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The Sino-Pak Strategic Partnership and its Implications for Pak-US Relations in the Twenty-First Century

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ABSTRACT

The US has been a friend of Pakistan since its independence. On the other hand, China and Pakistan have common interests and a common enemy. The growth of China in the twenty-first century and the strategic partnership between China and Pakistan have moved the United States closer to India, which is a serious concern for Pakistan. The paper explores the nature of the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership, the impacts of the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership on Pak-US relations, and looking into Pakistan's policy options for balancing relations with the US and China. The paper concludes that the US ruled the world after the 1990s as a single hegemon. So, after the rise of China, the US is concerned about its declining hegemony. As well, the Sino-Pak strategic partnership is not acceptable to the US. As a result, the US cut off military and economic assistance to Pakistan, supported India's position in the United Nations Security Council, and signed a civil nuclear deal with India. In the end, it makes policy recommendations for Pakistan to establish a balanced position between the US and China.

Keywords: *Pakistan-China Relations, Pakistan-US Relations, Strategic Partnership, National Interests, Balanced Approach.*

Introduction

The term "strategic partnership" refers to a bilateral relationship between two countries aimed at carrying out a mutually beneficial project. Pakistan and China have had a strategic partnership for more than seven decades. They established diplomatic connections despite different social, political, and economic systems in the 1950s. The strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China stems from the fact that they have a common enemy, India. The most urgent cause was that when India put trade restrictions on Pakistan, China responded by offering a coal-for-cotton barter agreement. In these circumstances, Pakistan recognized the People's Republic of China. The Bandung conference also allowed Pakistan to resolve its differences with China. China aided Pakistan militarily and financially during the 1965 war. On the other hand, the US did not respond appropriately to the 1965 conflict (Soherwordi, 2010). In terms of defense, China also supported Pakistan. During the 1970s and 1980s, China extended its cooperation with Pakistan. The strategic partnership is visible in the economic sector. China offered financial aid to deal with Afghan migrants. The economic relations between Pakistan and China were further groomed in the 1990s. Due to the free trade agreement, imports and exports between China and Pakistan have increased. The trade between China and Pakistan has expanded from one billion to seven billion US dollars.

After the 9/11 incident, China and Pakistan came closer to each other. The Chinese government criticized the US attack in Abbottabad that led to the arrest of Osama bin Laden. The Sino-Pak strategic partnership was further strengthened when both countries signed the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Even before the start of CPEC, relations between Pakistan and the US were tense due to the Pak-China closeness, the US violating Pakistan's sovereignty to hunt down Osama Bin Laden, the Raymond David case, and the Salala incident. In these circumstances, CPEC further added fuel to the fire of hatred. The developing Sino-Pak strategic partnership is unacceptable to the US since China has emerged as a challenger to the US. The famous author Dong Wang critically explains and analyses the root causes of the conflict and the elements of cooperation between China and the US in his book, *The United States and China: A History from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (2021). The author also explains the impact of China-US relations on regional actors such as Pakistan, India, and Iran. The Sino-Pak strategic partnership changed the behavior of the US towards Pakistan and put Pakistan in a difficult position to balance between the US and China. US President Donald Trump reacted harshly against Pakistan by stopping the US 1.3\$ billion security assistance and winding up Pakistan's military and educational training program. The differences between Pakistan and the US have been sorted out somehow after Prime Minister Imran Khan met with US President Donald Trump in 2019. The US response was not as strong as it could have been because Pakistan's strategic position is in the US interest. Washington realizes that if it offends Islamabad with overly harsh sanctions, Pakistan will suspend supply lines for its troops in Afghanistan. This stance is presented by Usama Butt and Julian Schofield in their book, *Pakistan: The US, Geopolitics, and Grand Strategies* (2012). The author explains an in-depth examination of Pakistan's foreign policy toward the US and addresses Pakistan's bilateral ties with China and middle eastern states (Butt Usama, 2012). B. M. Jain also contends in his book, *South Asia Conundrum: The Great Power Gambit* (2019), that the developing strategic alliance of Russia, Iran, China, and Pakistan has not only limited US choices in the region but has also limited the US position and supremacy in South Asia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The book looks at the emerging issues and assesses the policy options available to the Trump administration in dealing with the Afghanistan crisis. The author further shows how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) impacts the economic and security interests of Asia and the US. Furthermore, the author highlights the increasing rivalry between the US and China and attempts by other nations to balance them (Jain, 2019). However, Pakistan has played a dominant role in arranging talks between US officials and the Afghan administration.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the impacts of the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership on Pakistan–United States relations.
2. To analyze the policy options available to Pakistan for maintaining a balanced relationship with both China and the United States while safeguarding its national interests.

