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PAKISTAN-CHINA ALL WEATHER FRIENDS: STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS FROM PAST TO PRESENT AND PROSPERITY FOR THE REGION

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
China, Military Collaboration, Global power, Global Politics, All Weather Friends, Regional Prosperity	Pakistan-China relationship has long been characterized as "all-weather friendship," with both nations enjoying a deep, multifaceted partnership that spans several decades. This study is to explore the Pakistan-China strategic partnership has evolved, shaped by shared geopolitical interests, like India, regional security, and global power dynamics. The partnership has been guided by mutual trust, non-interference in internal affairs, and strategic convergence, reinforced over diplomatic engagement, military collaboration, and economic interdependence. The study uses qualitative social science research techniques to examine the political, economic, and geopolitical dimensions of relationship. The research highlights the role of leadership diplomacy, people-to-people exchanges as well as institutional mechanisms in sustaining the alliance not only for Pakistan and China but also for the broader region. In this linking, despite global political shifts, the partnership has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, positioning both countries as strategic allies in an increasingly multipolar world. Thus, understanding this historical trajectory is crucial for the policymakers as well as analysts.
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INTRODUCTION

The strategic partnership between Pakistan and China is a notable example of enduring bilateral relations in contemporary international diplomacy. Rooted in both geostrategic need and shared political interests, Pakistan-China relationship has evolved from mere diplomatic engagement into a multidimensional alliance, encompassing defense cooperation, economic collaboration and deep-rooted people-to-people ties (Ahmad, Tahir, Hussian & Ismail, 2024). To fully realize the strategic dimensions of this partnership, it is vital to delve into historical background that laid its foundation,

influenced its trajectory and lasts to shape its dynamics. The origins of Pakistan-China relations can be traced back to the early years following Pakistan's independence in 1947. Despite the initial hesitance and divergent political ideologies Pakistan being a newly-formed Islamic Republic and China a nascent Communist state two nations soon found common ground. In aftermath of World War II, geopolitical landscape of Asia was being rapidly redefined. China's rise as a major regional power, combined with Pakistan's strategic location, set the stage for mutual recognition of shared interests, particularly in context of their regional security concerns and a shared aversion to India's growing influence.

The formal diplomatic relations were established in 1951, following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. Pakistan was one of first Muslim-majority countries to recognize PRC, despite its Cold War alliance with United States and participation in anti-communist blocs like the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Pakistan's recognition of China was driven by the pragmatic calculations, including concerns about balancing India's regional dominance and desire to explore new diplomatic avenues independent of Western pressures. The 1960s marked a turning point in Pakistan-China relations, particularly after Sino-Indian War of 1962. Both Pakistan and China perceived India as strategic rival and this shared concern led to deepening of their relationship. Pakistan was first country to reach boundary agreement with China in 1963, peacefully resolving territorial disputes in northern Kashmir region. This agreement not only set a precedent for future territorial negotiations between the two nations but also solidified their strategic partnership (Fatima, Amna & Saeed, 2024). The convergence of the interests between Pakistan and China became increasingly evident in the realm of military and defense cooperation.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the two countries developed a robust military relationship, with China providing Pakistan with military equipment, technology transfers and help in developing indigenous defense capabilities. This defense collaboration gained further momentum following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, where both Pakistan and China, along with United States, supported Afghan Mujahideen against Soviet forces. The Afghan conflict underscored the shared geopolitical goals of both nations, particularly in countering Soviet influence in the South Asia and maintaining regional stability (Garver, 2002). The strategic relationship amid Pakistan and China has also expanded into economic domain, particularly since the turn of the 21st century. The CPEC, launched in 2013 as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), stands as the flagship project of the bilateral economic partnership. The CPEC involves significant Chinese investment in Pakistan's infrastructure, energy and industrial sectors, aimed at enhancing connectivity amid two countries and bolstering Pakistan's economic development. These initiative has not only further cemented bilateral cooperation but has also raised up their partnership to new level on global politics (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015).

