

# **The US-India Strategic Partnership: Pakistan's Foreign Policy Response**

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## **Introduction**

The US-India strategic partnership is considered the watershed moment in the bilateral relationship between India and the United States<sup>1</sup>. It is underpinned by the historic civil-nuclear agreement as well as defence agreements for transfer of “high-end [military hardware]”<sup>2</sup> to India. Moreover, joint naval exercises of the US and India in the Indo-Pacific, including Indian demand for a liaison in the Arabian Sea, have potentially expanded India-Pakistan's geostrategic competition from land to sea<sup>3</sup>. For Pakistan, the US' civil nuclear deal distorted the uniform criteria governing the nuclear export control regime. Pakistan has proposed a criteria-based approach to civil-nuclear trade and the NSG membership. The growing transfer of advanced military technology and dual-use nuclear material to India has created strategic instability in South Asia's volatile region. Therefore, in order to restore the strategic balance, Pakistan has taken a two-pronged approach. Besides further strengthening its ties with China, Pakistan is also expanding its defence relations and increasing cooperation in counterterrorism efforts with Russian Federation. Simultaneously, Pakistan has been working on its nuclear capability and adjusting its nuclear doctrine with a view to maintain its deterrence against India.

Apart from that, India is actively engaged in its efforts for diplomatically isolating Pakistan by projecting it as a state sponsor of terrorism. India's latest military doctrine has made its nuclear policy ambiguous, and its threats of surgical strikes have destabilized the South Asian region. In this context, Pakistan's

foreign policy response has been both pragmatic and balanced. In order to cope with the challenge of diplomatic isolation, Pakistan is intensively working on improving bilateral economic and security ties with regional countries. It has maintained its strong relations with some Gulf countries and pursued a neutral approach in the Saudi-Iran rivalry. Moreover, Pakistan's high-level engagement with Afghanistan, Central Asian republics and other regional countries signifies Pakistan's active diplomacy to ward off Indian efforts aimed at its isolation. In this context, Pakistan has become part of many regional economic and security agreements such as TAPI, CPEC, and SCO, which would promote regional economic integration and harmony of interests among member states.

This paper analyses strategic imbalance created by the US-India strategic partnership in the South Asian region, and Pakistan's foreign policy initiatives to restore the balance in the region.

## **US-India Strategic Partnership**

During the Cold War, US and India could not become allies due to Jawaharlal Nehru's nonalignment policy and preference for strategic autonomy and the US' anti-Communist ideology. Strobe Talbot, the US diplomat, considered "incompatible obsessions"—India's with Pakistan and America's with the Soviet Union—as the main hurdles to US-India cooperation in that era.<sup>4</sup> Resolution of such a "palpable difficulty" in the US-India bilateral relationship was the main agenda of Talbot-Singh dialogues held after the 1998 nuclear tests. The focus of the dialogue, between Strobe Talbot and Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh, expanded from nuclear proliferation issues to involve broad challenges such as nature of the international system, counter-terrorism, climate change and developing strategic cooperation<sup>5</sup>. US President G.W. Bush sought to remove the bottlenecks in the US-India relationship and therefore started extensive diplomatic engagement with the Indian government. Most importantly, he signed the civil-nuclear deal with

India, which is considered the major breakthrough in their bilateral relations.

### **Civil-Nuclear Deal**

US President George Bush and Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh agreed in 2005 to enter into a civil nuclear cooperation initiative. The agreement initiated the process of cooperating with India in civil-nuclear trade and bring it in consonance with the international non-proliferation standards. It was indeed a complex process as it needed amending several US' laws governing nuclear cooperation. Therefore, it took them three years to formally enter into an agreement. As a prerequisite for the civil-nuclear trade, India agreed to separate its civilian and military facilities in 2006. An amendment was made in the US' 1954 Atomic Energy Act (AEA) in 2006. The amended law is known as Henry J. Hyde Act. It exempted India from the requirements of the US AEA and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which ban nuclear trade with a non-NPT member state.