Research Questions

1. What are the impacts of the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership on Pak-US relations?
2. What policy options does Pakistan have for balancing the situation with both the United States and China?

Literature Review

There is much research available on the Sino-Pakistan relationship. Nonetheless, the relevant publications do not address the research questions this paper is going to investigate.

Andrew Small (2021), provides an extensive and fair review of the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China. In his book, he describes the history of China-Pakistan relations and relates

it with the West, India, Afghanistan, and Asia. The author also addresses a few of the most controversial issues, including support of China for Pakistan's nuclear program, China's negotiations with the Taliban, and the part of the Chinese military in Pakistan. The sub-topics include China's interests in regional safety and strategic competition with its enemies, the United States and India (Small, 2015).

Dong Wang, (2021), critically analyzes the entire history of relations between China and the US. The author addresses the root causes of the conflict and the elements of cooperation in their relations. In addition, he provides a qualitative analysis of the changing economic, social, and political dynamics between China and the United States (Wang, 2021.).

Usama Butt and Julian Schofield (2012), provides a detailed and in-depth study of the foreign policy of Pakistan towards the US. The authors have divided the book into two parts. The first part deals with the current dispute over changing nature of the US-Pakistan relations. Part two concentrates on Pakistan's bilateral ties with China, the Gulf States, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, and Iran (Butt, 2012).

Shuja Nawaz (2020) presents a picture of unequal partners and describes how the relationship between the US and Pakistan has not been more than a rollercoaster ride since the early 1950s. The author clarifies that Pakistan cannot break relations with the US since it is surrounded by hostile states such as Afghanistan and India. Pakistan does not want to become a puppet of China and get involved in the US-China rivalry or Arab-Iran conflict. Moreover, the author focused on the ten years from 2008 to 2018 (Nawaz, 2020).

In his book, *South Asia Conundrum: The Great Power Gambit* (2019), B. M. Jain contends that the developing strategic alliance of Russia, Iran, China, and Pakistan has not only limited US choices in the region but has also limited the US position and supremacy in South Asia, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The author highlights the increasing rivalry between the US and China and attempts by other nations to balance them (Jain, 2019).

The book *Pakistan at the Crossroads: Domestic Dynamics and External Pressures*, (2016) by Christophe Jaffrelot summarizes the problems of Pakistan. This book is divided into internal and external levels. On the domestic front, it discusses civil-military relations, the role of political parties in Pakistan, judicial activism, insurgency in the tribal regions, police reforms, and the status of the Pakistan economy. On a global scale, Pakistan's ties with Afghanistan after 2001, relations with the US and China, and Muslim nations, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran, are examined. The author also discusses the unlikely war between Pakistan and India. Finally, this collection is written by prominent Pakistani experts and adds new knowledge to the already existing literature on post 9/11 (Jaffrelot, 2016).

Research Methodology

This research relies on a qualitative case study design. The nature of the research is explanatory and the theoretical lens of realism theory is used. The cause-and-effect relationship is used in this study to connect three states. The research used primary and secondary data.