LITERATURE REVIEW

China-Pakistan collaboration, a strategic axis against U.S.-led regional hegemony, means. At the center of this relationship is CPEC, mammoth Chinese investment that has vast economic & strategic implications for both countries. If China is using CPEC to acquire energy resources and spread its

cloud in South Asia, then Pakistan is using it to fight the U.S and to juggle its complicated relations with India. This expanding alliance defies established order and undermines American interests by providing the alternative trade corridors and transforming the regional economic passage. But the relationship is fragile, and fears for both security and Pakistan's internal stability cloud its future. The developing Sino-Pak nexus has the potential to alter the balance of power in the Asia and it is important to watch its evolution and how it will shape regional strategic environment (Khan, Shah & Shaheen, 2024). The intricate political-economic relations amid Pakistan and China in the past seventy years. Starting with the earliest days of their diplomatic engagement in 1950s, it charts the politicization and maturation of relationship from a series of strategic agreements to a full-fledged strategic partnership.

The study explores that how Cold War considerations and changing geopolitics malignant ground shaped strategic and security alignment in 1970s and 80s. It also offers an overview of the current Pakistan-China relationship, focusing on major developments in 21st century such as CPEC, joint security concerns, and cultural interactions. Analyzing the fundamental elements facilitating this enduring tie e.g., proximity of interests, trust, respect and the economic and strategic incentives for both this study explicates trajectory and nature of Pak-China relations. The paper highlights the importance of the alliance as an example of co-operation and shared interests in global diplomacy, and as a key factor in the geo-political landscape today (Khan & Ilmas, 2023). Illuminate that the copacetic diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and China has survived through a number of shifts in geopolitical scenarios and has been stable and robust. Amidst evolving Indo-U. S. relations and torn Pakistan-U. S. relations, this overview is intended to provide the insight into the strong aspects of the Pakistan-China relationship, so vital to the counterweight of India and to the address regional sensitivities.

The historical underpinning and current interactions highlight China strategic stakes in bolstering not just the stability of Pakistan, but its vested interests across the wider Asian terrain. In the realm of extended South Asian politics, enduring Pakistan-China diplomatic ties stand out as a resilient friendship, withstanding tests of time and dynamic geo-strategic conditions. Amid shifting regional and international dynamics. The further study focuses that Pakistan is likely to maintain a steadfast alignment with China, considering it as most reliable strategic partner for counterbalancing India and mitigating potential diplomatic manipulation or negligence from U.S. Additionally, the study underscores China's intrinsic interest in promoting and stabilizing Pakistan's political and military landscape, reflecting its long-term security concerns in the Southern, Central and Western Asian regions (Jahangir, 2013). China and Pakistan have idolized long term and friendly relations. The relationship is regardless of their difference of ideology and marked in their respective cooperation. Thus, the writer explains the economic cooperation of China and Pakistan with the investment of Chinese in Pakistan.

The Chinese investments are especially in the infrastructural development. The plan of CPEC was efficaciously launched to start a gateway amid PRC and Pakistan. For that purpose, the two states are signed contracts of the CPEC. According to writers, CPEC may face some challenges in political, security and economic fields. Most importantly the political instability and insecurity is vital issue.

CPEC will change the cooperative phase of China and Pakistan to the unbeatable level. The CPEC is part of China's OBOR policy and this policy was initiated by China in counter of America's pivot to Asia policy. They predict that CPEC is beneficial for Pakistan and China as well as it can provide routes for land lock states of Central Asia. his unique relationship has been characterized by mutual trust, cooperation, and shared interests in various sectors, including political, economic, military, and cultural fields. The whole region can have benefited from this mega project. It offers high level of knowledge about outcomes of CPEC due to Chinese scholar the reliability of article is increased (Irshad, 2015).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research used are employs historical, descriptive, and analytical approaches to proceed and draw a conclusion. The data collected would be analyzed using qualitative social science research techniques. Moreover, the study incorporated secondary sources, such as expert opinions available on the internet. In this regard, all the data given in this study are composed of released papers in print media, books, and journals, and official reports of the organizations for instance the secondary methods for the research were consulted and analyzed historical background of Pakistan-China strategic partnership.

