidents such as the riots of July 2009 and the more recent clashes of July 2011, which embarrassed China internationally.

China clearly has long-term concerns of possible links between Uighurs and extremist groups operating in and around the border regions of Pakistan. There are growing reports of the Uighurs receiving training in Pakistan and having linkages with Islamist militant sections including the Al-Qaeda.⁴⁰ One reason why China has resisted from openly criticising Pakistan is because Pakistan has gone out of its way to ensure that rising extremist sentiments in Pakistan do not spiral out of control and jeopardise Chinese interests in Xinjiang.

Realising the importance of this issue for China, and its propensity to drive a wedge in Sino-Pak relations, Pakistan has worked hard to keep the situation from deteriorating any further. Pakistan, of course, has its own reason also for ensuring stability in the region as a peaceful

³⁹ Ziad Haider, 'Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan's Gwadar Port' *Politics and Diplomacy*, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs (Winter/spring, 2005), pp. 100-101 <http://www.stimson.org/images/uploads/research-pdfs/GWADAR.pdf> Accessed 12 January 2012.

⁴⁰ 'Xinjiang Connection', *Dawn* (3 August 2012) <http://www.dawn.com/2011/08/03/xinjiang-connection.html> Accessed 24 January 2012.

Xinjiang acts as an indirect lever in its getting China's support on Kashmir.⁴¹ During the military regime of General Musharraf, Pakistan took some very strong action against these separatist groups, including targeting Uighur settlements in Pakistan and eliminating key East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) leaders, including Hasan Mahsum.⁴² The Lal Masjid operation of July 2007 was reportedly also partly driven by the need to address China's concerns about the fate of its nationals in Pakistan.⁴³ In addition, following the first anti-terrorism military exercise named 'Friendship 2004' in Xinjiang, three more exercises were held in 2006, 2010 and 2011 to crack down on ETIM activities in Xinjiang. In July 2011, as many as 10 ETIM militants were captured by Chinese troops with the help of the Pakistani military.⁴⁴

Notwithstanding Pakistan's full cooperation, China remains deeply concerned about the long-term implications of the growth of extremism in Xinjiang. It is known to have made its displeasure felt in private, although it has refrained from making it a point of contention between the two countries. China's studious silence changed with the July 2011 attacks in the city of Kashgar in Xinjiang. The attacks drew a stern reaction from local Kashgar authorities, who for the first time implicated Pakistan by suggesting that the ETIM leaders in Xinjiang had received training in Pakistan-based camps.⁴⁵ While this was later retracted by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to placate Pakistani sentiment, it was nonetheless a departure from earlier Chinese policy which Pakistan would scarcely have failed to take note of. Pakistan is leaving no stone unturned to reinforce the importance of Sino-Pak relations in Islamabad's calculations and is going ahead in full steam to cooperate with China on the Uighur issue.

After the July attacks of 2011, the Pakistani government immediately sought to defuse a potentially challenging situation by publicly declaring that, 'terrorists, extremists and separatists in Xinjiang constitute an evil force'. Three high-level visits by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Hina Rabbani Khar, President Asif Ali Zardari and ISI Chief Lt Gen Ahmed Shuja Pasha followed in quick succession to soothe Chinese concerns on this matter.⁴⁶ In December 2011, the two countries signed three Memoranda of Understanding to

⁴¹ Jian Yang and Rashid Ahmed Siddiqi, 'About an All Weather Relationship: Security foundations of Sino-Pak relations since 9/11' *op.cit.*, p. 576.

⁴² Raffaello Pantucci, 'China's Afghan Dilemma', *Survival*, Vol.52, No.4 (August-September 2010), p. 23.

⁴³ Lisa Curtis, 'China's Military and Security Relationship with Pakistan', (26 May 2012), p.3, <http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/chinas-military-and-security-relationship-with-pakistan> Accessed 3 January 2012.

⁴⁴ 'China-Pak Planning Joint Military Action Against Terror Groups' Deccan Herald (3 July 2011) <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/79028/china-pak-planning-joint-military.html> Accessed 30 December 2011.

⁴⁵ Han Hua, 'Fight Terrorism with Pakistan', China Daily (12 August 2011), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-08/12/content_13097293.htm Accessed 3 December 2011.