Results and Discussion

i. Historical Background of Sino-Pak Relations

China and Pakistan established diplomatic relations on 21 May, 1951, when Pakistan recognised the People's Republic of China. The relationship between Pakistan and China is based on mutual trust and respect. The initial cause behind their strategic partnership is that they share a common enemy India. Another, more pressing reason was that when India imposed trade restrictions on Pakistan, China responded by offering a coal-for-cotton barter agreement (Javaid U. &., 2015). However, as a communist state, China has opposed Pakistan's participation in defense alliances such as SEATO and CENTO. The Bandung conference in 1955 helped Pakistan to resolve its

disputes with China by clarifying to China that Pakistan's participation in defense alliances was not intended to surround China. On March 2, 1963, China and Pakistan signed the Sino-Pak Boundary Agreement, ushering in a new era of cooperation (Husain, 2016). As a result of this boundary agreement, Pakistan gave China 5180 square kilometers and acquired 1942 square kilometers from China. This agreement was crucial for both political and economic reasons. The signing of the boundary agreement between the two countries is viewed as the foundation of the current Pakistan-China strategic partnership. The war of 1965 and 1971 also strengthened their relations. During the 1965 conflict, China gave Pakistan complete political, economic, and military backing. Between 1965 and 1971, China gave Pakistan roughly US\$ 445 million in foreign aid. In the 1971 conflict, China expressed great concern and indirectly helped Pakistan. China exercised its veto in the UN Security Council to prevent Bangladesh from getting recognition in favor of Pakistan.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Sino-Pakistan relations flourished in finance, commercial, technological, and defense cooperation. China also offered economic assistance to Pakistan to overcome the economic challenges posed by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In 1982–83, China provided A-5 and F-6 aircraft belonging to the MiG-19 family to Pakistan. According to another report, between 1978 and 1988, China supplied Pakistan with 825 T-59 tanks. China also delivered 98 F-5A fighter jets and 40 F-7 fighter jets between 1988 and 1992. In 1986, they signed a comprehensive nuclear deal to ease the export of civil nuclear technology. Under this agreement, China promised to give Pakistan power reactors and nuclear-related items and services. Despite US nuclear sanctions, China negotiated a comprehensive nuclear cooperation deal with Pakistan in the 1980s. Pakistan received missile technology from China, notably the M-9 and M-11 missile systems. In May 1998, Pakistan successfully tested its first nuclear weapon with the assistance of China. Moreover, China used its veto power against UN Security Council Resolution 1172. The resolution criticized India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests and called for an end to the production of nuclear-related materials in the future (Kerr, 2008).

ii. A Brief Glimpse of the First Five decades of Pak-US Relations

The history of bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US is quite fascinating. The US and Pakistan established formal ties on 20 October, 1947. The initial cause that influenced Pakistan-US ties was Pakistan's low economic and military situation after independence. In these circumstances, the US was the only potential source of military and economic assistance for Pakistan. From the beginning, the Pak-US relationship has never been stable (Waheed, 2017). The relationship between Pakistan and the US has frequently been considered need-based. On the one hand, the US was helping Pakistan, and at the same time, the US was assisting India militarily and economically. In 1950s, Pakistan became part of the US-led regional alliances, such as SEATO and CENTO, to seek political, economic, and military assistance. After joining SEATO and CENTO, the US agreed to provide Pakistan with US 17.5\$ million in military assistance and US 60\$ million in financial aid. In exchange, the US set up a monitoring and communication station near Peshawar against the Soviet Union to conduct surveillance activities.

Even in the Sino-Indian border war in 1962, the US increased its military aid to India and the US urged Pakistan not to take advantage of India's problems and instead support India rather than China but Pakistan rejected it. As a result, relations between Pakistan and the US deteriorated. On 2 March, 1963, Pak-US relations further deteriorated, when Pakistan signed a boundary agreement with China. In the war of 1965, the response of the US was also neutral. The US imposed embargoes on both Pakistan and India. Pakistan suffered more than India as a result of the US neutral approach because India was already receiving armaments from the Soviet Union. The US response was the same in the war of 1971. When India detonated a nuclear device in

1974, the US did not take any harsh actions. On the other hand, when Pakistan agreed to buy a nuclear fuel reprocessing unit from France on 18 March, 1976, Under the policy of non-proliferation, the US promptly reacted against the agreement.