ANALYSIS OF STUDY

Background: Early Relations (1947-1950)

The year 1947 was watershed moment in South Asia, as it marked the partition of British India and emergence of Pakistan as an independent state. Initially, Pakistan's foreign policy was shaped by its need to secure its newly won independence, stabilize its borders and address internal challenges. Pakistan's early foreign policy had a pro-Western tilt, as the country sought support from Western powers, especially the United States, to counter perceived threat from India (Khan, 2011). But the geopolitical landscape of region changed fundamentally when CCP emerged victorious in 1949 and established People's Republic of China. China and Pakistan both acted in suspicion on each other's foreign policy.

Dawn of Strategic Relations, Crisis & Cooperation

The strategic relationship between China and Pakistan is among most significant in Asia. It began in early years of Pakistan's independence and grew steadily, particularly from 1950 onwards when China emerged as the PRC. This partnership has since been characterized by military cooperation, economic ties and diplomatic support. The period from 1947 to 1966, a foundational era in China-Pakistan relations, saw both nations navigating complex international dynamics, such as Cold War and regional tensions in South Asia (Curtis, 2009). This explores expansion of strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan during this period, highlighting the key events and policy shifts that shaped the relationship.

Initial Diplomatic Engagements: Formalizing Relations (1950-1955)

A milestone in the history of foreign relations of both the countries was in May 1951 when both the countries officially established diplomatic relations when China became first non-Muslim country

to recognize Pakistan and the Beijing–Islamabad ties has since been described by leaders and the people of both countries as "higher than the mountains, deeper than the oceans, stronger than steel, dearer than eyesight, sweeter than honey, and so on. Islamabad's recognition of the PRC, on which Pakistan was one of the earliest of the Islamic states to do so, reflected its policy of realism in the international relations. That was quite bold considering that Pakistan was pro-West, but such was the audacity of these men. In this connection, Pakistan, especially in the through military alliance like the CENTO and SEATO, has also tried to develop the close tie with the West and the United States. Thus, these ties let the countries like China secretly undermine the Soviet Union and Red dominance in the area.

Thus, such agreements of Pakistan raised suspicions in mainland China; that this was part of U.S.-led containment attempt to block the spread of communism. Despite these strategic and ideological divergences, Sino-Pakistani relations were cordial from the beginning, and they remained cordial in early 1950s. The two countries gradually warmed up their ties after 1955 Bandung Conference. It is at this conference that post-colonial African and Asian countries refused to participate in what was discussed about global solidarity, imperialism and colonialism. While at the conference, it was possible for Pakistan and China to put aside their differences to an extent and talk about Western imperialism and the problems of the poor countries. It is also a mutual recognition that allowed increased cooperation in the years that came after. In this connecting, the Bandung Conference is often considered a key nexus in Sino-Pakistan relations which would prove to be an indispensable to understanding of eventual closer political, economic and military ties that evolved in the years to come. This first diplomatic period led to one of the most enduring alliance in the region (Kataria & Naveed, 2014).

Shifting Geopolitical Landscape: Toward Strategic Cooperation (1955-1960)

Several key developments in late 1950s contributed to the growing closeness between China and Pakistan. By this time, Pakistan had begun to realize that its alliance with United States and other Western powers did not fully address its security concerns, particularly vis-à-vis India. The 1954 military pact amid U.S. and India and later Soviet military support to India, heightened Pakistan's insecurity, making it more open to fostering ties with China. The Sino-Soviet split, which emerged in late 1950s, further isolated China within communist bloc, prompting it to seek partners in Asia. Pakistan, with its geopolitical significance, became an attractive ally for China (Azeemi, 2007). In 1960, two countries undertook diplomatic & strategic efforts to solidify their relationship. A pivotal moment was negotiation of Sino-Pakistan border agreement, which resolved longstanding border disputes amid China and Pakistan's northern territories, particularly in region of Karakoram Range. Signed in 1963, this agreement demonstrated the growing trust between two nations. China viewed Pakistan as a crucial counterbalance to India, while Pakistan saw China as a valuable ally against its regional rival.

Strategic Cooperation during the Sino-Indian War (1962)

The 1962 Sino-Indian War marked a significant turning point in China-Pakistan relations. The war broke out over border disputes between China and India, primarily in Aksai Chin region. Pakistan, which had its own territorial disputes with India over Kashmir, saw the conflict as an opportunity to

strengthen its ties with China. During the war, Pakistan maintained the neutral stance but leaned diplomatically towards China, refusing to join the chorus of international condemnation against Beijing (Zaki, 2014). The war exposed the vulnerabilities in India's defense strategy and revealed deep divisions in South Asian geopolitics. From China's perspective, Pakistan's refusal to side with India or its Western allies during the conflict was seen as a sign of goodwill. Therefore, war further estranged Pakistan from India and reinforcing its need for the solid ally to counter Indian influence in the region.