⁴⁶ 'China absolves Pakistan of Kashgar attacks', Pak Tribune (12 October 2011), <http://paktribune.com/news/China-absolves-Pakistan-of-Kashgar-attacks-244301.html> Accessed 3 December 2011.

strengthen military cooperation, strategic communication and intelligence-sharing between the two countries to stamp out terrorism.⁴⁷

Despite Pakistan's efforts, China is not sure that the threats emanating from Xinjiang would recede any time soon, especially if Pakistan remains embroiled in fighting rising militancy on its own turf. According to some media reports, though officially denied by China, Beijing was considering acquiring military bases in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) to keep a close watch on extremist activity along the Pakistani borders to prevent it from reaching the sensitive Xinjiang province.⁴⁸

Pakistan's political uncertainties and inability to effectively rein in terrorism both within and outside its borders, could have long-term ramifications on Sino-Pak relations at the political level and also in terms of investment and economic cooperation. Increased militant activities across Pakistan could threaten China's long-term economic and commercial interests as its investments in Pakistan have continued to grow apace in sectors such as defence, transportation, space programmes, telecommunications and energy, much of this with state patronage.⁴⁹ By some accounts, China is to invest to the tune of US\$35 billion in Pakistan over the next five years. Complementing these investments is a rise in bilateral trade which is expected to touch US\$15 billion by 2015 from a modest US\$1 billion in 1998. The Currency Swap Agreement between the two countries in December 2011 is expected to further boost bilateral trade and investment between the two countries.⁵⁰ Recently, as a result of the worsening security situation in Sindh, a Chinese mining firm, Kingho, withdrew from a US\$19 billion project for development of coal mines and power and chemical plants.⁵¹ Some reports suggest that with the exception of the Karakorum highway, where security has been guaranteed by the Pakistani army, progress on projects such as the Gwadar-Xinjiang pipeline might also be affected due to security concerns.⁵² Political instability and growing terrorism in Pakistan is clearly going to engage China's close attention in the coming days as it could have a major bearing on its 'long standing calculus' in Pakistan which has so far 'yielded a remarkable intimacy between Beijing and Islamabad'.⁵³

⁴⁷ Sultan M Hali, 'Pak-China defence cooperation enhanced', Pakistan Observer (2 Jan. 2012), <http://pakobserver.net/detailnews.asp?id=33354>. Accessed 12 January 2012.

⁴⁸ Amir Mir, 'China seeks military base in Pakistan', <http://atimes.com> Accessed 30 December 2011.

⁴⁹ Mathieu Duchatel, 'The Terrorist Risk and China's Policy toward Pakistan: Strategic Reassurance and the United Front', *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 20, no.71 (2011), p. 557.

⁵⁰ 'Pakistani President says China ties vital', *China Daily* (26 December 2011), http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2011-12/26/content_14324810.htm Accessed 26 December 2011.

⁵¹ Evan A. Feigenbaum, 'China's Pakistan Conundrum' *Foreign Affairs* (4 December 2011). <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136718/evan-a-feigenbaum/chinas-pakistan-conundrum> Accessed 27 December 2011.

⁵² Mathieu Duchatel, 'The Terrorist Risk and China's Policy toward Pakistan' *op.cit.*, p. 557.

⁵³ Evan A. Feigenbaum, 'China's Pakistan Conundrum', *op. cit.*, p. 2.

The Regional Dynamics

Looking at the wider implications of Sino-Pak ties on the region and beyond, the two most important players that have an impact on, and which in turn are affected by, Sino-Pak entente are India and the US. These four countries are interconnected through a series of complementary and conflicting interests in the region. The security dynamics of China, US, Pakistan and India, whose power and influence intersect at various points of the strategic landscape in the region, is an integral part of South Asian regional security. China and US engagement with the two South Asian powers, India and Pakistan, in some ways, remains at the heart of the regional security conundrum. Just as shared antipathy towards India has historically been a common factor in sustaining Sino-Pak ties, Sino-Pak entente has in no small measure proved a vexing issue in Sino-Indian normalisation. Right from the outset, the US played an important role in sustaining the myth of Indo-Pak parity and helped in the evolution of US-China-Pakistan friendship in the seventies. The warming of Indo-US relations in recent years, particularly the Indo-US nuclear deal, has not surprisingly been met with heightened concern by both China and Pakistan. Today, Pakistan is witnessing one of the lowest phases in its relations with the US and is increasingly leaning on China for greater moral and material support. China and India, despite improvement in ties since 1988, continue to have strategic differences on a wide variety of issues which makes for inevitable undercurrents of power contest and rivalry between them. At the global level, China and the US, while sharing common interests in economic and technological development, have key strategic differences on their respective global role and influence. This has major implications for the security dynamics and power equations in the region.