After the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, the US once again needed Pakistan as a front-line state because of its geo-strategic importance. To counter the Soviets, the US provided a guarantee of assistance to Pakistan against Soviet aggression. In 1981, President Ronald Reagan signed a US 3.2\$ billion five-year aid deal for Pakistan and agreed to sell forty F-16 aircraft. This aid package was prolonged for another six years, from 1981 to 1987. Furthermore, the US also exempted Pakistan from the Glenn and Symington Amendments in these years. Ronald Reagan also promised US 4.2\$ billion in further aid over the next five years (1987-1993). In return, Pakistan fought in the Soviet-Afghan war as a frontline state. Pakistan not only provided military bases to the US but trained the Mujahedeen to counter the Soviet army. Even the US turned the pressure off on the nuclear program. From 1985 until 1990, President George H.W and Ronald Reagan gave required certification to Congress in support of Pakistan's nuclear program. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US emerged as the unilateral power of the world. After achieving its goal, the US betrayed Pakistan and left the region after the Soviet Union existed from Afghanistan. So, in this scenario, Pakistan faced a difficult situation and is still facing it. The Soviet-Afghan War posed a serious threat to Pakistan's internal and external security. Many Pakistani soldiers were killed, and a massive flood of Afghan refugees in Pakistan's northern region caused problems for the country's law and order situation. Furthermore, the Soviet-Afghan War fostered drug trafficking, the Kalashnikov culture, and sectarianism. Despite all this, in the 1990s, the US froze all military aid, economic assistance of US \$700 million and refused to allow the transfer of F-16 aircraft unless the President certified on an annual basis that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device (Smith, 2011). The US again imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan after the nuclear tests of 1998 (Curtis, 2012).

iii. Sino-Pak Strategic Partnership in the 21st Century

The twenty-first century has proven to be a beneficial period for Sino-Pak relations in many domains, including defense, economics, and strategic partnership. Pakistan and China marked the 50th anniversary of their relationship in 2001. Both the countries have also signed six agreements and one Memorandum of Understanding in 2001. China and Pakistan's defense ties improved after September 11. The bilateral trade between Pakistan and China also reached a level of US 1.8\$ billion in 2002. In 2003, Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali visited China. During this visit, both countries committed to expanding bilateral trade and collaboration. As a result of this visit, both countries concluded a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in 2003. Both countries held their first maritime exercises in 2003, followed by a joint army exercise in 2004. The purpose of this exercise was to combat terrorism. In 2005, the Treaty of Friendship had also signed between China and Pakistan. The term "strategic" was used for the first time in this treaty. In 2006, the first Free Trade Agreement between Sino-Pak was inked, and it went into effect in July 2007. Pakistani exports to China increased after the Free Trade Agreement. China has always been a big supporter of Pakistan's nuclear program. After signing an arrangement with China, the Pakistan Navy received the fourth F-22P Sword frigate in 2008 to develop its naval capabilities. The completion of the JF-17 Thunder aircraft by the efforts of Pakistani and Chinese engineers was another milestone of the Pakistani air force. In 2009, the Sino-Pak strategic partnership gained strength in financial terms by concluded a second free trade agreement. This year is also regarded as Pakistan and China's Year of Friendship. In honor of the year of the Pakistan-China friendship, the State Bank of Pakistan issued a commemorative coin.

The Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership rose exponentially from 2010-2016. In 2011, Pakistan-US relations were at their lowest point. So, Pakistan decided to strengthen its strategic partnership with China. The growing strategic partnership between Pakistan and China has manifested itself in military assistance. In 2011, the US gave 39 percent of military aid, while China provided 38 percent (Small, 2015). However, in 2016, the ratio has shifted. China supplied 63 percent of its military hardware, while the US gave only 19 percent. It's a great representation of the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China. Moreover, when US Marines violated Pakistani airspace and invaded a compound in Abbottabad to capture Osama bin Laden, China reacted in Pakistan's favor. Moreover, China's foreign ministry issued a statement stating that any strike on Pakistan or its territory would be considered an attack on China. Pakistan and China also signed transportation-related projects in 2014, including the Metro Bus project and the Orange Line train project.