US President could provide an exemption to a country signatory to the proposed agreement. The US and India concluded an agreement in 2007, known as the 123 agreement, which stipulated terms and conditions for the civil-nuclear cooperation between the US and India. On August 1, 2008, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) approved the safeguard agreements and the inspection plan with India. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) approved the Indo-US civil nuclear deal in September 2008. Finally, the US Congress approved the 123 agreement in October 2008.<sup>6</sup>

Critics of the 123 agreement point out that it not only undermined the rationale against nuclear proliferation but also contributed to strategic instability in South Asia.<sup>7</sup> The civil nuclear deal enabled India to receive dual-use nuclear technology, including materials

and equipment that could be used to enrich uranium or reprocess plutonium—materials necessary for making an atom bomb.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Bush and subsequently Obama administration actively worked to get India an NSG membership but the move was blocked by China, which instead demanded that the NSG membership should not be country-specific, but criteria-based.

### **Defence and Security Cooperation Between US and India**

In the rapidly changing geostrategic dynamics in the post-9/11 period, the United States considered India, in the US envoy to India Kenneth Juster's words, as "the net provider of security and stability in South Asia".<sup>9</sup> The agreement signed between President Bush and Indian prime minister Vajpayee, called Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), in January 2004 and the Obama administration's \$10 billion deal with India in 2010 elevated their bilateral strategic cooperation to new heights. President Obama declared it as the "defining partnership of the twenty-first century."<sup>10</sup>

Also, the ten-year agreement of Defense and Trade Technology Initiative (DTTI) in 2012 provided much impetus to India's defence indigenization process. In June 2016, the US Congress passed the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for the FY17, which recognised India as a "Major Defense Partner".<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, India's top suppliers of arms have been Russia and Israel. At present, the US is the second largest defence exporter to India, only after Russia. India's defence imports from the US, nearly \$300 million a decade and a half ago, have reached \$15 billion in the 2008-2017 period.<sup>12</sup> The United States sold 22 Predator Guardian drones in June 2017, making India the first non-NATO partner to acquire this advanced technology.<sup>13</sup> Other advanced defence sales to India included P-8 maritime patrol

aircraft, C-130 and C-17 transport aircraft, M777 howitzers, and Apache and Chinook helicopters.

The export of the highly advanced defence technology has been made after India's signing of the Logistic Security Agreement with some modifications, including rechristening it as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in August 2016. Thus, the modified version of LEMOA stipulated mutual use of bases on a "case-by-case" basis, not permanently, and that the logistical support would not be obligatory on the other party.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, India has also agreed to sign another agreement, namely Communication and Information Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA), which they renamed as Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). This agreement allows the "high-end secure communication network to be installed on platforms being sold to India", as well as, "enabling an interoperable environment for [US-India militaries] to conduct joint operations" using the similar communication network.<sup>15</sup>

However, some challenges remain with respect to the success of these agreements. One, Indian defence establishment is reluctant to give 'access to US personnel for periodic inspection of the communication system', terming it as intrusive. Two, it would be difficult for India to integrate its Russian origin military equipment on the US platforms.<sup>16</sup> Besides, India's possible purchase of \$6 billion missile defence system, S-400 Triumf systems, from Russia may raise some concerns in the US' policy circles as the US imposes sanctions on the future defence acquisitions from Russia.<sup>17</sup>

The recent move by the United States to place Indian defence attaché in its Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) at Bahrain is considered a "path-breaking" development in their bilateral defence cooperation. As such, the naval gamut of the NAVCm, ENT—Red Sea, Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf and the

Arabian Sea—resonates with Indian strategic objectives in the Arabian Sea.<sup>18</sup>

India's naval power is further strengthened by its investments in naval ports of Chabahar in Iran and Dumq in Oman, Assumption Islands in Seychelles, Agalega in Mauritius, and its own Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. The US also possesses naval and military base at Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory. With their bilateral agreement of LEMOA [and COMCASA] in place, the US and India could jointly or reciprocally use each other's naval bases [and share defence and communication network].<sup>19</sup> Australia's investments in naval ports at Cocos and Christmas islands further add value to the maritime defence network of the US and its allies.<sup>20</sup> The inclusion of Japan in the maritime framework of port facilities in the Indo-Pacific Ocean supports the four countries' stance of free and open seas.