The Role of the US

As the most powerful economic and military global power, the US has played an important role in influencing and shaping the India-China-Pakistan security matrix. US relations with Pakistan have waxed and waned over the years. During the Cold War years, US's massive military aid and strong diplomatic support for Pakistan on Kashmir gave Pakistan the much needed leverage vis-a-vis India. However, after the 1965 Indo-Pak war, the US stopped supporting Pakistan militarily. Relations were restored during the 1971 Indo-Pak war but dipped again until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 when US needed Pakistan to fight against the Russians. After the Afghan war ended, the US invoked the Pressler Amendment and imposed military and economic sanctions against Pakistan.⁵⁴ It refused to deliver military equipment, particularly the F-16s for which Pakistan had already paid in advance.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ See piece by former Pakistani Ambassador to the United States Maleeha Lodi 'The Pakistan-US relationship', <http://www.defencejournal.com/april98/pakistanus.htm> Accessed 24 January 2012.

⁵⁵ See Rajshree Jetly and Iftikhar Lodhi, 'Pakistan-China Relations in the 21st Century: Retrospect and Prospect' op.cit., p.158.

The immediate aftermath of 9/11 saw US-Pak relations grow dramatically as they collaborated in the war on terror. Pakistan was designated as a major non-NATO ally and received massive economic and military aid as a front line state. In recent years, US and Pakistani strategic interests have however, steadily diverged over Pakistan's role in the US war on terror. To US dismay, Pakistan has been reluctant to extend full and unqualified support to US efforts to root out terrorism. In particular it has been reluctant to target the militants' strongholds such as the Haqqani network in North Waziristan or the Afghan Taliban, which US considers essential for its success. Pakistan has its own reasons for proceeding with caution as it may in future have to deal with these very parties if they come to power in Afghanistan after US withdrawal.⁵⁶

In addition, a series of incidents over the last year, including the US unilateral action in the killing of Osama Bin Laden on Pakistani soil, the Raymond Davis affair, the increase in drone strikes, the memo-gate affair and the killing of 24 Pakistani soldiers in a US airstrike have brought ties to a new low and led to an increase in anti-US sentiments in Pakistan. Anger over US clandestine raid on Osama's hideout has led to a widespread demand for re-examination of Pakistan's relations with the US.

As the partnership has begun to unravel, the US is widely seen to be acting purely out of self-interest and not a genuine friend. Even after realigning with the US in the war on terror, Pakistan has essentially not forgotten the desertion by the US after the Soviet withdrawal, and fears a similar fate with the anticipated US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. Thus despite the huge amounts of money and arms that the US has poured into Pakistan since 9/11 (Pakistan has received US\$22 billion in military and economic assistance since 2001) it is seen as an opportunist who has used Pakistan at will in pursuance of its own strategic agenda.⁵⁷

With the sharp deterioration in Pak-US relations, Pakistan has drawn closer to China which is seen as being more consistent and forthcoming in its support.⁵⁸ First, after the US fickle approach left Pakistan in a lurch, China promptly responded to Pakistan's demand for defence supplies at a time it was feeling vulnerable vis-a-vis its security. Second, by remaining a steadfast friend of Pakistan at vulnerable moments, China has won greater appreciation in the eyes of the Pakistani administration and the Pakistani people. (Not

⁵⁶ These types of complications do not confront Sino-Pak ties where the targets are Baluch insurgents and Uighurs in Xinjiang, who are less likely to challenge Pakistan's national interests. See Rosheen Kabraji, 'All Weather Friendship?', op.cit., p. 9.

⁵⁷ US aid is seen to come with conditions that are often at variance with Pakistan's perceived national interests and its defence sales with few exceptions, are seen as being mainly geared towards dealing with counter-terrorism and therefore primarily aimed at US interests. See Mathieu Duchatel, 'The Terrorist Risk and China's Policy toward Pakistan' op.cit., p. 559. According to recent reports, the US defence authorisation bill for 2012 seeks to suspend 60 per cent of the US\$1.1 billion military aid to Pakistan - under the category Pakistan Counter Insurgency Fund till the Pakistan makes progress in the war on terror.