Economic & Military Cooperation: 1963-1966

China and Pakistan had begun to explore deeper military and commercial cooperation in early 1960s. Under that bill signed Tuesday merchandise trade agreement of two states became effective immediately making way for shipment of goods amid the two states. Assistance in infrastructure construction came under parasol of China economic aid to Pakistan. The transportation, electricity and telecommunications were later included in framework of this long-term partnership, which was grounded on economic partnership we have just heard about. China and Pakistan established close military cooperation, providing Pakistan with military equipment and conducting joint exercises. The China recognized Pakistan's strategic importance as a counter to Indian expansionism and U.S. influence. The 1965 Indo-Pak War highlighted alliance's value, with China providing diplomatic support and warning India of values (Zeb, 2012). In 1963, Pakistan and China signed a provisional boundary agreement about demarcation amid China's Xinjiang and Pakistan control of adjacent areas. This agreement provided strategic, political & economic advantages, with 750 square miles of territory for Pakistan.

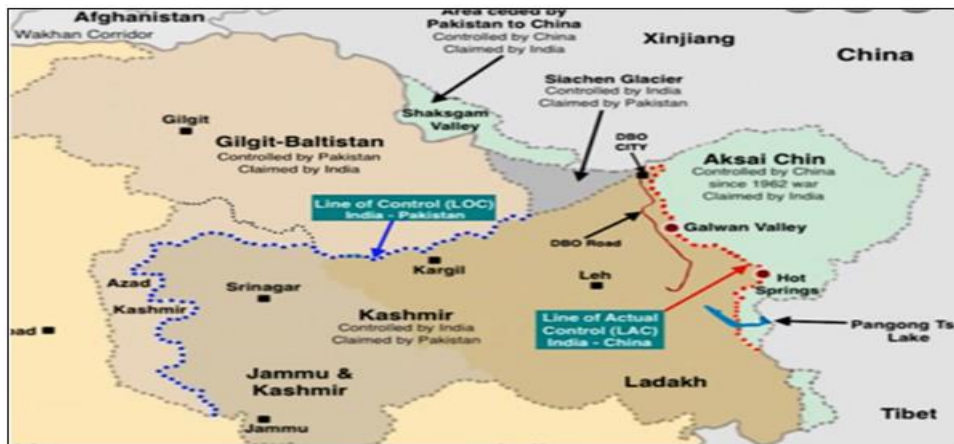
Western observers believe the relationship entered a "ballistic phase" with Pakistan acquiring 5,180 square kilometers of territory in the Northern Kashmir and Ladakh (Javaid & Jahangir, 2015). The Sino-Pakistan Series, a border accord between Pakistan and China, was criticized by US for being an illicit pact. In this linking, the agreement led to an air transport agreement, allowing airlines to operate in different cities. This sparked diplomatic relations and a loan for Dacca airport. However, discussions on the Kashmir dispute were unsuccessful, and India's reluctance to address the issue resulted in the missed opportunity (Hussain, 2020). During the 1965 conflict between India and Pakistan, China provided military, political, and economic support to Pakistan, condemning India's criminal aggression. Moscow maintained neutrality, while Washington imposed embargo. Pakistan and China signed a trade deal, with the China providing machinery and interest-free economic assistance. Consequently, trade volume varied due to China's focus on the Cultural Revolution and Pakistan's political instability. In 1963, China provided \$50 million to boost commercial relations (Barnds, 1975).

China-Pakistan Border Agreement

The China-Pakistan Border Agreement, signed in 1963, defined boundary between China Xinjiang region and Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan. It resolved a long-standing border dispute and fostered closer ties between the two nations. Pakistan ceded territory in Shaksgam Valley to China, while China recognized Pakistani control over the Gilgit-Baltistan. The agreement strengthened bilateral relations and facilitated infrastructure development, including the Karakoram Highway

(Chaudhuri, 2018).