The Quadrilateral Group, referred to as Quad, is formed by the US, India, Japan and Australia to conduct naval exercises in the Indo-Pacific Ocean region. In the Malabar Exercises of 2017, the US, India and Japan participated in the maritime exercises. Australia, as part of the Quad, was also invited to participate, but it showed its reluctance to join. According to its officials, it did not seek to provoke China in the prevailing geostrategic environment.<sup>21</sup> Recently, India hosted navies from 16 countries on March 6, 2018, for biennial *Milan*<sup>22</sup> exercises at the Andaman and Nicobar Islands<sup>23</sup> at the juncture of the Bay of Bengal and the Andaman Sea.<sup>24</sup>

India and the United States have also been engaged in coordinating bilateral counter-terrorism efforts. They launched the first ever US-India Counter Terrorism Designation Dialogue in December 2017. It constitutes sharing of information, designations of terrorists, combatting financial crimes and networks, and disrupting and dismantling terrorist camps both regionally and globally<sup>25</sup>.

According to India's 2017 Joint Armed Forces Doctrine, India's shift from Credible Minimum Deterrence (CMD) to Credible Deterrence has inherent ambiguities with regard to changes in its nuclear policy.<sup>26</sup> Indian state officials, including Shiv Shankar Menon, former national security advisor and Manohar Parrikar, the former defence minister, have questioned the operational effectiveness of the No First Use doctrine. They maintain that in a war situation, NFU would be the first casualty.<sup>27</sup> In this context, India's incorporation of 'surgical strikes' as a retaliatory policy instrument has validated Pakistan's suspicion vis-à-vis India's conventional military strikes inside Pakistan's territory. According to Khalid Banuri, Former Director General Arms Control and Disarmament Affairs (ACDA) the changes in Indian nuclear posturing has signified full spectrum of the conflict, including coercive diplomacy, economic strangulation, and diplomatic isolation of Pakistan.<sup>28</sup>

India has made efforts for destabilizing Pakistan through state-sponsored terrorism and through Afghanistan. Pakistan's capture of India's serving navy commander Kulbhushan Jadhav and his confessions testify about India's terrorist and sabotage activities inside Pakistan's Balochistan province and metropolitan cities. Apart from causing security instability, India has also tried to economically isolate Pakistan. India withdrew from participating in the 2016 SAARC Summit in Islamabad<sup>29</sup> as well as influenced some other regional countries, including Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan, to join its boycott of the conference.<sup>30</sup> Beyond that, India has sought to promote the BIMSTEC—Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation as an alternative to the SAARC framework for regional cooperation. It invited all the BIMSTEC members to join the BRICS summit in 2016.<sup>31</sup> In the same spirit, India has used the 2008-Mumbai attacks as a sticking point to portray Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism. India's foreign minister Sushma Swaraj, in her 2018 UN speech criticised Pakistan for the cross-border terrorism,<sup>32</sup> disregarding India's own oppressive policies in Kashmir.

## **Pakistan's Foreign Policy Response**

The foremost concerns of Pakistan with reference to the US-India strategic partnership are as follows. One, growing transfer of arms disturbs balance of power between India and Pakistan. Two, giving India a larger role in Afghanistan increases insecurity of Pakistan. Three, the US overlooks India's human rights violation in Kashmir, which in turn emboldens India's oppressive regime. Four, as a result of India's testing of submarine based nuclear missiles, such as Arihant, Indo-Pak rivalry has shifted from land to sea.

