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China-Pakistan Military Cooperation Analysis of the Alliance and Its Implication on South Asia

Namita Barthwal

CENTRE FOR LAND WARFARE STUDIES

Field Marshal Sam Hormusji Framji Jamshedji Manekshaw, better known as Sam “Bahadur”, was the 8th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS). It was under his command that the Indian forces achieved a spectacular victory in the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971. Starting from 1932, when he joined the first batch at the Indian Military Academy (IMA), his distinguished military career spanned over four decades and five wars, including World War II. He was the first of only two Field Marshals in the Indian Army. Sam Manekshaw’s contributions to the Indian Army are legendary. He was a soldier’s soldier and a General’s General. He was outspoken and stood by his convictions. He was immensely popular within the Services and among civilians of all ages. Boyish charm, wit and humour were other notable qualities of independent India’s best known soldier. Apart from hardcore military affairs, the Field Marshal took immense interest in strategic studies and national security issues. Owing to this unique blend of qualities, a grateful nation honoured him with the Padma Bhushan and Padma Vibhushan in 1968 and 1972 respectively.



Photographs courtesy: The Manekshaw family/FORCE

Field Marshal SHFJ Manekshaw, MC
1914-2008

CLAWS Occasional Papers are dedicated to the memory of Field Marshal Sam Manekshaw

China-Pakistan Military Cooperation

Analysis of the Alliance and Its Implication on South Asia

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Contents

• Abstract	I
• Introduction	2
o <i>Factors that have played a role in Strengthening the China-Pakistan Partnership</i>	2
• The Evolution of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation	4
o <i>Key Agreements and Military Exercises</i>	8
o <i>Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighbourly Relations</i>	10
o <i>Enunciation of CPEC and its Impact on Military Cooperation</i>	12
• The Geostrategic Dimension of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation	14
• The Geoeconomic Impact of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation	17
• The Future Prospects of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation	17
• Challenges to Sustaining the China-Pakistan Military Partnership	19
• The Geopolitical Impact of China-Pakistan Military Partnership on South Asia	21
• Recommendations of Indian Policymakers	22
• Conclusion	24
• Annexure I-IV	26
• References	30

China-Pakistan Military Cooperation Analysis of the Alliance and Its Implication on South Asia

Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth analysis of the evolving military cooperation between China and Pakistan, tracing its historical roots and examining its current manifestations and strategic implications. Over the years, the partnership has deepened, influenced by factors such as geographic proximity, shared strategic interests against common rivals, and mutual benefits in security and defence capabilities enhancement. Notably, China has become Pakistan's primary arms supplier, with significant joint ventures such as the JF-17 aircraft and various naval and missile systems, reflecting a robust military collaboration. This study also explores the geopolitical dimensions of the alliance, particularly how it affects the regional balance of power and poses a potential two-front challenge to India. The research highlights the necessity for Indian policymakers to devise a multifaceted response strategy, enhancing diplomatic engagements, refining military readiness, and understanding the intricate dynamics of China-Pakistan military ties. The analysis concludes with recommendations for India to mitigate the strategic challenges posed by this enduring partnership, emphasising the importance of comprehensive national security strategies and regional stability.

Introduction

China and Pakistan have a long-term partnership, which with limited interaction, was diplomatically initiated in 1951 (Khalid, 2021). In seven decades, the relationship between both countries have steadily broadened and deepened into multiple areas, viz. Political, economic, cultural, people-to-people and defence (Government of Pakistan, n.d.). In the discourse of International Relations, China and Pakistan have often described their partnership in a number of ways such as 'all-weather friendship', 'iron brotherhood', 'strategic partnership' and a 'comprehensive partnership of cooperation' by the leadership (Li, 2021). To highlight, in 1964, China's Premier Zhou Enlai enunciated the most famous phrase, 'higher than the mountains, deeper than the seas, and sweeter than honey' to describe Beijing's relationship with Islamabad (Garlick, 2021, 1). In August 2022, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, former Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan, described the Pakistani military's relationship with the Chinese military as "brothers in arms" who are working together to safeguard collective security interests.

Over the years, China and Pakistan have cooperated on several issues. From 2002 to 2021, China has invested in 433 projects in Pakistan (AIDDATA, 2023). China has also been instrumental in the proliferation of nuclear weapons, missiles and military modernisation of Pakistan (Dori & Fisher, 1998). Since the 1960s, more specifically, after the signing of the 1963 Border Agreement, China has become a key supplier of Pakistan's conventional arsenal. The trend of their military partnership has only increased after the end of the Cold War. At present, Pakistan is China's largest and most important arms recipient, acquiring approximately 40 per cent of the latter's arms exports. And, by the Trend-Indicator Value, since 2015, China has provided nearly 75 per cent of all Pakistan's imported arms, revealing the depth of their military cooperation (SIPRI, 2023). It is important to consider that the military partnership of these two countries has not formed out of the blue. There are several factors- geographical, strategic and geopolitical- that have cemented the China-Pakistan military partnership.

Factors that have played a role in Strengthening the China-Pakistan Partnership

The Following factors have played an important role in strengthening the China-Pakistan partnership:

- (a) **Geographic Proximity.** China and Pakistan share a 523-kilometre border, i.e., *Pakistan's Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir* is connected with China's Muslim-dominated Xinjiang.

- (b) **Pakistan's Geostrategic Location.** Pakistan's location is at the crossroads of three important regions of Asia, i.e., South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia. Along with that, it has a 1,046-kilometre coastline with the Arabian Sea, serving as China's route to the sea bypassing the maritime choke points in the east. This is the single most important reason that will keep China invested in Pakistan in spite of all problems, notably the terror threats to its citizens and interests in Pakistan.
- (c) **'The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend'.** India is a common strategic rival for both- China and Pakistan. India has territorial and political disputes with both countries. However, the extent to which both view India as a threat varies. Pakistan tends to view everything through an India-centric lens. The country sees India as the hegemon that could inflict a major military defeat on Pakistan (Faruqi, 2023). Whereas, China views it as a potential regional threat to its superpower ambitions (Chang, 2017; Mahmood, 2015).
- (d) **China holds a prominent place in Pakistan's National Security Strategy.** Over the decades, China has supported Pakistan in both traditional and non-traditional security areas. China has helped Pakistan through domestic crises, natural disasters, economic bankruptcy, terrorism, occasional US pressure and international isolation. There is an opinion in Pakistan that China's support of Pakistan deters the US from taking extreme measures despite Islamabad's nuclear and missile programme, and its supporting of terror groups. For Pakistan, maintaining a friendship with China is appealing because the latter possesses economic, political, and military clout in the international system and, most importantly, is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) with veto power. Also, China's help in the modernisation of Pakistan's armed forces is keeping up Pakistan to sustain its arms race with India.
- (e) **Early border settlement paved the way to explore the Cordial Relationship.** China and Pakistan settled their border dispute in 1963. This factor has been discussed in detail in the part (a) of section II of the paper. The settlement helped them both initiate a strategic partnership.
- (f) **The Islamic World has been a Critical Factor since the early years of the Relationship.** Beyond the shared objective of countering India, the China-Pakistan relationship is also significantly shaped by their mutual interests in the Muslim world (Garver, 2001, 189). Pakistan has provided China with strategic depth among the Islamic states, shielding Beijing from criticism over its policies toward Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and promoting Chinese interests as an intermediary in the Muslim world.