⁵⁸ Jane Perlez, 'Pakistan pulls closer to a reluctant china, The New York Times (6 October 2011), <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/07/world/asia/pakistan-pulls-closer-to-a-reluctant-china.html> Accessed 12 January 2012.

surprisingly, in a survey carried out by the PEW Research Centre in 2011, only 12 per cent of the Pakistanis held a favourable view of the US as compared to 82 per cent for China.)⁵⁹ More important, Beijing's defence sales to Pakistan is seen as working towards enhancing Pakistan's defence profile capabilities. Chinese assistance is also long-term and aimed at development projects and up-gradation of infrastructure including railways, ports and roads that would ultimately benefit Pakistan.

Although, both China and the US have viewed and supported Pakistan as a strategically significant state, the crucial difference between China and the US from the Pakistan perspective is that whereas the US has shown itself to be inconsistent, not hesitating to drop it midstream if its own strategic interest so demanded, China has by and large remained a steady friend to Pakistan throughout the last half century. During Pakistan Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani's visit to China in May 2011, just after the raid on Osama, at a time when Pakistan was suffering from a crisis of credibility in international circles, China was the first country to publicly demonstrate its support for Pakistan. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao asked for Pakistan's 'independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity' to be respected and reassured Pakistan of its friendship despite changes in the international landscape.⁶⁰ In a joint statement, China recognised the tremendous effort and the great sacrifice that Pakistan has made in fighting terrorism, while Pakistan reiterated that it would never allow its territory to be used to attack any country and would continue to support international counter-terrorism cooperation.⁶¹

China, of course, has its own reasons for its steadfast support to Pakistan at this crucial juncture. As a major global power set to play an increasingly pivotal role in Asian regional security, China remains wary of US growing presence and involvement in the region. It feels that US interests in the region apart from counter-terrorism are also dictated by other long-term factors, such as securing energy routes, and countering China's growing influence in the region.⁶² It remains particularly watchful of US moves in the strategically vital Central and South West Asia, where the US is continually strengthening its presence and influence.⁶³ More important, as Huan Hua notes, China remains wary of the implications of US intensified presence in South West and Central Asia after 9/11 on the South Asian Region. 'With the US military comeback, China, now is facing a brand new strategic configuration in

⁵⁹ See PEW Global Attitudes Project, Pew Research Centre <http://www.pewglobal.org/database/?indicator=1&country=166> ,<http://www.pewglobal.org/2011/07/13/chapter-4-views-of-china/> Accessed 12 January 2012.

⁶⁰ Li Xiaokun and Li Lianxing , 'Pakistan assured of firm support', *China Daily* (19 May 2011). http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-05/19/content_12538441.htm Accessed 24 December 2011.

⁶¹ 'China applauds Pakistan role in the war on terror', *Dawn* (21 May 2012) <http://www.dawn.com/2011/05/21/china-applauds-pakistan-role-in-war-on-terror.html> Accessed 1 January 2012.

⁶² Andrew Small, 'China's Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan', *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.33, No.3 (2010), p.88.

⁶³ It has acquired military base in Kyrgystan and is engaged in a number of infrastructural projects. See Jiang Yang and Rashid Ahmed Siddiqi 'About an All-Weather Relationship' op.cit., p.569.

the subcontinent after a decade long direct interaction between China and South Asian countries without super power intervention.’⁶⁴

Not surprisingly, China has remained reluctant to be dragged openly into the Pakistan-Afghanistan imbroglio. US hopes that China would use its special friendship with Pakistan to combat terrorism and boost counter-insurgency efforts in Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan have clearly not materialised.⁶⁵ China draws a clear distinction between those militant groups that could impact upon its security situation in Xinjiang, and those that it has less to fear from. It does not actively seek to antagonise groups for whom it remains at best a secondary target.⁶⁶ China, in any case, is also known to maintain extensive contacts with extremist groups to ensure that they do not target its interests.⁶⁷

However, China also is aware that a complete exit of the US from Afghanistan may not be in its interest as it may find itself having to take on some of the onerous tasks that the US has so far been undertaking. China has deep concerns about the spread of radical Islam and terrorism from the Pakistan Afghanistan region in the highly sensitive Xinjiang province, which covers one sixth of the country’s landmass. Some of the US air strikes have also been directed at the training camps in Waziristan which were training Uighur rebels from Xinjiang. So even if Pakistan turns increasingly to China for greater economic and military aid, it remains to be seen how far China would be willing to commit itself in a future scenario where the US has withdrawn from Afghanistan with little or no aid money forthcoming from the US. China may not be willing to play substitute to the US and ‘bail out Pakistan with loans, investment and new untied aid as its involvement will be in accordance with its own priorities and evolving risk assessments.’⁶⁸ Chinese assistance is, in any case, limited to public sector investments and loans and is not on the same scale as the US (Chinese assistance was estimated at US\$217 million between 2004 and 2009).⁶⁹