Map 1 Shows the Territorial Area of Border Agreement



Source: <https://optimizeias.com/china-pakistan-1963-agreement/>

Diplomatic Solidarity & Shared Strategic Interests

Beyond economic and military cooperation, China and Pakistan also cultivated strong diplomatic ties during this period. Both nations supported each other on critical international issues. Pakistan backed China's position in United Nations, calling for PRC's rightful place as a permanent member of the Security Council, while China reciprocated by supporting Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir dispute. This period also saw increased diplomatic exchanges between the two countries. Pakistani President Ayub Khan 1964 state visit to China involved meetings to Chinese leaders and officials including Premier Zhou Enlai and Mao Zedong. This trip represents the further development of the friendship between the two countries and its objective of ensuring the security of their own regions. Several agreements that enhanced ties between the two countries were made during the trip, with the two leaders discussing subjects that ranged from the economic cooperation to military strategy (Hussain, 2020).

Sino-Pak Strategic Cooperation during 1966-1971

The 1966-71 era marked a significant milestone in history of China-Pakistan's strategic partnership, as it was characterized by geopolitical and strategic differences and common interests. The mid-1960s saw substantial geopolitical realignments in Asia, with China under Mao Zedong navigating a period of increasing tension with the Soviet Union, culminating in the Sino-Soviet split. Pakistan, under military leader Ayub Khan, was involved in an ongoing rivalry with India, leading to the first major war between the two nations in 1965 (Chaudhuri, 1986). China and Pakistan's shared concerns about India formed a core foundation for their cooperation during this period thus fostering peace, stability, and prosperity in region. China provided Pakistan with arms, equipment, and technical support, helping rebuild its forces after 1965 war (Weidong, 2017). Chinese experts also assisted in development of Pakistan defense production industry, including efforts to establish a domestic arms manufacturing base.

The China's support was seen as indispensable in building Pakistan's deterrence against India, and China's alliance with Pakistan served as a counterbalance to the Soviet-India partnership (Khan & Kasi, 2017). Beyond military cooperation, China-Pakistan relationship expanded into diplomatic arena, with both nations finding common cause in countering the India's growing regional influence. China consistently supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir issue, using its position to back Pakistan claims in Kashmir. Pakistan's support was crucial for China's entry into the United Nations in 1971, with Islamabad playing a key role in rallying support for the China's admission to the UN and the expulsion of Taiwan from organization. During the late 1960s, China and Pakistan sought to expand their economic cooperation, with the construction of Karakoram Highway connecting the Xinjiang region in China with the northern Pakistan. Despite facing a major test in 1971, both sides remained committed to their strategic partnership, which would only grow stronger in the years that followed (Faisal, 2020).

Bilateral Strategic Cooperation During the 1970s

The 1970s marked a significant phase in Pakistan-China relations, as two countries solidified their strategic cooperation in the dynamic global and regional environment. Geopolitics, shared strategic interests, and a convergence of goals, including countering Indian and Soviet dominance in South Asia, were key drivers of this cooperation (Azeemi, 2007). The United States' opening to China, the sharper polarization of Cold War, and rise of multipolar South Asia influenced the development of military, strategic, economic, and political dimensions. Pakistan played a crucial role in arranging clandestine communications between China and the US, leading to President Richard Nixon's trip to the Beijing in 1972. The 1971 war between India and Pakistan reaffirmed the significance of the Pakistan-China partnership in the context of Indian and Soviet Union regional hegemony (Kataria & Naveed, 2014).

China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation in 1980s

The strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China during the 1980s was characterized by a convergence of political, military and economic interests in the face of regional challenges and global geopolitical shifts. The decade was crucial for both nations as they sought to balance their security needs, economic development and diplomatic goals amid the Cold War. This relationship, although it had historical roots, reached new-fangled heights in 1980s due to a variety of factors, including Soviet-Afghan War, regional rivalries and a mutual desire for stability in South Asia (Chakma, 2020).

Political Cooperation

The political landscape of the 1980s played a pivotal role in shaping the Pak-China relationship. Pakistan's strategic location, bordering Afghanistan, India and China, made it a crucial player in the geopolitical dynamics of the region. China, under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, sought to expand its influence while maintaining stability in its neighborhood. The strategic partnership has helped to navigate global trials, from economic sanctions to security threats. This period marked beginning of military and diplomatic collaboration, which would lay foundation for long-lasting alliance. Pakistan, under General Zia, was keen to secure its borders, especially with Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.