Moreover, China has viewed its close ties with Pakistan as a safeguard against the spillover of Islamic terrorism from Pakistan into Xinjiang.

- (g) **Disruptions in US-Pakistan relations pushed Pakistan closer to the Chinese side.** Many Pakistanis believe that the US is an unreliable partner that has betrayed Pakistan on multiple occasions (Ali, 2017). This sentiment was reinforced during the Trump administration, when Pakistan saw a significant reduction in US aid. President Trump accused Pakistan of failing to uphold the principles of the WoT (War on Terror) and providing safe havens to the Taliban. In contrast, China is perceived as a reliable partner that consistently fulfills its commitments (Ali, 2017, 221). Historically, Pakistan and China have maintained strategic congruence in containing India, whereas Pakistan's relationship with the US has always been more transactional. During the Cold War, the US focused on countering the Soviet Union, while Pakistan was primarily concerned with India. This lack of strategic alignment has contributed to the perception of the US as an inconsistent ally (Sabharwal, 2023).
- (h) **Current Geopolitical Events.** Recent events in the international realm like the rise of China; deteriorating US-China and China-India relations; the emergence of India as a pivot to the US Indo-Pacific strategy; and, the withdrawal of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from Afghanistan, affirmatively catalysed the functioning of China's military partnership with Pakistan.

This paper aims to assess the extent and nature of military cooperation between China and Pakistan. It examines the historical context, key agreements, joint exercises, and areas of collaboration in the military realm between China and Pakistan. This paper assesses the impact of China-Pakistan military cooperation on Pakistan's defence capabilities. The analysis will shed light on how this cooperation strengthens their relationship and potentially alters the regional balance of power. By analysing the depth and breadth of their military cooperation, the research aims to establish a comprehensive understanding of their "alliance" and recommend some steps that Indian policymakers must take to avoid or manage the anticipated two-front war situation.

The Evolution of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation

- (a) **Historical Context.** The signing of the Border Agreement on 2 March 1963, shortly after the Sino-Indo War of 1962, marks the inception of China and Pakistan's military cooperation. However, it is important to note that, the Sino-India War of 1962 had only catalysed the process. The

agreement was the product of an amalgamation of developments made during the late 1950s and early 1960s. This includes the recommendations made by SK Dehlavi, Mohammad Ali Bogra and General Raza. These recommendations were advocated by the then Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to the government of Pakistan (Ali, 2017, 42; Jalal, 2014, 117). The proposal of Pakistan to resolve the border dispute with China was based on three elements: the ground situation, customary law and practices of the disputed land, and mutual accommodation. The proposal impressed the Chinese Government as Beijing was also interested in settling the issue (Khan, 2011). According to details, the agreement gave Pakistan 1,350 square miles of its illegally occupied territory, including rights to the water drainage into the Indus River, six of the seven mountain passes, and three-quarters of the K-2. In return, Pakistan gave up its claim to 2,050 square miles of illegally occupied territory that was already under Chinese control, including the Shaksgam Valley. The agreement was seen as beneficial for Pakistan, as it gained control of a strategically important region and access to essential natural resources. It also helped to strengthen ties between Pakistan and China, who have remained close allies ever since (Ali, 2017, 42). After signing the Border Agreement, China became a vocal supporter of Pakistani claims on Jammu and Kashmir, ending the neutrality it had maintained in the 1950s (Chang, 2017; Cheema, 1986, 48).

The primary reason leading to Pakistan's calculated shift towards China and the resolution of the border dispute, in the early 1960s, was the fact that "American assistance was beginning to dry up" (Jalal, 2014). It was a pragmatic decision by Pakistan's establishment that aims to maintain parity against India, an adversary it considers an existential threat and must be resisted at any cost (Fair, 2016). During the border agreement process, Pakistan resisted US pressure to relinquish territory claimed by India, demonstrating to China that Pakistan could act independently. China's concerns regarding Pakistan's participation in Western defence pacts were also eased. Instead, China started to ponder the advantage of Pakistan's role in the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and Central Asia Treaty Organisation (CENTO/Baghdad Pact). Pakistan's involvement in SEATO and CENTO allowed it access to Western intelligence and military resources. China could potentially benefit from shared intelligence and insights gained through its relationship with Pakistan. Also, Pakistan's participation in these pacts meant it had strong Western backing, which could serve as a counterbalance to India's influence in the region. This indirectly

benefited China, by keeping India occupied and less able to focus on its northern border with China.

The significant outcome of the Sino-Pakistan entente was the birth of defence and strategic ties. In the 1965 war between India and Pakistan, China overtly came out in support of Pakistan. The Chinese government released a statement accusing and condemning India for being the aggressor. Shortly thereafter, China began providing military assistance to Pakistan, which included assistance with weapons, training, and technical expertise. In July 1966, almost a year after the 1965 Indo-Pak War, China and Pakistan signed their first military agreement worth 120 million USD (Ali, 2016, 61). It is noted that after the war, Beijing continued providing military assistance to Islamabad despite the failure of its Cultural Revolution, which caused a severe socio-economic upheaval and human deaths in China.

In the late 1960s, Pakistan sought to diversify its arms supplies beyond the United States due to growing distrust. The country turned to France and China for defence equipment. However, the Department of Defence soon discovered that French equipment was prohibitively expensive. Acquiring French arms would have limited the Armed Forces to only a few squadrons of Mirage III and V fighter-bombers, along with three Daphne-class submarines. Consequently, not by choice but by necessity, Beijing became Pakistan's primary arms supplier, offering bulk supplies at more affordable rates. Furthermore, Pakistan's relations with China have developed largely in response to its security needs, which were deeply influenced by its troubled relations with India. Pakistan considers India a main threat to its security. In nutshell, Pakistan drew closer to China, in the 1960s and further in the 1970s, due to the circumstances where both the superpowers, the US, which had been its main arms supplier in the 1965 war, and the Soviet Union, which supported India in the protracted Indo-Pak war (Syed, 1974, 15). Pakistan's role in the 1971 rapprochement between the US and China helped Islamabad to strengthen its relations with both Beijing and Washington, however it soured its relations with the Soviets considerably. Post the 1971 Bangladesh Crisis, in which Pakistan did not receive much support from the US, China finally became its leading arms supplier in terms of cumulative value (Gandhi, 2002; Afridi & Bajoria, 2010).

Following the military defeat from India in the 1971 war, Pakistan accelerated its nuclear programme. During this period, China reportedly stepped in to assist Pakistan in developing its nuclear and missile programs. In June 1976, Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Beijing

along with top military leadership—including General Mohammad Sharif, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Army Staff Committee, and Air Chief Marshal Zulfikar Ali Khan, Chief of Air Staff, to sign the nuclear agreement. The nuclear agreement was announced for peaceful purposes but apparently contributed to Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon programme (Ali, 2017, 86). By the end of 1980, China had become Pakistan's largest supplier of arms and military equipment. In *Eating Grass* (2012) by Feroz Khan, the author wrote that the Pakistan–China relationship was reciprocal and advantageous. Khan jotted that any technological advancements Pakistan obtained were accessible to China for reverse engineering. That arrangement allowed China to gain novel technological insights, while enabling Pakistan to cultivate its engineering capabilities. Khan further mentioned that the most significant and lasting outcome of this joint endeavour to overcome technological denial, especially in the field of nuclear power (Ahmed, 2022, 49).