It may also be pointed out here that the US itself has a vested interest in befriending Pakistan and would not let its ties with Pakistan slide downwards at a time when its support is vital for its ongoing war on terrorism. Therefore, barring any unfavourable developments, both China and the US would continue to have a stake in the present status quo and would move with extreme caution in not upsetting the present Sino-Pak-US equilibrium.

⁶⁴ Huan Hua, ‘China and South Asia’ in K. Santhanam and S. Kondapalli eds., *Asian Security and China 2000-2010*, (New Delhi, Shipra Publications, 2004), p. 296.

⁶⁵ China’s ambivalence of course does not help the US which bears the full brunt of extremist elements in Afghanistan and the border areas of Pakistan, while China rides on its support and does not pressure Pakistan to fight Afghan militant groups in Afghanistan.

⁶⁶ Even though following the 2009 riots in Xinjiang, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb threatened to attack Chinese interests in Algeria, it is highly unlikely that Al Qaeda would actually invest resources to help the Uighurs and diffuse its efforts against the US by drawing in China. See Brian Fishman, ‘Al-Qaeda and the Rise of China: Jihadi Geopolitics in a Post-Hegemonic World’, *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.3 (2011), p.58.

⁶⁷ Andrew Small, ‘China’s Caution on Afghanistan-Pakistan’, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

⁶⁸ Evan A. Feigenbaum, ‘China’s Pakistan Conundrum’, *op. cit.*, p. 4

⁶⁹ Rosheen Kabraji, ‘All Weather Friendship?’, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

India as a Factor

India, with whom both Pakistan and China have shared adversarial relations resulting in armed hostilities, remains an important if not the most important factor in sustaining and cementing Sino-Pak relations. Historically, Pakistan-India relations have remained adversarial over a number of issues, particularly Kashmir, over which both have gone to war four times. In recent years cross-border terrorism has emerged as the major bone of contention between the two countries.⁷⁰ It is clear that India-Pak relationship will not witness any qualitative improvement unless the issue of terrorism is addressed and resolved to mutual satisfaction. Whilst talks have now resumed between the two countries, there are many challenges ahead. How Pakistan and India bridge the mistrust between them on issues such as Kashmir, terrorism and Afghanistan, which are of equally vital strategic interest to both of them, would be crucial to the future of Indo-Pak relationship.

China and India, on the other hand, have moved a long way from the hostilities generated by the 1962 war and have been engaged in negotiations to resolve the vexed border issue. Over the years, the two countries have embarked on a number of confidence building measures to ensure peace and tranquillity on their borders.⁷¹ India has witnessed a dramatic growth in its trade and investment with China, which has overtaken the US as India's largest trading partner.⁷² However, despite the positive areas of engagement, there are many significant hurdles along the way. For example, the border issue remains unresolved leading to periodic flare-ups in Arunachal Pradesh. Dalai Lama's presence in India only heightens the tensions between the two countries. Most important, given their geopolitical rivalry and power potential, the two countries inherently see each other as long-term contestants for power and influence in Asia. This acquires added significance because of India's rise and steady emergence as a major player poised to play an increasingly important role in the coming decades.

China is particularly watchful of India forging strong strategic and economic links with important countries in South East and East Asia including Australia, Japan, Singapore and Vietnam signalling both its will and capability to play a more proactive role in these major

⁷⁰ The terrorist attack on Indian Parliament in December 2001, claimed by India to be masterminded by Pakistan-based militant organisations, brought Indo-Pak relationship to a new low. Relations dipped precariously again with the 2008 Mumbai blasts which, according to India, pointed to the involvement of the Pakistan based Lashkar-e Taiba group. Pakistan, however, has categorically denied these allegations.