The year 2015 is quite crucial for Pakistan and China. This year, a previously defense-focused strategic relationship has evolved into a mega-economic-focused strategic partnership. The strategic partnership between Pakistan and China has grown even stronger since the CPEC's inception. The CPEC was officially started in 2015 when President of China Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and 51 memorandums of understanding and 11 projects were signed. The CPEC is a massive development initiative worth nearly US 62\$ billion. CPEC is a combination of many corridors, including the Investment, Trade, Energy, Transportation, Infrastructure, and Industrial corridor. Between 2014 and 2030, the economic corridor would connect Pakistan's Gwadar port with China's northwestern region. By 2030, the GDP growth rate of Pakistan is expected to reach 7.5 percent. Another aim of CPEC-related projects is to build up to date routes and improve current road network to boost commerce and provide easy market access. In 2006, the bilateral trade between China and Pakistan was at US\$ 2 billion, and by 2015, it had increased to US\$ 16 billion. In 2018, CPEC entered its second phase. The main focus of this phase was on Pakistan's social and economic growth. For this purpose, both countries inked another Free Trade Agreement in 2018. In the same year China's Jiuquan Satellite Centre launched Pakistan's Remote Sensing Satellite-1 (PRSS-1). The shortage of energy is also another concern for Pakistan. The majority of the CPEC investment (US\$33.79 billion) is going into power projects in Pakistan, which would generate 17045 MW of electricity. So far, ten energy projects have been completed (Authority, n.d.). Under CPEC, China has provided opportunities for Pakistani students. More than 28,000 Pakistani students are enrolled in various universities in China. All of these examples demonstrate the extent of strategic partnership between the two countries.

iv. US-Pakistan Relations in the Post 9/11 Period

The relationship between Pakistan and the US took a dramatic turn after 9/11 terrorist attacks. President Bush ordered an immediate response to deal with the situation and track down the terrorist organizations responsible for the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan also got a list of US requests which included the use of airbases (Sattar, 2020). Pakistan granted permission to use the Shahbaz airbase in Sindh and the Shamsi airbase in Baluchistan. Pakistani security forces also captured thousands of al-Qaeda and Taliban members and sent them to CIA custody. Moreover, Pakistani troops were deployed along the Afghan border to protect foreign militants (Nagra, 2014). In exchange, the US promised political and military help for a limited period. The US played a positive role in reducing Pakistan's debt repayment burden through the IMF by expanding economic assistance and debt relief. In 2004, Pakistan was considered a non-NATO ally. The US also facilitated Pakistan to purchase advanced American military technology. Another gesture was the contribution made by the US to earthquake relief in 2005. Relations between Pakistan and the US were also at their peak during the George Bush era. President Bush promised Pakistan

a strategic relationship in the military, trade, education, and technology in 2006. Pakistan has been described as a pivotal country by US leaders (Shah D. S., 2018). However, Pak-US relations took a left turn at the end of the first ten years of the 21st century, when the US revised its priorities for the nuclear program by signing a civil nuclear agreement and the Defense Cooperation Framework Agreement with India. According to the terms of the agreement, India would be eligible to purchase nuclear technology from the US, including materials and equipment. On the other hand, Pakistan has not received a similar deal from the US. In 2009, well-known senators like Richard Lugar, Kerry, and Barman strengthened relations with Pakistan by doubling funding from US 600\$ million to US 1.5\$ billion over the next five years. During 2002 and 2013, the US gave Pakistan US 26\$ billion in economic and military aid and military hardware purchases. The hardware included 8 P-3C Orion maritime patrol planes, 18 new F-16 fighter jets, 6,000 TOW anti-tank missiles, 6 C-130 transport aircraft, 500 AMRAM air-to-air missiles, a Perry-class missile frigate, and 20 Cobra attack helicopters. The assistance provided by the US is only to trap Pakistan. In return, Pakistan got nothing but to bear the loss of human lives (Crawford, 2015), and face security, and economic issues.