In the same decade, the Washington-Islamabad rapprochement took place in the wake of Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979). However, the military supplies from America to Pakistan could not reach to level of China's arms supply. The military partnership between the US and Pakistan revived during this time. But Washington also balanced the military aid with sanctions, which impacted diplomatic relations. On the other hand, diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan grew stronger. The military regime in Pakistan, and the suppressive incident of Tiananmen Square in China did not alter the nature of the relationship (Burke & Ziring, 1990, 468). On the contrary, both countries stood with each other when the international community criticised their undemocratic acts. Even when the US put sanctions on Pakistan (due its covert nuclear program), China continued its unwavering military support to Pakistan. For instance, in 1993, China, going against US sanctions, provided the M-I I missile system to Pakistan (Jahangir, 2022).

Amidst the growing cooperation between China and Pakistan had been accompanied by “serious differences” over Pakistan-based militant groups supporting separatist movements in Xinjiang and the creation of the Taliban in Afghanistan. China expressed concerns through diplomatic channels. In 1992, China openly complained about the interference of the Taliban in Xinjiang. China took measures such as closing the Karakoram Highway to prevent the infiltration of Islamic militants. Later, Beijing established the Shanghai Five (later Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) due to alarmingly rising religious fundamentalism in Afghanistan. While China condemned terrorism emanating from Pakistan, both states agreed

to conduct back-channel diplomacy to resolve the issue. In the outcome, Pakistan assured China that no Pakistan-sponsored Islamic groups would meddle in Xinjiang (Dutta, 1994; Mahmud, 2001).

A shift in China's South Asian policy came in the 1990s and early 2000s, China moved to pursue the policy of 'relative neutrality' towards Indo-Pakistan disputes by projecting itself as a mediator and stabiliser (Ali, 2017). For instance, in 1996, Chinese President Jiang Zemin encouraged Pakistan to establish mutually strong ties with India to resolve political issues through discussion (Acharya, 1996). The 'relative neutrality' of Beijing stood firm even during the Kargil Conflict. It is believed China, though it maintained its 'all-weather friendship' with Pakistan, suggested the latter to abide by the Line of Control and negotiate with India based on the Simla Agreement (1972) (Kondapalli, 1999).

China moved away from somewhat neutral stance on South Asia, during the same time that the US and Pakistan renewed their relations after the 9/11 attacks by Al-Qaeda, leading Pakistan to join War on Terror (WoT) (Ali, 2017). Concurrently, in March 2002, China and Pakistan initiated their Defence and Security talks. These talks have since addressed various topics, including cooperation between the military forces of the two nations, regional security, partnerships in defence industries, joint military training, and counter terrorism efforts.

Key Agreements and Military Exercises

Initially, Beijing supported America's War on Terror (WoT) and backed Islamabad's decision to join the effort (Smith, 2011). However, as the WoT progressed, the increasing US presence and influence in Pakistan concerned China. Beijing perceived this as a geostrategic manoeuvre by the US to establish a long-term military presence in the region, posing a threat to China's security. Consequently, China began to distance itself from the WoT.

To counter the US presence, particularly in Pakistan, China developed a strategic response. Recalling the Cold War era, when Pakistan maintained alliances with both the US and China, Beijing viewed the current situation as a potential threat to its sovereignty. This assessment likely motivated China to initiate 'Defence and Security talks' and conduct joint military exercises with Pakistan.

The inaugural 'Defence and Security talks' between China and Pakistan took place in March 2002, focusing on military cooperation, regional security, defence industry collaboration, joint training, and counterterrorism. Since then, annual military exercises have been conducted alternately on land,

water, and air. Pakistan is now among the few nations with which China has conducted exercises across all three military branches. The joint exercises, initiated in the wake of the post-9/11 era, have significantly evolved over two decades, increasing in complexity and interoperability (Lalwani, 2023). Leadership from both countries regularly affirms the growing interoperability between Beijing and Islamabad. There is also close cooperation in intelligence sharing. Regular military exercises, such as the *Shaheen* and *Warrior* series, involve not only combat training but also intelligence-sharing components to enhance joint operational capabilities. Table 1 and Table 2 present data suggesting the growing interoperability in China-Pakistan's Navy and Army, respectively. The navies of both countries started the *Sea Guardian* exercise in 2020. As per data, new training elements have been introduced in the successive exercises. Similarly, the armies of China and Pakistan conduct the *Warrior* exercise, which also focuses on interoperability. To see the level of interoperability in the Air Forces of China and Pakistan (via the *Shaheen* Exercise), refer to Annexure-I.

**Table 1 Indicators of Complexity in Joint China-Pakistan
'SEA GUARDIAN' Naval Exercise (2020-2023)**

Training Element	Sea Guardian I (2020)	Sea Guardian II (2022)	Sea Guardian III (2023)
Joint Operations	✓	✓	✓
Maritime Targets		✓	
Anti-Submarine Warfare	✓	✓	✓
Replenishment at Sea		✓	
Anti-Aircraft and Anti-Missile Operations	✓	✓	
Reinforcing Damaged Ships		✓	
Tactical Manoeuvre	✓		✓
Formation Manoeuvring			✓
Search and Rescue		✓	✓
Air Defence		✓	
Live-Fire Drills	✓	✓	
Visit, Board, Search & Seizure (VBSS)	✓		✓
Helicopter Cross-Deck Landing			✓
Safeguarding CPEC sites			✓
Gun Shooting			✓

Training Element	Sea Guardian I (2020)	Sea Guardian II (2022)	Sea Guardian III (2023)
Maritime Patrol			✓
Maritime Interception	✓		

Note: Author's data is based on public reporting and press releases from China, Pakistan and other analytical sources. Sources are attached in annexure II

Table 2 Indicators of Complexity in Joint China-Pakistan Warrior Exercises (2016-2020)

Training Element	Warrior-III 2015	Warrior-IV 2016	Warrior-VII 2018	Warrior-VIII 2019
Counter-Terrorism (CT) Operations	✓			✓
Urban CT Operations		✓		
Rural CT Operations		✓		
Mountainous CT Operations				✓
Multi-Dimensional Reconnaissance			✓	✓
Search and Clearing Buildings			✓	
Three-Dimensional manoeuvring Deployment			✓	✓
Joint air and ground operations			✓	✓
Joint Defence			✓	✓
Live Ammunition				✓
Defence of CPEC projects				✓
Aerial Transportation				✓

Note: Author's data is based on public reporting and press releases from China, Pakistan and other analytical sources. Data of year 2017 and 2020 are not available. Sources are attached in annexure III

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighbourly Relations

In 2005, China and Pakistan, during the visit of the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao to Islamabad, signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighbourly Relations. (Institute of Chinese Studies, 2005) Surprisingly, the treaty received little attention. However, Article 4 of the treaty is significant regarding their military relations. Article 4 of the Treaty states that -

“Neither signatory shall join any alliance or bloc detrimental to the other side’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity; or take any action of this nature, including signing any treaty of this nature with a third country. Neither signatory shall permit any third country to use its territory to impair the other signatory’s national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.