First, the issue of US-India civil-nuclear trade and transfer of advance defence equipment in the region. Pakistan neither possesses the resources nor appears to have an intention to lock its horns in an arms race with India. Pakistan has raised its concerns at the UN General Assembly on various occasions against "growing transfer of conventional armaments especially in volatile regions".<sup>33</sup> In South Asia's volatile environment, one state's excessive military spending has the potential to disturb the delicate strategic balance, causing damage to peace and stability in the region. As regards the US' strategic partnership with India, Pakistan has argued against the double standards in the sale of nuclear fuel and conventional arms in South Asia. Destabilized South Asia would remain a hindrance in the maintenance of peace in the region. Pakistan's foreign secretary Tehmina Janjua conveyed these concerns to the UN General Assembly's Disarmament and International Security Committee in October 2016. She also added that the US' civil-nuclear and dual-use defence technology deals with India only serve US' myopic commercial and strategic interests, ignoring the long-term goal of security and stability.<sup>34</sup>

Pakistan considers the India-specific amendment in NSG regime not only as a discrimination against it but also a distortion of the criteria governing the civil-nuclear trade.<sup>35</sup> Instead, Pakistan has sought the civil-nuclear trade or the NSG membership based on uniform criteria. In the US-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue Joint



Statement in March 2016, the US “acknowledged Pakistan’s ongoing efforts to harmonise its strategic trade controls with those of multilateral export control regimes”.<sup>36</sup> It also noted its appreciation for Pakistan’s active engagement with IAEA through participating in the nuclear security summits as well as hosting IAEA’s training activities in the country.<sup>37</sup>

The US administration, however, demanded certain concessions from Pakistan in exchange for the NSG membership. These concessions constitute Pakistan’s limiting nuclear weapons and delivery system to the necessary levels that deter a nuclear attack from India. Two, ending further development of tactical nuclear weapons; and, three, not developing a missile that can hit targets beyond the Indian territory.<sup>38</sup> Pakistan argues that it considers itself a dependent variable in the nuclear dynamic, while India is the independent variable<sup>39</sup> and its nuclear development is directly proportional to India’s. Moreover, Pakistan’s short-range missile system is aimed at deterring India from conducting border incursion under its Cold Start strategy.

Besides constant negotiations on civil-nuclear trade, Pakistan has a long history of defence relationship with the US. The last phase of their bilateral defence cooperation began in 2001 after the 9/11 incident. Since then, their relationship has progressed intermittently. After Pakistan’s alliance with the US in the war against terror, the United States provided both civilian and military assistance in exchange for Pakistan’s logistical, military and intelligence cooperation.

However, after routing Al-Qaeda and establishing a new government set-up in Afghanistan, the US lost focus on Afghanistan and got involved in Iraq. The US again shifted its attention to countering Chinese threat in Asia and engaged with India and other like-minded states. Meanwhile, the Afghan Taliban exploited America’s inconsistent policies and waged an insurgency in Afghanistan.<sup>40</sup>

In Pakistan also, local militants resorted to nation-wide violence after the 2007 Red Mosque incident. Since then, Pakistan was involved in countering domestic terrorism. Therefore, it could not simultaneously take military action against the Afghan insurgents that targeted the US and Afghan forces in Afghanistan and at the same time fight Pakistani Taliban (TTP), who targeted civilians and military installations. The US did not understand Pakistan's compulsions and stressed on it to deal with the forces inimical to its interests in Afghanistan. Nonetheless, after the successful military operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, Pakistan destroyed and dismantled organized presence of terrorists in the country, including those located in the tribal territory along the Pakistan border with Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> Taliban located in these areas were believed to be conducting across the border strikes in Afghanistan.

Contemporarily, the US administration has supported the incumbent Afghan government's recent peace offers to the Afghan Taliban for a political settlement. Besides, it also noted Pakistan's meaningful role in partnering with the US in facilitating peace efforts in Afghanistan.<sup>42</sup> Yet, the United States continues to level allegations of the presence of terrorists' sanctuaries and suspended military assistance to Pakistan.