In 2011, the gap between the US and Pakistan grew even further (perveen, 2021). Three crucial incidents happened that affected Pakistan-US relations including Raymond Davis case, the US raid in Abbottabad that killed Osama bin Laden, and Salala check post incident (Ahmed N. , 2016). The drone issue is another cause of Pakistan and the US' deteriorating relationship. After the Osama bin Laden incident, Islamabad demanded that the drone strikes completely stop. The US strikes were reduced, but the issue resurfaced after the assassination of TTP chief [Hakimullah Mehsud](#). It is estimated that 522 drone strikes killed 3852 people between 2004 and 2015 (Zaidi, 2021). During the Trump era, Pak-US relations were also at a low level. Throughout the Trump presidency, there have been two phases of Pak-US relations. The foreign policy of Donald Trump was pro-Indian (Arežina, 2019). During his campaign, he stated that he took a strong stand toward Pakistan for not providing full support on the Afghanistan issue and for assisting Chinese ambitions through CPEC. After becoming US president, Donald Trump halted military and security help to Pakistan. Moreover, in 2018, the US shut off US 1.3\$ billion in security aid. Later, Trump tweeted at the end of 2018 that he was beginning to improve relations with Pakistan's government. The reason was that the United States and Pakistan wanted peace and stability in Afghanistan. Trump has not disengaged from Pakistan due to its geographic location and importance in Afghanistan. In the Joe Biden period, ties between Pakistan and the US were slow to develop. Under President Joe Biden, ties between Pakistan and the US will remain focused on Afghanistan and confined to military and economic assistance. It is concluded that US security concern has driven Pak-US ties over the previous two decades.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS

The changes in the world's political dynamics have pushed Pakistan into a critical situation. The Sino-Pak strategic partnership has far-reaching implications for Pakistan-US relations. After the inauguration of CPEC and the Iran-China deal, the US sees Pakistan through the eyes of China. US resentment has grown towards Pakistan. The US allied with India to counterbalance China and Pakistan (Jain, 2019).

i. US Enhancing Strategic Partnership with India

The US was caught off guard by China's rise in the twenty-first century (Wang, 2021). To balance the South Asian region, the US enhanced its strategic partnership with India (Zhao, 2015). In 2004, bilateral relations between India and the US began to strengthen when they announced the NSSP (the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership) to collaborate in strategic areas such as space, nuclear, defense systems, high-tech commerce, and security apparatus. The US changed its

priorities of the nuclear program by signing a civil nuclear agreement and the Defense Cooperation Framework Agreement in 2006 (Khan D. A., 2014). According to the terms of the agreement, India would be eligible to purchase nuclear technology from the US, including materials and equipment. This agreement was approved by the US Congress in 2008. It was further extended for the next ten years. The treaty gave India a legitimate position as a nuclear state, which had broader consequences for India-Pakistan relations. On the other hand, the US has not offered Pakistan a similar agreement. The US and India also concluded joint energy, security, and trade contracts in 2016. The US has also backed India's entrance into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (Rashid, 2017). The NSG consists of 48 members that oversee global nuclear trade. Pakistan has also requested membership in the NSG. According to the rules, both India and Pakistan are ineligible to join the NSG because they are not part of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Nonetheless, the US has elevated its voice in support of India to counterbalance China. Being a member of the NSG will enable India to take advantage of the international nuclear trade and enhance India's nuclear power status. It is concluded that the US's continued support to India to make it a member of the NSG will affect Pakistan's nuclear capabilities. Furthermore, in the future, the doors to Pakistan's nuclear mainstreaming could be permanently closed for Pakistan if India joins the nonproliferation regime before Pakistan. Furthermore, bilateral trade between India and the US has also increased from US \$36 billion in 2005 to US \$104 billion in 2014. All of these treaties indicate a plethora of advantages for India in terms of US cooperation. The Sino-Pak strategic partnership illustrates the dual policy of the US.