Neither signatory shall permit the establishment in its territory of any organisation or body that can impair the other signatory’s sovereignty, security and territorial integrity.”
(Ali, 2017, 166)

In 2006, Pakistan officially started making efforts to highlight the relevance of Gwadar Port and proposed to link it with Central Asia, Afghanistan and China’s Xinjiang Province. China, instead of making any announcement, started preparing the ground for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which Beijing and Islamabad officially announced in 2013. The reference of CPEC, in relation to increasing military cooperation between China and Pakistan is pertinent, because a good number of scholars believe that ports are critical enablers for China’s economic, political and military expansion across the globe. It has been highlighted that the Gwadar project is a suitable site for naval support, and is a strategic investment for Beijing to support its internal and external security (Kardon et al., 2020).

By the end of the first of decade of the 21st century, Pakistan’s relations with the US again turned sour for multiple reasons- first, in 2008, the US and India signed a nuclear deal, followed by a waiver for India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which allowed India to import civilian nuclear technology. Soon, Pakistan, being a non-NATO ally, also raised a request for a similar deal with the US, which the latter refused. Second, the involvement of Pakistan’s ISI in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. Though the US played mediator between India and Pakistan, it was irked by Pakistan’s use of terrorism as a tool of foreign policy. Third, in May 2011, Operation Neptune Spear was conducted by the US SEALs the US operation to kill Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan drew significant controversy. Pakistan protested against the US for taking unilateral action and violating its sovereignty, while the US accused Pakistan of harbouring the world’s most notorious terrorist. During this period, China supported Pakistan, praising Islamabad’s efforts to counter terrorism, and indirectly condemning the US for breaching Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pakistani media reports at the time speculated that “China had even warned that an attack on Islamabad would be considered an attack on China” (Ali, 2017, p. 175). However, this is considered Pakistani propaganda. While China has provided political, military, and diplomatic

support to Pakistan, it has never involved its military in Pakistan's conflicts, including the wars of 1965 and 1971, or the Kargil conflict.

In the same year as Operation Neptune Spear, the China and Pakistan Air Forces initiated the *Shaheen* exercise. President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani also signed a deal for China to deliver 50 jointly developed JF-17 fighter jets to Pakistan.

Enunciation of CPEC and its Impact on Military Cooperation

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, the announcement of CPEC was made in 2013 as a critical part of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. Jeremy Garlick, who conducted a study on the narratives related to CPEC in Pakistan, suggested that, as per the narratives, the economic corridor is designed not only for economic development, but also for common strategic purposes, including countering India and suppressing separatist movements. The data on narratives revealed that for Pakistan, CPEC is an opportunity to strengthen the civil-military elites' hold on governance and increase military capabilities. Whereas, for China, CPEC is critical for geo-positional hedging in the Indian Ocean Region (Garlick, 2022, 79).

From the time CPEC was announced, it has been noted that China and Pakistan have started focusing on high-quality complex exercises to build capacity for joint operations. Both countries, in their public statements, since 2015, have emphasised interoperability between their armies, navies and air forces. Highlighting the geostrategic intent of China's increasing interoperability with Pakistan, the Pentagon 2020 report on China's military mentioned that China's military engagement with Pakistan can enhance the PLA's ability to counter combined operations of foreign forces (Millner et al, 2022). Further, it has been observed that both China and Pakistan had formally institutionalised their military collaboration and senior-level meetings. In June 2022, at the well-publicised China-Pakistan Military Cooperation Committee, Beijing and Islamabad exchanged strategic assessments.

Apart from military exercises, China and Pakistan share various joint production programmes, including the JF-17 aircraft, Al Khalid Tanks, Haider Main Battle Tank, Naval Frigates, Fast Attack Craft (FAC) missile boats and submarines. Initially, Pakistani experts received training in production in China. Later, when technology was transferred to Pakistanis, the production units shifted to Pakistan. One of the major joint productions is the JF-17 aircraft, a fourth-generation light-weight, multi-role fighter Jet, jointly produced by the Chengdu Aircraft Corporation (CAC) and the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC). This joint production intends to capture the defence markets of West Asia and North Africa. In 2021, Nigeria became the

first recipient of the JF-17 (SIPRI Database, n.d.). The second recipient of J-17 was Myanmar. However, the Myanmar military Junta declared J-17 unfit for operational tasks. Various analysis state that J-17 had faced several technical issues, maintenance problems, and reliability concerns, particularly with RD-93, a Russian-made engine. Sanctions on Russia, amidst the Russia-Ukraine War, have further complicated the maintenance (Panday, 2023). It has been reported in the media that in the second phase of industrialisation under CPEC, China and Pakistan may turn some of the CPEC locations into defence production units. Previously, Chinese organisations had shown enthusiasm to relocate their defence production units on CPEC routes (*The Eurasian Times*, 2019). However, the rise in attacks on Chinese installations in Pakistan have raised concerns amongst the organisations to undertake CPEC-related projects.

In maritime security, cooperation between China and Pakistan is seen as part of Beijing's broader geostrategic ambition in the region, with Islamabad playing a critical role in facilitating these ambitions (Bhan, 2023; *The Hindu*, 2023). On the other hand, the acquiring of four Type 22 Frigates, six offshore patrolling vehicles (including PMSS *Kashmir*, Pakistan's largest patrolling ship), 30 anti-ship missiles (CM-401) and two corvettes from China is a part of Pakistan Navy's strategy, which was promulgated in its Maritime Doctrine 2019, to increase power projection in IOR (SIPRI Database, n.d.; Bhan, 2023). There is an ongoing supply of 8 Hangor Class submarines by China to Pakistan. This is an important supply in Pakistan's attempts to acquire sea-based nuclear capability.

China is also aiding Pakistan in setting up infrastructure along the LoC, which includes providing CH-4 and Wing Loong-I (UAVs), 200 LY-80 and 70* HQ-9 Surface-to-Air Missiles (SAMs), more than 1000 Portable SAMs, and assisting in installing communication towers and underground cables, on the pretext of securing CPEC road and hydel projects (SIPRI Database, n.d.). In June 2023, China's SH-15, a 155 mm truck-mounted howitzer gun was spotted on LoC (*The Hindu*, 2023). The acquisition of the HQ-9 SAM Air defence system from China further boosts Pakistan's capabilities against aerial threats, marking another strategic advancement in the Sino-Pakistan strategic military nexus (SIPRI Database, n.d.; Boomakanti, 2023). Furthermore, Pakistan anticipates the acquisition of fifth-generation combat aircraft and additional long-range air-defence missile systems from China, which would further consolidate its air defence architecture and strategic military capacity.

The defence cooperation further extends into space technology, with China integrating Pakistan into its BeiDou Satellite Navigation system and enhancing Pakistan's Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR)

capabilities. The BeiDou system augments Pakistan's precision strike capabilities and interoperability with Chinese forces. China had also supplied the SLC-18 Active Electronic Scanned Array radar to Pakistan. This radar is capable of tracking satellites in Low Earth Orbit, and ballistic missiles. This system significantly enhances Pakistan's situational awareness and defensive capabilities, potentially altering the strategic balance in the region.