Table 1 Key Political Events in 1980s Influencing Pak-China Cooperation

Year	Event	Impact on Pak-China Relations
1979	Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan	Strengthened security help against common threat
1980	General Zia's Visit to China	Reinforced bilateral political and military ties
1982	China Support for Pakistan on Kashmir	Diplomatic backing for Pakistan in international forums
1984	Economic Reforms in China	Opened avenues for increased trade and economic ties
1988	Death of Zia and Political Transition	Slight slowdown in relations, but strategic ties remained

Source: Author, 2024

The Soviet-Afghan War (1979–1989) was a defining factor that brought Pakistan and China closer. Both countries viewed Soviet Union presence in Afghanistan as a direct threat to regional stability. China, wary of Soviet expansionism along its western borders, supported Pakistan's efforts in aiding Afghan 'Mujahideen'. In this connection, on these matters, Beijing provided material and financial assistance to Pakistan, even though Islamabad served as the conduit for Chinese arms to the Afghan resistance fighters.

Military Cooperation

Military collaboration between Pakistan and China flourished during 1980s, with both countries recognizing the need to bolster their defense capabilities. China became Pakistan primary supplier of military hardware, including aircraft, tanks & missiles. This cooperation was critical for Pakistan, especially as it faced heightened tensions with India, which was receiving military support from the Soviet Union.

Table 2 Major Military Collaborations between Pakistan & China in 1980s

Year	Military Agreement/Development	Description
1980	Sale of F-6 Fighter Jets	Pakistan acquired Chinese F-6 jets to enhance its air force
1983	Joint Production of Al-Khalid Tank	China provided technical expertise for tank production
1985	Sale of Surface-to-Air Missiles	Strengthened Pakistan's air defense system
1986	Strategic Cooperation Agreement	Formalized defense collaboration and intelligence sharing
1987	Transfer of Missile Technology	Helped Pakistan in developing its missile capabilities

Source: Author, 2024

China military assistance to Pakistan was crucial in modernizing its armed forces. The 1986 Strategic Cooperation Agreement between two countries formalized their defense collaboration, including intelligence sharing, joint military training, and defense production. China played a significant role in developing Pakistan's missile capabilities, which later proved crucial for Pakistan's deterrence strategy. Pakistan received fifty T-59 tanks annually, 20 CSA-1 surface-to-air missile batteries, two Romeo-class submarines, two Hoka-class FAC weapons & sixty Q-5 Fantan A fighter ground attack aircraft. China also sent 16 Hai Ying missiles and four Huangfan-class FACs. The Pakistani Navy's fleet includes 24 naval vessels, including 12 Shanghai-class ships, 4 Chuwan-class hydrofoils, 4 Huangfen-class vessels & 4 Hoku-class destroyers. China ropes Pakistan in military modernization over training, defense industrial facilities, and production of replacement components (Muzzamil & Wasimuddin, 2022).

Economic & Trade Relations

The 1980s also saw an expansion of economic and trade ties between Pakistan and China. China's economic reforms under the Deng Xiaoping, which began in 1978, opened the door for increased bilateral trade. In this connection, while military cooperation dominated the relationship, economic ties grew steadily in diverse contexts, with both countries knowing the mutual benefits of stronger trade relations.

Table 3 Trade Relations between Pakistan & China (1980-1989)

Year	Bilateral TV (USD -M)	Major Exports from Pakistan	Major Exports from China
1980	150	Cotton, Textiles, Leather	Machinery, Electronic Goods
1982	180	Rice, Cotton, Leather	Chemicals, Textiles
1985	250	Textiles, Cotton	Machinery, Tools, Electronics
1988	300	Textiles, Leather, Carpets	Electronic Goods, Machinery
1989	320	Textiles, Leather Goods	Tools, Industrial Equipment

Source: Compiled by Author (<https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-country/pak/partner/chn>)

While trade volumes remained modest compared to later decades, foundation for future economic cooperation was laid during the 1980s. China became a key supplier of machinery and industrial goods to Pakistan, while Pakistan exported raw materials and textiles to China. In this regard, the two countries also explored opportunities for joint ventures in areas likewise textiles, agriculture and manufacturing.