⁷¹ These include agreements for the resolution of the border issue such as Landmark Agreement on Maintaining Peace and Tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control of 1993; An agreement on Confidence Building Measures in the Military Field along the Line of Actual Control in the India-China Border Areas (1996), and an agreement for spelling out the political parameters and guiding principles to delineate and demarcate the lines of actual control (2005). In addition to this, there are military CBMs such as reduction of troops on both sides, prior notification of military exercises, and regular meetings between the local commanders and joint military exercises. See David Scott, 'Sino-Indian Security Predicaments for the Twenty-first century', *Asian Security*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2008), p. 252.

⁷² India's total trade with China during 2010-2011 was to the tune of US\$63 billion as against US\$45 billion for the US. See Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/iecnt.asp> Accessed 24 January 2012.

regions, which are of vital security interest for China.⁷³ Concerned about India's strategic profile and growing influence in these regions, China has embarked on a 'string of pearls' strategy to protect its maritime interests and to secure vital energy supplies for itself. India, however, sees the strategy as not only significantly boosting Chinese naval capabilities in the region where India has vital strategic, geopolitical, economic and energy interests but also encircling India all across its maritime borders.⁷⁴ China's biggest pearl in South Asia is its deep water sea port in Gwadar, which is capable of offering berthing facilities for the Chinese Navy. Pakistan's hostility to India gives an extra edge to China's potential to keep India constrained within South Asia and also outmanoeuvre it in the strategic region at the entrance point to the oil rich gulf and energy rich central Asia. Pakistan's Defence Minister Ahmed Mukhtar's recent statement that Pakistan had invited China to build a naval base at Gwadar,⁷⁵ gave rise to speculation that China might use this to gain a foothold in the Indian Ocean to challenge Indian and American naval dominance in the region. These speculations were laid to rest when China denied any such intention.⁷⁶

In recent years, Indo-US strategic dialogue has given even greater credibility to India as a regional influential, which is bound to play a more assertive role in South Asia. During the Cold War years, India's relations with the US remained generally cool and distant under the weight of differing ideologies and security perspectives.⁷⁷ The end of the Cold War has allowed India and the US to pursue a bilateral strategic relationship. The US recognition of India as a natural partner in 2003 signalled support for its rise as a major power in the new century. Not surprisingly, China sees US strategic partnership with India as being dictated by the US larger strategy of containment of China, which as a rising global power could threaten its supremacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

Given their own long-standing concerns regarding India regional predominance, both China and Pakistan predictably reacted coldly to the Indo-US nuclear deal. China, of course, has its own reasons to be concerned about the deal as it gives an edge to India which could potentially threatens its own position in the region. Pakistan, not surprisingly, was unhappy that the US was giving preferential treatment to India. For Pakistan, the fact that despite being a long time-time ally it was not considered for a similar deal, was a clear signal that the

⁷³ For a comprehensive discussion of this issue, see John Garver and Fei-Ling Wang, 'China's Anti-encirclement Struggle' *Asian Security*, Vol.6, No.3 (2010), pp. 238-61.

⁷⁴ Some Chinese scholars have argued that India's fears are misplaced and that China's interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean are purely economic and not targeting India. See, Zhang Guihong, 'The Rise of China: India's Perceptions and Responses', in *South Asian Survey*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2006), p. 99. Some Indian scholars also support this view. See Amardeep Athwal, *China-India Relations: Contemporary Dynamics*, (Alindon, New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 65.

⁷⁵ Beijing agrees to operate key port, Pakistan says, *Tehran Times* (28 May 2011), <http://www.tehranimes.com?NCms/2007.asp?code=241514> Accessed 3 November 2011.

⁷⁶ 'China says it is unaware of Gwadar port proposal', *Dawn* (24 May 2011), <http://www.dawn.com/2011/05/24/china-says-it-is-unaware-of-gwadar-port-proposal.html> Accessed 29 December 2011.

⁷⁷ US not only supported Pakistan but also spearheaded the Sino-Pak-US axis in the 1970s that had major implications for both India and Pakistan and India and China relations.