ii. US backs India on Permanent UN Security Council Seat

The Security Council is a crucial United Nations institution. The permanent seat in the UNSC provides a significant source of legitimacy for global action. The US has long supported India's permanent membership in the Security Council to advance and protect its national interests. In 2021, President Biden praised India's outstanding leadership during its presidency of the UNSC. He also reaffirms his support for India's permanent position in the UNSC. After gaining a permanent seat on the Security Council, India's political and legal authority would expand. It will have disastrous consequences for Pakistan due to the formal acceptance of Indian status.

iii. Suspension of Economic and Military Assistance

The Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership has also had an impact on Pakistan-US economic and military relations. In the twenty-first century, the US cut off military and financial aid on various occasions (Jaffrelot, 2016). Pakistan experienced negative growth in the fiscal year 2019 as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Previously, Pakistan received financial assistance from international institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank to recover from pandemics such as the 2005 earthquake. After the growing Sino-Pak strategic partnership, these institutions imposed strict rules on Pakistan. The US claimed that IMF assistance would allow Pakistan to repay its debt to China. The proportion of military aid provided by the US has also decreased. It was 39% in 2011 and dropped to 19% in 2016. The US government withdrew US \$1.3 billion in security assistance in 2018 for two reasons. First, for not fully supporting the US in Afghanistan. Secondly, Pakistan's strategic partnership with China. On the other hand, the US opened all technological and military doors to India.

CHINA INFLUENCE IN PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS

China holds a distinct place in relations between Washington and Islamabad because both countries were rival powers and Pakistan constantly tried to make changes to further its goals. In the global context, the US and China are two great powers (Friedberg, 2005). From the start, their relations are characterized by opposition and rivalry. The US unilaterally ruled the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The US has no notion that China will challenge its

dominance in a few years. After the launch of economic reforms in 1978, China has made remarkable economic progress. In 1978, the trade of China was US 2\$ billion, while it was worth more than US 4\$ trillion in 2014. In 2014, the Chinese defense budget increased to US 160\$ billion, a 12.2 percent increase from the last year. China's technology and military capabilities have also substantially grown in recent years. The rapid rise of China in the global scenario poses a substantial threat to US global hegemony. In 2013, China started the Belt and Road Initiative to counter US hegemony by spreading its influence in the region across Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. The US had openly criticized the Belt and Road Initiative by China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor further added fuel to the fire of hatred. After the inauguration of CPEC, the US views Pakistan in the context of China. American politicians claim that the Sino-Pakistan strategic partnership is a big hurdle in U.S.-Pak good relations. Alice Wells, the Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs, criticized CPEC, claiming it is a debt trap for Pakistan. China only wants to ensure profits for its state-owned enterprises and to get easy access to the world (Javaid N. I., 2020) James Mattis, the US Secretary of Defense, has also questioned the legality of CPEC. As a reaction, the US has stepped up collaboration with Australia, Japan, and India, to quell the strategic ambitions of China.

After the trade war, the US and China relations have further worsened. The trade war between China and the US began on 6 July 2018, when the US banned the export of semiconductor chips. In 2019, the US issued a one-year order against the Chinese telecom companies such as Huawei and ZTE because the US believed that these companies could threaten the national security of the US. In response, China took countermeasures against the US. China put the US companies on an unreliable entity list. The chip industry is the biggest in the US. To counteract China's economic supremacy, the US levied a 25% duty on all steel imports, except the states such as Australia, Argentina, South Korea, and Brazil (Woo, 2018), and a 10% duty on all aluminum imports except Argentina and Australia. In response, China imposed 15% to 25% tariffs on more than 128 products of the US, such as fruit, seamless steel pipes, wine, and recycled aluminum (Carvalho, 2019). Therefore, it is concluded that the rapid growth of China in the post-9/11 era has hurt Pakistan-US relations.