Regional & International Diplomacy

On diplomatic front, Pakistan and China worked closely in various international forums to support each other's positions on critical issues. China stayed Pakistan stance on Kashmir, Pakistan endorsed China's policy towards Taiwan and Tibet. This mutual backing in the global forums reinforced their strategic partnership.

Table 4 Diplomatic Coordination between Pakistan & China in 1980s

Year	International Forum/Issue	Cooperation/Outcome
1981	United Nations - Kashmir Issue	China supported Pakistan's position on Kashmir
1983	UN Security Council - Afghan Issue	Both countries called for Soviet withdrawal
1985	Non-Aligned Movement Summit	Joint stance on Third World development issues
1987	Organization of Islamic Cooperation	China supported Pakistan's regional security
1989	Diplomatic Debates on Nuclear Non-Prolifer	Pakistan backed China's stance on arms control

Source: Author: 2024

Pakistan and China had opposed Soviet inroads in Afghanistan and both worked together to ask for Soviet withdrawal in United Nations, and in diplomatic proceedings. It was not just on regional issues that the two states were cooperating: they also worked collaboratively on broader issues, such as non-proliferation, with Pakistan backing China position in global forums. 1980s was decade of closer strategic cooperation amid Pakistan and China. The political, military and economic interest amalgamate of that decade created cooperation, as would continue in the subsequent decades. Still regional geo-political scenery has changed, but ground realities of Pak-China support established

in 1980s still hold relevance today with countries working together on several fronts from defense to development (Khan, 2011).

China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperation in 1990s

The 1990s was a sensitive decade for China-Pakistan strategic relations. It was an era that saw the consolidation and strengthening of a relationship started decades before. In 1990s, both countries were confronting a highly dynamic international context, punctuated by end of the bipolar world dominated by Cold War confrontation, regional unrest & rapidly changing post-Cold War security circumstances. Pakistan and China's relations during this time had a good military cooperation and economic support; they shared mutual interest over regional security risking in India & Afghanistan (Munir, 2018).

Economic Cooperation

Although military ties were the mainstay of relations between Sino-Pakistani in 1990s, there was significant economic cooperation as well. China supported Pakistan economically, technologically in numerous fields, such as the infrastructure projects, and energy pathways. The construction, with Chinese help, of Karakoram Highway, which links China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan, was a big strategic project and a symbol of the close relationship between the two countries (Naeem & Majid, 2020).

Table 5 Chinese Aid and Investment in Pakistan (1990s)

Sector	Major Projects	Value (in million USD)
Infrastructure	Karakoram Highway expansion	500
Energy	Chashma Nuclear Power Plant	1,000
Telecommunications	Digital telephone exchange development	200
Agriculture	Irrigation and water resource management	300

Source: Author: 2024

Strategic & Diplomatic Cooperation

China has been Pakistan's primary defense supplier since 1980s and 1990s, providing equipment, technology, and scientific expertise to enhance its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. China has also provided Pakistan with conventional armaments, including JF-17 aircraft, F-22P frigates, K-8 jet trainers, T-85 tanks, and F-7 planes (Curtis, 2009). China and Pakistan's strategic cooperation in the 1990s was centered on regional security, particularly in India and Afghanistan. Despite Pakistan's support for the Taliban during Afghan civil war, China provided economic and military assistance to Pakistan. In 1996, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Pakistan, pledging to establish comprehensive partnership (Allauddin & Ali, 2021). Pakistan tested its nuclear weapon in 1998, China supported its nuclear program. China vetoed UN Security Council 1172 resolution condemning India and Pakistan's nuclear tests. Kargil War between Pakistan and India was fought peacefully, with China remaining neutral. After war, General Musharraf prioritized cooperation and friendly relations with China. China consistently provided the diplomatic support to Pakistan, vetoing anti-Pakistan resolutions and supporting Pakistan on issues like Kashmir and human rights (Ahmar, 2020).