US had finally moved away from the myth of Indo-Pak parity that it had upheld over decades.⁷⁸

It is clear that a strong Indo-US strategic entente is likely to push China and Pakistan even closer. India's growing economic strength and political muscle cannot be ignored by China, and any strategy to force India to stay tethered to its own backyard can only be good for China. For China, arming Pakistan and providing help to enhance its nuclear capabilities has a strategic benefit of stretching India's defences by ensuring that India has to divert its military capabilities to the borders with Pakistan, thus diluting India's capacity on its borders with China. It also keeps India from effectively realising its full economic and geopolitical potential.⁷⁹

For Pakistan, China's support remains crucial for countervailing India's regional predominance and protecting its long-term security interests. Kashmir remains the bone of contention between India and Pakistan, and is often seen as a barometer for measuring China's relations with India and/or Pakistan. The Chinese endorsement of Pakistan's position on Kashmir following the outbreak of hostilities between India and China in 1962 gave Pakistan a decisive edge over India.⁸⁰ However, a steady improvement in Sino-Indian relations in the 1980s and 1990s saw Beijing move from its extreme position of supporting a plebiscite in Kashmir to adopting a more nuanced stance on the issue.⁸¹ This was interpreted by some as China moving to a pro-India position on Kashmir.⁸² However, events in the last two years suggest that China is diluting its position on Kashmir and inching back to supporting the Pakistan line. A significant move was China's decision to grant visas to residents of Jammu and Kashmir on a separate sheet stapled to the passport rather than on the passport itself.⁸³ China has also been increasingly involved in road and infrastructural

⁷⁸ Pakistan argued that 'the proposed exception for India will not be helpful to the shared objectives of stability in South Asia and a strong global non-proliferation regime. The agreement, which keeps a large number of facilities and reactors, including breeder reactors, outside safeguards, would only encourage India to continue its weapons programme without any constraint or inhibition.' See K J M Varma, 'India's Special Status will have Serious Implications for South Asia: Pakistan' (18 March, 2006) <http://www.rediff.com/news/2006/mar/17ndeal4.htm> Accessed 31 December 2011.

⁷⁹ Huma Yusuf, 'Higher than the Himalayas' Dawn (23 May 2011), <http://www.dawn.com/2011/05/23/higher-than-the-himalayas.html> Accessed 24 December 2011.

⁸⁰ Much to India's chagrin, in 1963, Pakistan and China signed the Sino-Pakistan Frontier Agreement whereby Pakistan ceded 5180 sq km of land in Northern Kashmir and Ladakh to China.

⁸¹ In 1996, Chinese President Jiang Zemin made an official statement urging Pakistan to settle its dispute over Kashmir in a peaceful manner. China urged a similar approach during the Kargil war (1999) and the December 2001 crisis when it advised both countries to exercise restraint. This view is shared by Garver who believes that 'improvements in Indian -Chinese relations led to a weakening of China's endorsement of Pakistan on this key issue'. See John W Garver, *Sino-Indian Rapprochement and the Sino-Pakistan Entente*, Political Science Quarterly, Vol.111, No.2 (Summer 1996), p.326.

⁸² Notwithstanding Pakistan's public stance there was some disappointment about China's shift on Kashmir. See Samina Yasmeen, 'China and Pakistan in a changing world' in K. Santhanam and Kondapalli eds. *Asian Security and China, 2000 - 2010*, op.cit, pp. 313-36.

⁸³ This was aggravated by the fact that Lieutenant General B.S Jaswal, Head of the Northern Command of the Indian Army, was denied a Chinese visa prompting New Delhi to cancel a high-level defence visit to Beijing. Sujit Dutta, 'Managing and Engaging Rising China: India's Evolving Posture' in *Washington Quarterly*, Vol.34, No.2, (2011), pp. 132.

projects in Pakistani-administered Kashmir. China is reportedly assisting Pakistan with the construction of the Bunji Hydroelectric project in Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and is also planning a rail line that connects the Khunjerab pass with the Chinese city of Kashgar. In 2010, there were reports of 11,000 Chinese troops stationed in Gilgit in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. This was denied by both China and Pakistan, who insisted that it was a Chinese humanitarian team that was in Gilgit to assist the flood victims, but India remained concerned.⁸⁴ From India's perspective, Chinese presence in Kashmir brings China closer to its borders, with long-term implications for India.