Another factor contributing to the deterioration of Pakistan-US relations is China's growing ties with Iran, Russia, and Pakistan (Raza, 2019). Despite US sanctions, China and Iran recently signed a landmark deal for the next 25 years. According to the terms of the deal, China will have access to low-cost crude oil and gas supplies. In exchange, China will invest US 400\$ billion in Iran's gas, oil, and infrastructure sectors. This deal challenges the supremacy of the US. Pakistan's Prime Minister also spoke out in support of the China-Iran deal. The China-Iran deal could be significant for Pakistan-Iran relations in the future for two reasons. First, China would advocate for close Pakistan-Iran ties to safeguard its economic interests in the area. Secondly, China's influence in Iran may make it easier for Pakistan to strike a balance between its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. The China-Iran deal will also affect Pakistan-US relations. The Power Transition Theory is being used to explain the conflict between the US and China. According to this theory, the war between China and the US was unavoidable because China's growing power was constantly challenging US hegemony and it also affected Pak-US relations (Friedberg, 2005).

CONCLUSION

In the twenty-first century, world politics has undergone tremendous changes. Several critical events happened, including the 9/11 attacks, the US raid in Abbottabad that killed Osama bin Laden, the rise of China (Tan, 2016), the start of CPEC, the Iran-China agreement, and the trade war between the US and China are all examples (Evans, 2019). These events changed the alliance system, turning friends into foes and enemies into allies. From the beginning, the US and China

have been good friends and allies of Pakistan. Both the US and China help Pakistan through its ups and downs. On several occasions, the US has expressed friendly concern for Pakistan. While more often imposed restrictions on Pakistan after the completion of its interest. The US continues to engage with Pakistan in all facets because of its geostrategic location. Since the Afghan war, Afghanistan has been the main focus of US foreign policy. From 1979 to 1989, Pakistan acted as a frontline state to counter the Soviet role in Afghanistan. After 9/11, the role of Pakistan was also crucial. Pakistan has provided military bases for the US actions. As a result, Pakistan has faced a massive influx of Afghans, human casualties, and an attack on its sovereignty.

On the one hand, China is a vital strategic partner for Pakistan. It has aided Pakistan in every way possible. On the Kashmir dispute, China also supports Pakistan's position. Pakistan grew closer to China due to the US's indifference to Pakistan during its hour of need. As Pakistan and China grew closer, the US saw Pakistan as part of the China axis. This thing complicates Pakistan-US relations. The rivalry between the US and China is intensifying in the twenty-first century. In 2018, the trade war between China and the US was at its peak. It has diverse implications for Pakistan-US relations. The US' close engagement with India is another factor behind deteriorating relations. The US also allied with India to counter China's role in South Asia. In these circumstances, India benefits more (Quddafi, 2018). The US is assisting India financially, politically, and militarily to give a tough time to China and Pakistan. To counteract China's growing influence in the region, the US signed a nuclear agreement with India. The US also supported the entry of India into the Nuclear Suppliers Group. It will also affect Pakistan's nuclear capabilities.

The US has always been wary of Sino-Pak relations, but the US's response was not as strong as it could have been because Pakistan's geographical location is in the US's interest. Pakistan was also instrumental in getting the Taliban to the table for talks. In the changing scenarios, The US does not need to look at Pakistan through the lens of China. The Sino-Pak strategic partnership is only a small part of a much larger process in which China is challenging the United States' global dominance. Pakistan is just fulfilling its national interest. Pakistan must also maintain a balance between the US and China because both are vital to Pakistan.

In the end, it is recommended that Pakistan can balance its ties with China and the US through diplomacy, bilateralism, and making alliances. Diplomacy is a highly effective way to resolve any conflict. Through diplomacy, one state can improve relationships with other states. Both countries are important to Pakistan. The US views its relationship with Pakistan through a competitive China lens because of its growing strategic partnership with China. Diplomatic efforts can only help to enhance this image. Secondly, Pakistan's ties with the US and China are focused on security, political, economic, and cultural factors. These factors encourage Pakistan's officials to maintain cordial relations with both, rather than favoring one over the other to gain security and economic gains. In the end, Pakistan needs to adopt a balanced approach to secure itself politically and economically. If Pakistan picks one of them, it will face several obstacles to its economic and political stability. The international political environment is very complex. A clash of interests poses a significant threat to world peace. The same rule is applied in the case of Pakistan. Pakistani policymakers must avoid becoming dependent on China.

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