The Kargil conflict, occurring from May to July 1999, was a limited-scale war between India and Pakistan in Kargil district of Indian-administered Kashmir. The dispute arose when India alleged that the Pakistan Army was infiltrating terrorists and paramilitary personnel across the Line of Control, leading to increased tensions and a localized violent clash. During this period, Sino-Indian relations were still grappling with the repercussions of the nuclear tests performed by both nations. In this context, China's position on Kargil conflict exhibited a notable level of neutrality. Although relations between China and India had not completely normalized tensions arising from the nuclear tests, Beijing abstained from openly supporting either party in dispute. Ali (2019), China refrained from supporting Islamabad's provocations; although its rhetoric towards Pakistan was marginally friendly than towards India, its official diplomatic position remained neutral. While this perception may not fully represent reality, China's unwavering dedication to neutrality in fourth Indo-Pak conflict markedly enhanced its prominence and efficacy in persuading Pakistan to seek honorable retreat from Kargil.

DISCUSSION

This disturbed the strategic environment and brings a geopolitical dimension to the fighting that concerns India even more. What's more, China's dominance in the South Asia under its all-weather friendship with Pakistan has eroded India's strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific and its power projection capability has been curtailed. Pakistan and China have mutual, longstanding interests that augur well for a strategic partnership. Particularly in the context of balancing India's regional influence and deepening connectivity through joint projects, such as China-Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC. But new times in global power, including a surge in tensions between China and the United States, could complicate the diplomatic interests of both nations. Between China and Pakistan, there is also the risk of change in China-India equation that would be detrimental to the China-Pakistan relationship and alliance if China-India ties develop substantially. Challenges of cooperation (risks of cooperation) are economic sustainability in Pakistan and security concerns at home (including terrorism, political instability as well as economic recession), that may interrupt the CPEC project as well as any other possible cooperation. Thus, despite these challenges, it can be deduced that Pakistan and China will very likely keep collaborating in robust partnership despite global and regional changes, in confronting India's growing sway and reaching key economic and security objectives.

CONCLUSION

The foundation of Pakistan and China's strategic alliance is a shared perspective, mutual trust, and shared interests. Their partnership has endured for than 70 years in spite of several geopolitical challenges, despite the fact that they are unequal partners. With China's increasing concern for Pakistan's welfare and Pakistan's growing distance from the West, the cooperation grew stronger in the 1960s. Their relations were further cemented via nuclear cooperation, collaborative military initiatives, and building of Karakoram Highway. A flagship project of collaboration today, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor seeks to advance economic growth, people-to-people interactions, and regional connectivity. China and Pakistan's relationship has endured over time, with the countries continuously standing behind one another on the important matters of national concern. It is also

economically beneficial for Pakistan with some merits and demerits regarding debt dependency, loss of independence. In this linking, most of Pakistan political discourse has centered on country's ballooning debt to China, with many questioning the fairness of the agreements and their effect on local job creation.

CPEC, as a physical manifestation of the timeless pragmatic relationship between Pakistan and China, has been adopted by various Pakistani governments as the solution to address decades-old infrastructure deficiencies. CPEC has fundamentally shifted the geopolitical landscape of region. By offering Islamabad an option outside of the traditional Western financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF, Pakistan's status in the South Asia has been enhanced. It also requires the neighboring states especially India, to revisit their approach due to increasing salience of Pakistan in the China-South Asian relationship. The relationship between Pakistan and China had always been strategic in nature. The cooperation is not limited to the economic domain and also extends to the sphere of defense and military where the two countries have decades old relationship. China has long been Pakistan's main source of advanced weapons from warships and tanks to fighter jets. Thus, both countries have participated in the military exercises, defense industry cooperation and sharing of information.

Recommendations

1. To develop a greater awareness and respect of one another's histories, values, and customs, both nations should keep encouraging interpersonal interactions, cultural gatherings, and cooperative educational initiatives.
2. Green energy Both the countries should promote joint ventures in green energy projects, such as solar, wind and hydropower to cut down dependence on fossil fuels and to overcome Pakistan's energy crisis.
3. Both countries also need to cooperate further in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and (APEC), and advance the cause of peace, trade and development in South and Central Asia.
4. Enhance exchange of students from Pakistan & China in Chinese universities and vice versa. Thus, inspire cultural exchanges, language courses, media partnerships to foster the positive images of one another on both ends.

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