### **China-Pakistan Defense and Economic Cooperation**

Since the US had refused to provide Pakistan with advanced defence technology in the past on several occasions, as is evident from its repeated suspension of the sale of F16s, Pakistan turned to China for help. Chinese cooperation in the defence sector of Pakistan is manifest in Pakistan's imports of over 55% of Chinese arms in the 2008-12 period.<sup>43</sup> The imports increased to 70% between 2012 and 2017, following the decline of US defence exports to Pakistan in the same period, according to the recent SIPRI report.<sup>44</sup>

The hallmark of their joint defence cooperation has been the coproduction of JF-17 thunder jetfighter aircraft (aka FC-1 Xiaolong/Fierce Dragon) by Chinese Chengdu Aircraft Industrial Corporation and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex.<sup>45</sup> Some scholars, critical of Pakistan's missile development, claim that China also helped Pakistan produce solid fuel short-ranged Shaheen-I [and medium-ranged Shaheen-II<sup>46</sup>] ballistic missile[s]. The development of these missiles were carried out in National Defense Complex (NDC), a ballistic missile manufacturing facility.<sup>47</sup> Since 2008, it remains a focal point for Pakistan's missile development programs. To its credit is the developing of redesigns of several models, including Hatf-2/Abdali, Hatf-3 Ghaznavi, Hatf-4/Shahen-I, and Hatf-6/Shahen-II missiles, which were first built by SUPARCO and PAEC. The NDC also produced the first land-attack cruise missile, Hatf-7/Babur.<sup>48</sup>

China agreed to sell eight nuclear-capable submarines to Pakistan in 2016, half of which would be co-produced at Karachi Shipyard Engineering Work. Besides, the critics also claim that China has been helping Pakistan in the production of indigenous drones.<sup>49</sup> One of the indigenously built armed drone, Burraq, reportedly struck a Taliban stronghold in Shawwal valley killing three terrorists.<sup>50</sup>

Another feature of Pakistan-China relationship is their joint military exercises. Pakistan-China counter-terrorism operations started in the 1990s in the face of rising threat from Uighur terrorists. Besides, PAF and Chinese PLA have also been engaged in yearly exercises known as Shaheen.<sup>51</sup> One of the important objectives of China-Pakistan counter-terrorism operations has been to protect Chinese workforce and projects being carried out under CPEC.<sup>52</sup>

Until recently, the engagement in economic areas was considered the weakest link in the strong relationship between Pakistan and

China.<sup>53</sup> However, after the inauguration of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that is going to change. The sixty-billion-dollar project aims at infrastructural development, energy generation and developing transport communication systems.<sup>54</sup> Once all the projects under the CPEC are completed, it has the potential to make Pakistan economically integrated with other regional countries. The Early Harvest Projects like power plants, roads construction and transport projects are to be completed in 2018. However, the real challenges come with reference to the development of industries, railway networks, and the long-term financial arrangements between the two countries. Costing of the projects and their repayment arrangements,<sup>55</sup> including the possibility of massive debt-burden on Pakistan, are some of the critical challenges facing the CPEC.

CPEC has attracted the interest of several regional countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Russia and Central Asian republics. Iranian ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honardoost termed it as a project of peace and tranquillity in the region, besides of course regional integration.<sup>56</sup> Hence, he urged other regional countries also to join the project.