In April 2024, the second technical training session aimed at establishing a new generation national geodetic datum of Pakistan successfully concluded, with 12 Pakistani technicians in attendance. This strategic initiative, originally requested by Pakistan in 2011, seeks to significantly enhance the nation's surveying and mapping capabilities. Beyond its civilian applications, the development of an advanced geodetic datum aids military cooperation between China and Pakistan (Pakistan Today, 2024). Accurate and up-to-date geodetic data is essential for military operations, including strategic planning, navigation, and the deployment of defence systems. Enhanced surveying and mapping capabilities provide precise geographical information, which is crucial for effective coordination and execution of joint military exercises and operations. This ensures that both nations can operate with a higher degree of accuracy and efficiency, reducing the margin for error in critical situations. Moreover, the new geodetic datum facilitates improved communication and interoperability between Chinese and Pakistani military forces. By aligning their geospatial frameworks, both countries can share critical data seamlessly, enhancing situational awareness and collaborative efforts in defence and security operations along the CPEC and beyond. This cooperation not only strengthens bilateral military ties, but also contributes to regional stability and security, reflecting the strategic depth of the China-Pakistan partnership.

The Geostrategic Dimension of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation

Geostrategy is a critical dimension of any country's foreign policy that is formed by geographical consideration. It involves the analysis and planning of the strategic way in which one country interacts with another country in terms of the geographical space they occupy. Key factors of geostrategy include the location of resources, the geography of areas of strategic interest, and the implications of the physical landscape on military planning and logistics.

The geostrategic dimension of China-Pakistan military relations is deeply rooted in the historical and regional context (Javaid & Javaid, 2016). In terms of history, as discussed above, since the 1960s, after signing the border agreement, China has consistently supported Pakistan's military and nuclear

weapon advancement. In the regional context, the dynamic of the China-Pakistan relationship has intensified due to the recent geopolitical shift in the South Asian region, which includes the US's closeness to India amidst the US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific, the Galwan Crisis (2020) which has deteriorated China and India's relations, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan (2021). In this evolving landscape of South Asia, China is eager to form and strengthen military cooperation not just with Pakistan, but all the South Asian countries. China is actively moving ahead in the Maldives, Nepal and Bangladesh, pressuring Bhutan and having a strong hold on Sri Lanka and Pakistan (Katju, 2024). China's engagement with Pakistan is precisely to take advantage of its geostrategic location, which was earlier, in the Cold War period followed by the WoT era, leveraged by the US. Moreover, China views its partnership with Pakistan as critical to managing the security of the Indian Ocean Region, highlighting their shared interests in protecting their security and regional influence (Bommakanti, 2023).

To secure its territorial sovereignty, over the past decade, China has solidified its position as Pakistan's primary supplier in providing conventional weapons, strategic platforms, and high-end offensive capabilities. In the early January 2024 cross-border attacks with Iran, China came out in support of Pakistan and assured to defend the latter's sovereignty. China's approach towards Pakistan is driven by geostrategic opportunities, economic interests, and fear of instability in the region because of Afghanistan (Small, 2015, 5). After the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan, there is concern about its spillover in the Xinjiang region, which shares border with Afghanistan. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), a separatist group from Xinjiang, has a presence in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal belt. Additionally, China wants to expand the BRI's presence in Central Asia via Afghanistan and seeking to build ties with the Taliban regime to utilise the mineral wealth dormant in the Hindu Kush for industries in its western region (Katju, 2024). Hence, China relies on Pakistan, which has historical relations with the Taliban and significant influence in the region. Contrary to geostrategic plan of China, Pakistan's relations with the Taliban have recently been soured over the role of TTP in worsening the security situation in Pakistan. Therefore, how Pakistan will help China with the Taliban is now a question.

For the past many years, China has also given technological assistance to Pakistan and has established manufacturing industries in Pakistan like Heavy Industry Taxila (HIT) (Allauddin et al, 2020), Kamra Aeronautical Complex and the National Defence Complex, a missile factory at Fatehgunj (near Islamabad). The assistance given by China to Pakistan has built a high level of trust between the two militaries, surpassing what might have been

achieved through a more conventional security partnership (Small, 2015, 25). In China's geostrategic approach towards South Asia, making Pakistan capable of tackling its regional challenges is an asset. This approach is overtly aimed at balancing the regional powers, particularly India. It is not difficult to decipher China's intent to militarily empower Pakistan. Islamabad plays a balancing role in Beijing's India policy, and forces India to keep a large number of its troops and military assets focused on its western frontier. It also ensures that India is kept off balance, distracted, absorbing diplomatic, political and strategic energies that could otherwise be directed towards China (Small, 2015, 54).

India's military leadership often acknowledges the two-front threat posed by collaborative and collusive approaches from China and Pakistan. This recognition underscores the potential for simultaneous conflicts with both neighbours. Pakistan's importation of Chinese military equipment and the joint execution of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have strengthened Beijing and Islamabad's geopolitical alliance. Consequently, their military cooperation could lead to scenarios such as coordinated attacks on India, or strategic diversions during India-Pakistan or India-China confrontations.

The recent infrastructure buildup along the Line of Control (LoC), and a joint exercise close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the aftermath of the Galwan clash, suggest that the Karakoram Pass region could become a focal point for China-Pakistan military collaboration against India. A significant trigger for a two-front war would be China's involvement in protecting its interests in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), if threatened by India. Notably, one of the operational tasks assigned to the People's Liberation Army's Western Theatre Command, established in 2016, is to "protect the Chinese workers and assets of the CPEC" (Sabharwal, 2023). However, no evidence of Chinese security forces' presence at CPEC sites has been established yet. Currently, the security for CPEC projects is provided by the 34th Light Infantry Division of the Pakistan Army, raised in 2016, and the 44th Light Infantry Division, raised in 2020, supplemented by local police forces.

India's military leadership acknowledges these threats of the deepening and trusted military cooperation, which is moving towards a "threshold alliance" that is more advanced than mere "defence cooperation agreements", but is not a formal military alliance and emphasises the need for preparedness to avoid a two-front war (Lalwani, 2023; Naravane, 2023). Apart from the possibility of burden-sharing and inter-operability during the crisis, the latent capacity of the China-Pakistan military partnership,

as evidenced by arms transfers, joint military exercises, co-locating armed forces, and potential military basing in Pakistan's ports, serves both countries' peacetime interests, including defence and security alliances, geoeconomics and cultural exchanges.

The Geoeconomic Impact of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation

One of the most significant geoeconomic aspects of China-Pakistan military cooperation is the CPEC, with the Gwadar port being its key component. The port at Gwadar, located in Balochistan Province, is strategically positioned near the entrance of the Persian Gulf. Numerous experts have speculated that China has intentions to use the Gwadar port for military purposes and to project power over the Indian Ocean Region.

Geo-economically, for Pakistan, CPEC has strengthened its client status (Katju, 2024). A country with client status often receives security guarantees from the patron country. This includes protection from external threats, military aid or assistance in maintaining internal stability, economic aid and investments, favourable trade deals from patron country, political support on the international stage and provide access to advanced technology.