In the ultimate analysis, it needs to be understood that unlike both Pakistan and India, China is operating from a position of strength and its support for Pakistan is going to be governed by its own strategic objectives and regional agenda as a major global power. Mathieu Duchatel, for example, sees China's priorities in Kashmir shifting from 'weakening India, to tacitly accepting Indian power, to vigilance that Pakistan not become too weak.'⁸⁵ China's more balanced position on Kashmir had less to do with its dilution of support for Pakistan than with its own strategic interests in cultivating India at a time in the 1990s, when India offered tremendous economic opportunity.⁸⁶ Similarly, its seemingly rigid stance on the visa issue could be its way of exercising leverage over India, rather than merely reinforcing its special ties with Pakistan. As Jingdong Yuan notes astutely, 'China's support of Pakistan's position signal its political intent rather than exercise an unswerving commitment...which explains Beijing's largely moral and political support rather than direct military involvement in the Kashmir conflict.'⁸⁷ Ashley J. Tellis is even more circumspect about China's unqualified support for Pakistan vis-a-vis India. Besides diplomatic and moral support, he argues, 'China might even be willing to provide it with the military instruments necessary to preserve its security, but it will neither provide Pakistan any formal guarantees of security nor extend deterrence. Nor will it prepare joint defences that imply coordinate military action against India'.⁸⁸

It is clear from the foregoing that China has its own security agenda for the region and it would be China's own regional and global priorities that would determine the limits of its support for Pakistan. It is interesting to note that when following the Indo-US nuclear deal there were expectations in Pakistan about a similar deal with China, China voiced criticism against the deal, but made no tangible effort to redress the balance for Pakistan in a similar way. At the same time, as long as it suits China's own strategic interests, it will not scale down its moral, diplomatic and military support for Pakistan in any way.

⁸⁴ China denied troops presence in PoK (2 September 2010), <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/china-denies-troops-presence-pok/130139-2.html> Accessed 12 January 2012.

⁸⁵ Mathieu Duchatel, 'The Terrorist Risk and China's Policy toward Pakistan' op.cit, p.560.

⁸⁶ Jingdong Yuan, 'Beijing's Balancing Act: Courting New Delhi, Reassuring Islamabad', *Journal of International Affairs* (Spring/Summer 2011), Vol.64, No.2, p.41.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Ashley J. Tellis, 'China and India in Asia' in Francine R. Frankel and Harry Harding eds., *The India China Relationship*, op.cit., p. 147.

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, shared strategic interests and geopolitical goals will continue to be the most important cementing factor in Sino-Pak security and defence relations. The trajectory of Indo-US strategic ties and the downward spiralling of US-Pak relations will also trigger its own logic on Sino-Pak security dynamics. China's support for Pakistan from its long-term strategic perspectives, would primarily be in three broad areas: Pakistan's geo-strategic significance in ensuring access to the vast emerging resources in West Asia and Central Asia; its value in containing India's power and influence; and its usefulness to China in its long-term bid to counter US global dominance in the context of changing strategic alignments in South Asia and South-west Asia. For Pakistan, friendship with China will remain the cornerstone of its foreign policy, impacting as it does on the promotion of its vital national interest vis-a-vis India. China is today its largest benefactor in the economic, strategic and geo-political spheres which has effectively bolstered Pakistan's regional strategic capabilities. As long as India-Pakistan peace process remains grounded on the issue of terrorism and Kashmir, Pakistan's relations with US are a downward spiral, and Sino-Indian relations remain a mix of cooperation and contest, Pakistan would continue to view China as its most strategic ally. Pakistan would need Chinese support in counterbalancing India's regional predominance and also to some extent the US growing influence in power profile in the region to some extent the US in the South, Central and Western Asian region.

The only potential challenge to the close relationship between the two countries could come not so much from external environment as from the growing Islamist fundamentalism and the looming threat of political instability in Pakistan. Should militancy rise and start to inversely impact Beijing's economic and security interests, including energy routes and infrastructural investments, it could place some burdens on the Sino-Pak relationship.⁸⁹ This, however, does not seem to be on the cards any time in the near future. First, Pakistan although facing grave political uncertainties, is not anywhere near a political and economic meltdown as feared by some. Second, the Pakistani government has an inherent stake in not allowing radicalism within its borders to affect its ties with China and will do everything in its means to keep the relationship on an even keel. China, on its part, would continue to need Pakistan's help in reining in Islamic fundamentalists on its sensitive western flank. Third, and the most important, both China and Pakistan share a symbiotically advantageous relationship - with China having the military and economic muscle and Pakistan the geo-strategic advantage - to further their security interests. Given the fact that the strategic advantages that Pakistan and China derive from each other would far outweigh any negative developments, there is very little likelihood of any dilution in their ties. This bodes well for Sino-Pak strategic entente in the foreseeable future.

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⁸⁹ Aamir Qureshi, 'China's Post-bin Laden Relationship with Pakistan', (May 4, 2011), <http://www.stratfor.com/print/193454> Accessed 20 December 2011.