### **Pak-Russia Cooperation**

Through most of the Cold War period, Pakistan and Russia remained unfriendly due to divergent security interests in the region. However, changing geostrategic realities led to adjustments in their foreign policies. Growing threat of Islamic State (IS) and issues of terrorism and drug-trafficking in the region have led Russia to expand its political, security and economic ties with regional countries.<sup>57</sup> Pakistan fits well in this new framework as it also shares similar concerns and seeks to expand its defence relationship with Russia. As a result, both the countries have engaged in multilateral frameworks for regional security and stability. Pakistan and Russia are part of multilateral security

cooperation arrangements such as Dushanbe Four, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),<sup>58</sup> and Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS). The seventh session of MCIS was held on 4-5 April 2018. Under security cooperation arrangements. Participating countries shared their experiences in countering militant threats, preventing illicit drug-trafficking, and bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup>

In November 2014, the first time in forty-five years, Russian Defense Minister, Sergei Shoygu, visited Pakistan and signed a defence agreement.<sup>60</sup> Following the signing of the agreement, Pakistan purchased four Mi-35 combat helicopters worth \$153 million in August 2017 and plans further purchases as well. They are also negotiating the sale of Su-35 and Su-37 combat aircraft.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, in October 2015, Pakistan and Russia signed a \$2 billion deal for the construction of North-South (Lahore-Karachi) gas pipeline.<sup>62</sup> Russia has also signalled its support for Pakistan's stance on membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. It is indeed a great leap forward from its previous stance. A Russian diplomat, Pavel Didkovski, in a recent seminar, titled Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Strategic Stability, held in Islamabad in December 2017, appreciated Pakistan's effective nuclear export control regimes and unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing. Furthermore, he expressed his country's support for the criteria-based membership in the NSG for the non-NPT nuclear states.<sup>63</sup>

Another important feature of their growing ties is their joint military exercises in Russia's North Caucasus in September 2016, known as *Druzhbha* (Russian: friendship).<sup>64</sup> Russia was also part of Pakistan's Aman-17 international naval exercises in the Arabian Sea in February 2017.<sup>65</sup> The objective of these exercises is to coordinate training and assistance in countering terrorism in the region. In a recent meeting, the Pak-Russia defence ministers met in Moscow in March 2018 and shared their concerns regarding the Islamic State's growing presence in Afghanistan and reaffirmed

their commitment to continue cooperation against terrorism in the region.<sup>66</sup>

## **Restoring Strategic Balance through Nuclear Deterrence**

Pakistan began its military nuclear program after India conducted a nuclear test in 1974. Pakistan realized that neither could it match India's conventional superiority nor could it depend on external military help in a future crisis. Now, with India becoming a nuclear weapons state, Pakistan should be overpowered. Therefore, developing strategic deterrence became a priority with it to overcome the conventional imbalance with India as well as to provide deterrence against India's nuclear weapon.

The growth of Pakistan's nuclear weapons depends on its production capacity and, more importantly, the growth of India's nuclear arsenal and build-up of its conventional power.<sup>67</sup> To date, Pakistan's most mature nuclear weapon delivery system is air-based. Along with it, Pakistan has also developed land-based and sea-based nuclear weapon system of ballistic and cruise missiles.<sup>68</sup> The launch of submarine-based cruise missile—Babur-III—has completed Pakistan's nuclear triad, and has given it the second strike capability.<sup>69</sup> Pakistan's nuclear policy is embedded in the country's security policy. Salient features of the policy are follows.

## **Pakistan's Nuclear Policy**

- Pakistan's nuclear deterrence is the determinant of strategic stability in South Asia.
- Pakistan's short-range, low-yield nuclear weapons are aimed at offsetting India's conventional military power.
- Pakistan is committed to developing Full Spectrum Deterrence (FSD) in line with its Credible Minimum Deterrence policy. The objective of Full Spectrum

Deterrence is to checkmate both nuclear attacks of India and its military intrusion in Pakistan's territory.

- Pakistan is also committed to Strategic Restraint Regime as well as composite dialogue for resolving all outstanding issues with India.<sup>70</sup>

## **Pakistan's Relationship with its Neighbouring Countries**

Besides maintaining and growing a strategic and economic relationship with major powers, Pakistan has also been engaged in security and economic cooperation with regional countries.

Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan continues to be undermined by allegations of cross-border terrorism and prevalence of mistrust. However, intensive engagement by both the countries bilaterally as well as multilaterally has the potential to produce positive results. Agreements like the APTTA and Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) encompass a broad framework for structural engagement in many areas of mutual concern. These areas include counterterrorism, border management, preventing drug-trafficking, refugees' repatriation, peace and reconciliation and economic development.

The multilateral agreements such as CASA and TAPI can also prove helpful in boosting bilateral economic trade. Additionally, translating cultural links and geographic proximity into economic synergies would also assist in expanding transit facilities and trade<sup>71</sup>. For this, revision of the APTTA—that formerly helped boost the bilateral trade and is in limbo since 2016—is long overdue. Furthermore, Pakistan's digitization and systematic regulation of border crossings will help not only smooth movement of people and goods but also help in reducing illegal trade. Afghanistan's participation in the CPEC and the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA) could play a positive role in improving bilateral ties.

Pakistan became a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in June 2017. The SCO membership and the operationalization of the Gwadar port have enhanced Pakistan's significance for the CARs as the country provides them with natural overland routes and connectivity to the Arabian Sea.<sup>72</sup> For improving economic engagement, there have been frequent reciprocal visits from leaders of Pakistan and Central Asian republics—Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. These states, being land-locked, can use Pakistani ports for their trade with Gulf countries and can help Pakistan meet its energy requirements.

In this context, the Central-Asia-South-Asia (CASA)-1000 is important. It is a \$1.2 billion, 750km long electricity transmission line, which would help Pakistan import electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan through Afghanistan. Total energy transmitted by the project would be 1,300 MW, of which 300MW would go to Afghanistan and 1,000MW would be supplied to Pakistan. Recently, the \$8 billion, 1,840 km TAPI gas pipeline project was also launched on February 23, 2018. Pakistan and India would each receive 1.325 billion cubic feet per day (bcfd) gas and Afghanistan would receive 0.5 bcfd under the project.<sup>73</sup> It is pertinent to note that India does not have an overland trade route to Central Asia and that it costs India twice to send its goods to C. Asia through the Chabahar port.<sup>74</sup>

Pakistan has also maintained security and economic cooperation with other regional countries like Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Shahid Khaqan Abbasi became the first prime minister of Pakistan, in over two decades, to make an official visit to Nepal on March 5, 2018. Though Pakistan has had diplomatic meetings and engagements with Nepal at multilateral forums, the recent visit of Pakistan's PM to Nepal marked a strategic dimension. As Nepal currently possesses the chairmanship of the SAARC, the Pakistani PM urged Sharma Oli, the newly elected prime minister of Nepal, to convene the SAARC summit in Islamabad. In addition, Pakistan also encouraged Nepal to be part of the Chinese BRI and informed him



of the importance of CPEC and its role in regional economic integration.<sup>75</sup>

Pakistan invited Sri Lankan president as the chief guest on its Republic day on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2018. Sri Lankan President Maithripala Sirisena also supported Pakistan's bid to host the SAARC summit. Besides, he also thanked Pakistani PM for Pakistan's support at the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) as a "true friend and a brother" in its turbulent times.<sup>76</sup> A trade exhibition held in Sri Lanka under the rubric of *The Pakistan Single Country Exhibit* in January 2018. It is expected that the exhibition would help boost bilateral trade between the two countries.<sup>77</sup>

Pakistan also shares with the Maldives a sustainable partnership in the economy, tourism, education, climate change, and countering terrorism. Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives were engaged in trilateral military exercises, Eagle Dash-1, in 2016. Pakistan provided training to and shared its experience with the armies of both the countries in counterterrorism operations.<sup>78</sup> Pakistan's army chief, General Bajwa was the first highest foreign dignitary to visit the Maldives<sup>79</sup> after the country's lifting of 45-days-emergency on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018.