The economic and security importance of CPEC for Beijing is palpable, as the initiative seeks to diversify China's energy imports, underscoring its strategic significance, with a potential to significantly alter regional dynamics by intensifying regional rivalries between India and Pakistan (Ratner, 2018). General Bipin Rawat emphasised China's intricate geo-economical dynamics with Pakistan in Pakistan's Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (PIOJK). He suggested that threats to CPEC, especially in PIOJK might compel China to assert its military presence. Threats to CPEC assets could create scenarios where China and India could engage militarily along the LAC. Also, in the India-Pakistan rivalry, India's naval strategy to blockade Pakistani ports could face challenges from the PLA Navy's countermeasure (Singh, 2021).

The Future Prospects of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation

- **High-level military exchanges, joint-training exercises, and cooperation in military technology.** Despite multi-crises situation in Pakistan, at the sidelines of the Third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in October 2023, both China and Pakistan reaffirmed their commitment to improve their strategic defence and security ties. High-level military exchanges, joint-training exercises, and cooperation in military technology were identified as key areas to strengthen defence ties further (BRF, 2023). Since 2022, the frequency of high-level military

visits between China and Pakistan has increased significantly. Almost every month there is a visit reported in media. Numbers of Pakistan military personnel at PLA National Defence University has increased significantly in the last few years.

The plans for the CPEC include the installation of a fibre-optic cable that will connect the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army's South Xinjiang Military District in Kashgar initially to Rawalpindi, with subsequent extensions planned to Islamabad, Karachi, and Gwadar. This development is part of a broader strategy to enhance communication and operational coordination between the two nations.

- **Military Interoperability and the possibility of joint operations.** The latest developments indicate that China and Pakistan are setting the stage for a more formalised and enduring military alliance, aiming to enhance interoperability between their armed forces. The growing ease with which the two nations' air forces and navies operate together points to preparations for potential joint missions in the future. This evolving partnership suggests a strategic alignment that extends beyond mere equipment transfer, encompassing coordinated operational tactics and training regimes (Lalwani, 2023). Additionally, there have been reports suggesting collaboration between China and Pakistan in conducting cyber-attacks against India.
- **Collaborative Space Endeavours.** In space cooperation, both countries showcased resolve for a longstanding partnership. The visit of Anwaar ul Haq Kakkar, the caretaker Prime Minister of Pakistan to Beijing marked a significant advancement in collaborative space endeavours, with emphasis on space exchange programmes, resource mobilisation, and innovation (BRF, 2023).
- **Issue of Afghanistan.** After the Taliban's takeover, both countries also emphasised strengthening communication and coordination on the issue of Afghanistan for upholding regional peace and stability (BRF, 2023). In future it is expected that China will provide more defence aid to build regional security architecture.
- **Presence of Chinese Private Security Companies in Pakistan.** The recent surge in attacks on the CPEC (see Annexure IV) may prompt a significant shift in the security landscape of Pakistan, particularly concerning the presence and role of Chinese Private Security Companies (PSCs). Given the persistent security threats and Pakistan's apparent struggles with ensuring the safety of Chinese personnel and projects, Beijing might intensify its push to relax restrictions on its PSCs operating in Pakistan. This could result in an increased presence of Chinese security

forces under the guise of PSCs, potentially using both Chinese and locally recruited personnel to secure their investments. Such a move could lead to a subtle, yet profound, expansion of Chinese influence within Pakistan's security apparatus. While this might enhance the protection of CPEC projects in the short term, it also raises concerns about sovereignty and the degree of foreign influence in Pakistan's national security matters. For India, this scenario would likely be viewed with caution, as the presence of Chinese security entities in Pakistan, particularly near the contentious border regions, could be perceived as a strategic encroachment, thereby escalating regional tensions further.

Challenges to Sustaining the China-Pakistan Military Partnership

- **Little optimism for the success of CPEC.** CPEC faces challenges due to economic instability in Pakistan, security issues and China's economic slowdown. The Chinese strategic community has shown little optimism for the success of CPEC. Further, they believe that China's government is aiding a "poorly managed" country (Singh, 2023). Adding to that, the deepening conflict within West Asian countries is affecting the further expansion of CPEC. However, China is mitigating these via actively mediating between conflicting parties by hosting inter-state meetings on counter-terrorism and security.

To sum up, it can be suggested that the China-Pakistan military relationship, while deepening in the military domain, is also influenced by economic interests and CPEC investments. The balance between military and economic interests is delicate and ought to be maintained for critical partnerships. While arms transfers, joint military exercises, and potential basing prospects advance both nations' strategic and geopolitical interests, China and Pakistan must also ensure that their economic interdependencies and investments are in alignment and mutually beneficial. Therefore, the success of initiatives like the BRI, and particularly the timely development of the Gwadar port, will be crucial in determining the future trajectory of the China-Pakistan partnership. Any misalignment in these developments could pose challenges to the sustainability of their partnership (Lalwani, 2023).

- **Increased Instability in South Asia.** There is a growing narrative that Pakistan's multiple crises has increased Chinese influence in the country. This influence has become particularly concerning as assessments indicate that China's grip on Pakistan's decision-making processes has strengthened following the CPEC projects. The extent of this influence

is such that, in the future, Beijing might not allow Pakistan, including those in Islamabad who seek to normalise relations with India, to pursue such a course. Hence, a holistic development of regional stability is a key challenge (Katju, 2024).

- **Pakistan's Western Allies.** Despite its close relations with China, Pakistan is often seen seeking Western partnerships. Pakistan has always tried to maintain the balance between its former Western allies and China. When US interests shifted to the Indo-Pacific, General Bajwa offered Pakistan's interest in playing a role in the Indo-Pacific and showed its willingness to explore the maritime dimension of Islamabad's "natural" partnership with the West (CLAWS, 2023). However, the economic crisis and change in geopolitical conditions altered the situation and benefited China more to gain influence in Pakistan's strategic circle. Nevertheless, the dilemma to choose between China and the West still lingers within Pakistani establishment, and hence poses a critical challenge to the China-Pakistan "threshold" military alliance.
- **Pakistan's growing geostrategic irrelevance.** Pakistan's geostrategic position in the world has changed due to the US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific, its exponentially asymmetric rivalry with India, its soured relationship with Afghanistan and the geopolitics of West Asia. Today, Pakistan's sway in geopolitics is no longer pivotal. These aspects might cause a severe challenge to the partnership.
- **Economic Imbalances.** One of the key obstacles to the China-Pakistan military partnership, of course, is the economic imbalances between the two nations. While China is the second largest economy in the world, Pakistan is dwindling in deep economic crisis and sluggish growth rate. Trade disparities and unmet investment could cause friction in the relationship. Further, if Pakistan lose access to Western exports or financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank due to its closeness with China, it could strain the relationship; or, if China re-directs its financial support to Pakistan towards Iran or any other West Asian country, it could lead to potential disagreements.
- **Anti-China Terrorism.** Another key challenge in the China-Pakistan military relationship is the security threats to Chinese personnel and CPEC infrastructure from jihadist groups operating in Pakistan. These threats, however, are not widely covered or highlighted in Chinese media, but they could strain the trust between the two countries and even impact high-profile military collaborations. If China perceives that Pakistan is unable to manage its internal security threats, this could

affect its strategic calculations and the extent of military cooperation, potentially leading to a withholding of more advanced technology.

The Geopolitical Impact of China-Pakistan Military Partnership on South Asia

China's persistent assertiveness in the South Asian region is not new. China is actively seeking partnerships in the region and has become more open about establishing overseas military bases, termed "strategic strong points". A report by RAND titled "The People's Liberation Army's Search for Overseas Access" suggests that four countries- Pakistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Myanmar- have attracted significant attention in Western analyses, as future basing or access locations for China. Whereas, Pakistan and Myanmar have been listed in PLA studies as promising potential host nations. (Garafola et al, 2022) It has been anticipated that if any of these projected basing or access to locations in South Asia materialises, it might create an "illiberal security order" in the region. (Ratner, 2018) An "illiberal security order" refers to an international system or structure where the government prioritises national security and stability over individual freedom and democratic principles. In such an order, the state often justifies the restriction of civil liberties, regressive law enforcement measures and strong central authority. These measures include censorship, surveillance and the curbing of political dissent.

China's increasing military cooperation with Pakistan significantly impacts the strategic dynamics in South Asia, propagating an environment that could exacerbate regional arms races, with implications that extend beyond state actors to possibly involve non-state actors as well. The US and China each have deep strategic ties within South Asia, with Beijing's partnership with Islamabad playing a crucial role in countering India, thereby contributing to a geopolitical rivalry in the region. The US and China's geopolitical competition could inadvertently fuel the strategic competition between India and Pakistan, making the region more precarious due to the presence of nuclear weapons (Naseem, 2023).

Scholars have argued that India, in a scenario of China-Pakistan military collusivity, may have to confront dual threats from both nations, with their collaboration spanning military and non-military sectors (Singh, 2021). The CPEC is a key element of this partnership, signifying a strategic and territorial collaboration that has raised considerable concerns in India. The initiative is viewed as part of China's broader ambition for regional dominance, and has led to a more assertive foreign policy stance from China, particularly towards India. This assertiveness is evident in China's aggressive posture on border

issues and territorial claims, increasing tensions and conflicts in regions such as Aksai Chin, Ladakh, Arunachal Pradesh, and Sikkim (Ranade, 2021).

One critical advantage China gains from its partnership with Pakistan, especially in the context of non-kinetic domain against India, stems from the racial and linguistic similarities between India and Pakistan. These similarities offer the China-Pakistan a unique leverage in psychological warfare against India. The geographical divide between China and Pakistan fronts further complicates India's defence strategies, such as the Cold Start strategy. Moreover, China's technological prowess in advanced domains is juxtaposed with India's newly acquired capabilities, highlighting a significant technological gap. India's economic challenges further strain its ability to allocate resources for a two-front war.

Recommendations of Indian Policymakers

In the dynamic and increasingly complex geopolitical landscape of South Asia, the deepening military cooperation between China and Pakistan poses a difficult strategic challenge for India. This evolving alliance, marked by joint military exercises and advanced technology sharing and strategic agreements, has profound implications for regional balance of power and India's national security. Therefore, it is imperative for India to timely devise a multifaceted response strategy. The recommendations herein given by the author are the outcome of her research on the subject. These are as follows:

- (a) ***Taking Possibility of a Two-Front War Situation, in the form of Collusivity or Collaboration, seriously.*** With two-front challenges from China and Pakistan, in the form of collusivity or collaboration, India will have to be in a state of perpetual semi-mobilisation. Therefore, there is a need to prepare, both mentally and physically, and both qualitatively and quantitatively, for a prolonged war. Military buildup, more boots on the ground, and modernisation are extremely necessary. As of now, Indian military preparedness, including insufficient ammunition stockpile levels and shrinking fleet of fighter jets, showcase serious vulnerabilities India face in the context of two-front war (S.V. Singh, 2023; S. Singh, 2020).
- (b) ***Diplomatic Engagement and Alliances.*** India must intensify its diplomatic endeavours and strive to cultivate trust, or strengthen alliances with other nations to counter the China-Pakistan partnership. This involves engaging with global and regional powers that are vested in maintaining stability in South Asia. At present, all South Asian nations are looking to leverage the subtle rivalry between China and India to their advantage. Consequently, India requires a coherent and sustainable

framework for engagement with its neighbours, one that aligns its interests with theirs effectively.

The strategic moves by China in Pakistan, especially its potential naval presence at Gwadar or Jiwani near the Strait of Hormuz, should raise alarms among influential members of the international community. Furthermore, the development of Gwadar as a transshipment hub for sea cargo moving between the east and the west poses a significant concern to countries with bustling commercial ports in the Persian Gulf. Establishing partnerships with these nations presents a clear strategy for India to mitigate the adverse effects of the Sino-Pak nexus. Such diplomatic and strategic manoeuvres are essential for preserving regional balance and ensuring national security.

- (c) **Internal Security and Counter-Terrorism Efforts.** Given the implications of China-Pakistan cooperation on regional security, India needs to strengthen its internal security measures and counter-terrorism efforts. This includes addressing internal vulnerabilities and strengthening intelligence capabilities. The recent attacks on security forces in the Jammu region could be a deliberate move to achieve certain strategic goals including raising the cost of the conflict by forcing troop de-induction and re-induction processes, subverting troop thinning exercise, and shifting focus from the LAC.
- (d) **Refine Deterrence Posture.** India has traditionally favored “hard power” deterrence postures towards Pakistan, while adopting a mixed strategy and diplomatic interactions with China. However, following the border standoff events at the Doklam Tri-junction (2017) and, especially, after the Galwan Valley incident (2020), India has recalibrated its deterrence posture. New Delhi has limited diplomatic interactions with Beijing, and is pressing its counterpart to resolve the border issue. With the absence of proper diplomatic exchanges with both adversaries, the strong alliance between China and Pakistan further challenges India’s “hard power” approach towards Pakistan. In this scenario, reviving diplomacy remains a crucial component of a comprehensive deterrence strategy. India must be aware of this alliance and strive to bridge the gap resulting from limited diplomatic engagement with China and no diplomatic engagement with Pakistan (CDD, 2023).
- (e) **To Explore China-Pakistan Collaboration and Collusivity in the Non-Kinetic Domain.** Information domain is critical to national security. Pakistan’s cultural, ethnic and linguistic closeness with India, and Chinese technological (RedTech) assistance to Pakistan, could create a vulnerable and hostile information environment for India. Knowing the tools and

methods of information warfare can help India in building strong defences against China and Pakistan in the non-kinetic domain.

- (f) **Understand the Nature and Extent of China-Pakistan Military Cooperation.** India needs to have a clear understanding and knowledge of the military cooperation between China and Pakistan, including their joint military exercises, key agreements and advancements in military technology. This understanding should extend to the geostrategic and geoeconomic domains of their relationship. There is a need to set up a dedicated research team to look at developments of China-Pakistan military cooperation in the garb of CPEC. The research team should continuously assess how the military partnership between China and Pakistan will alter the regional balance of power, as they might target other regional countries, in the information domain, to join them in military partnership, causing more threats to India.
- (g) **Focus on Economic and Infrastructure Development.** Alongside strengthening military capabilities, India should focus on economic growth and infrastructure development, particularly in border areas. This will not only boost economic resilience, but also provide strategic advantages.
- (h) **Public Awareness and Policy Communication.** The Indian government should ensure clear communication of its policies and strategies regarding national security, especially in the context of China and Pakistan's military collusivity and collaboration. Public awareness about these issues is crucial for broader support for government policies and initiatives.

Conclusion

The China-Pakistan military alliance is marked by joint military exercises and technology sharing, significantly challenging India amidst the technological gap and affecting the regional balance of power. This military relationship, intertwined with economic interests under the CPEC, highlights the importance of projects like BRI for the partnership's sustainability. Recent geopolitical shifts in South Asia, including US-China competition and the Galwan crisis, have further intensified this alliance, impacting not just India but the broader regional dynamics. The growing military cooperation between China and Pakistan could lead to potential joint missions and military basing in strategic locations, raising concerns about an emerging collaboration, and potentially leading to coordinated attacks or strategic diversions.

In response to these evolving dynamics, it is crucial for India to adopt a comprehensive and nuanced approach that addresses the dual threats posed by this collaboration. This includes preparing for the potentiality of a

two-front conflict, reassessing recruitment strategies, refining its deterrence posture to incorporate diplomatic engagements, and enhancing capabilities in the non-kinetic domain to counteract information warfare. Moreover, a clear understanding and continuous assessment of the nature and extent of China-Pakistan military cooperation will be vital for India to effectively navigate the strategic challenges posed by this alliance.



Annexure-I

Indicators of Complexity in Joint China-Pakistan 'Shaheen' Air Exercise

Training element	Shaheen I 2011	Shaheen II 2013	Shaheen III 2014	Shaheen IV 2015	Shaheen V 2016	Shaheen VI 2017	Shaheen VII 2018	Shaheen VIII 2019	Shaheen IX 2020
Combined-aims (with support elements)	✓			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Dissimilar air combat training	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Complex physical environments		✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Opposition forces			✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Electromagnetic countermeasures								✓	✓
Joint (with another services)						✓		✓	✓
Large formations						✓	✓	✓	✓
Live-fire elements						✓			✓
Nighttime flying						✓			
Unscripted features								✓	

Note: Author's new dataset assembled from public reporting and press releases from Pakistan, Chinese, and other news and analytical sources. Data for the Shaheen V (2016) exercise are unavailable.

Source: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/sr-517_threshold-alliance-china-pakistan-military-relationship.pdf

Annexure-II

27

MANEKSHAW PAPER NO. 103, 2024

Data for Table I were gathered from following websites:

http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/16266437.html
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202311/1301682.shtml>
<https://www.app.com.pk/global/sea-guardian-3-exercise-strengthens-china-pakistan-naval-cooperation-in-arabian-sea-experts/>
<https://moib.gov.pk/News/58490>
http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/4915287.html
<https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/sea-guardians-2/>
<https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202301/1283501.shtml>
http://eng.mod.gov.cn/xb/News_213114/TopStories/4858081.html
<https://www.nation.com.pk/06-Jan-2020/china-pakistan-launch-naval-exercises-sea-guardian-2020-on-west-coast-of-india>



Annexure III**Data for Table 2 were gathered from following websites:**

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/170666-Gen-Bajwa-witnesses-Pak-China-exercise-Warrior-4>

<https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/defense-security/allaying-chinas-security-concerns-in-pakistan-post-inception-of-cpec/>

http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/INTERNATIONALREPORTS_209193/InternationalMediaReportsonChina/16029673.html



Annexure IV

Targeted Attacks on Chinese Personnel and Interests Since 2016

29

MANEKSHAW PAPER NO. 103, 2024

Date of Attack	Location	No. of Casualties		Claim	Source of Claim	Type of Attack
		Pakistan	Chinese			
23 November 2018	Chinese Consulate	4 (killed)	–	BLA	BLA Spokesperson	Gunfire
22 April 2021	Serena Hotel, Quetta	5 (killed), 12 (injured)	–	Pakistani Taliban	Taliban Spokesperson	Suicide attack
14 July 2021	Dasu Hydropower Project	2 (killed)	9 (Killed)	n/a	n/a	Suicide attack
20 August 2021	East Bay Road, Gwadar	2 (killed), 3 (injured)	–	BLA	BLA, Spokesperson	Suicide attack
26 April 2022	Confucius Institute, University of Kerachi	1 (killed)	3 (killed), 1 (injured)	BLA	BLA Spokesperson	Suicide attack
20 March 2024	Gwadar Port Authority Complex	2 (injured)	–	Majeed Brigade, BLA	BLA Spokesperson Jeevand Baloch	Multiple Explosion and Gunfire
26 March 2024	Turbat Naval Air Base, PNS Siddique	1 (killed)	–	Majeed Brigade, BLA	BLA Spokesperson Jeevand Baloch	Multiple Explosion and Gunfire
26 March 2024	Dasu Hydropower Project	1 (killed)	5 (killed)	n/a	n/a	Suicide attack
31 March 2024	Ankara Dam	2 (killed), 4 (injured)	–	n/a	n/a	Gunfire

Source: <https://www.claws.in/the-implications-of-rising-violence-on-cpec-and-regional-dynamics/>

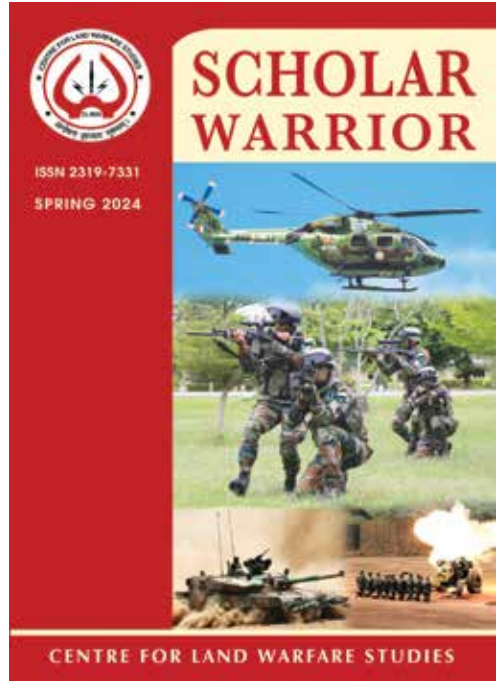
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The evolving military cooperation between China and Pakistan has significantly deepened over the decades, driven by geographic proximity, shared strategic interests, and mutual benefits for bolstering defence capabilities. This formidable partnership, epitomised by joint ventures such as the JF-17 aircraft and various naval and missile systems, has cemented China as Pakistan's primary arms supplier.

The strategic implications of this alliance are profound and urgent, particularly for South Asia. These deepening military ties present a potential two-front challenge to India, profoundly impacting the regional balance of power. Grasping the historical context, key agreements, and joint military exercises is crucial for comprehending full extent of this cooperation.

This analysis highlights the pressing need for Indian policymakers to develop a multifaceted response strategy. Enhancing diplomatic engagements, refining military readiness, and deeply understanding the intricate dynamics of China-Pakistan military relations are not just steps but imperatives. Comprehensive national security strategies and unwavering efforts to ensure regional stability are vital to counter the strategic challenges posed by this enduring partnership.

For the Indian security establishment, this paper is not merely a read; it is a call to action. The evolving China-Pakistan military nexus demands immediate and strategic attention. Ignoring these developments could leave India perilously vulnerable.



Namita Barthwal is a dynamic voice in the field of geopolitics, currently serving as a Research Assistant at the Centre for Land Warfare Studies in New Delhi and pursuing her PhD at the MMAJ

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