### **Pakistan's Relationship with Gulf Countries**

Pakistan's relationship with the Gulf countries forms a strategic as well as the economic basis. Pakistan's efforts to strengthen relations with the Gulf countries also constitute a bulwark against India's efforts for raising its security and economic profile in the Middle East.<sup>80</sup> India's ability to expand its security relations beyond the safety of sea lanes, through which it imports oil from the Gulf, is limited. Its strong relations with Iran and Israel simultaneously have also led to its low-security profile in the Middle East.<sup>81</sup>

Pakistan has balanced its relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran. In the purview of security threats from neighbouring rebel forces to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan deployed its troops to protect the Kingdom's territorial integrity and for the security of the holy places. It has also made it clear, at the same time, that Pakistan's forces would not be available against another Muslim state.<sup>82</sup> Iran's foreign minister Mohammad Javad Zarif acknowledged that just as Iran's relations with India are not against Pakistan; Iran understood that Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia were not against it.<sup>83</sup> Meanwhile, in order to concretize their bilateral relationship, both Iran and Pakistan have also conducted joint counterterrorism exercises and have worked for strengthening border security management.

Added to Pakistan's strategic relationship are its strong economic ties with Gulf countries. According to Pakistan's Economic Survey, of the total nine million overseas employees 54.8 percent work in the Middle East. The remittances they send annually on average since 2011 amount to nearly \$20 billion.<sup>84</sup> Pakistan's major trading partners in the Middle East are UAE and Saudi Arabia. In the FY 2016-17, Pakistan's total imports from the UAE amounted to \$5.84 billion, \$1.95 billion from Saudi Arabia, and \$864 million from Qatar. To these countries, Pakistan exported goods and services worth \$852 million, \$300 million, and \$42.6 million, respectively.<sup>85</sup>

Apart from Arab Gulf countries, Pakistan's trade volume with Iran reached \$1.5 billion in the FY 17, while both the countries have made a commitment to increase it to \$5 billion in FY 21. For this to happen, they will have to work together for "establishing banking channels, holding trade exhibitions, and addressing tariff and non-tariff barriers".<sup>86</sup> On a recent visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Jawad Zarif to Pakistan, both the countries pledged to deepen economic connectivity through benefitting from the complementarities of the Gwadar and Chabahar.<sup>87</sup>

In addition, Pakistan and Iran have also been working to finalise the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which is facing tremendous challenges.

These challenges constituted the United States' sanctions on Iran and the resulting reluctance of Pakistani banks to establish their branches in Iran.<sup>88</sup> However, even after lifting of the US sanctions, Pakistan has not been able to work on the pipeline, due to its financial constraints.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, Pakistan has not objected to the US' strategic partnership with India. What concerns Pakistan the most is that the US is pursuing discriminatory policies in providing India with high-end, dual-use defence technology. The increasing acquisition of military power through such advanced defence weaponry has made India aggressive in its relationship with Pakistan. Thus, exploiting its strategic partnership with the US, India has actively worked to diplomatically isolate Pakistan through both projecting Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism and refusing to engage with Pakistan in regional economic organizations such as the SAARC. Pakistan, on the other hand, has responded in equal measure, to counter India's hostile policies against it. Through the acquisition of advanced conventional weapon systems as well as developing full-spectrum deterrence at the strategic and operational level, Pakistan has successfully counterbalanced India's nuclear threat and conventional superiority. In addition, Pakistan has also made efforts for availing itself the most of its geo-strategic importance in the region by pursuing intensive economic and security engagement. Pakistan's balancing act in the Saudi-Iran rivalry, including strengthening its ties with the Gulf countries, testifies to Pakistan's pragmatic diplomacy. Moreover, its rigorous efforts for stabilizing its relationship with Afghanistan would achieve two ends: one, stability in Afghanistan is in parallel to stability in Pakistan; two, it will help improve trade and transit not only with Afghanistan but also with Central Asian states. Toward these ends, initiation of such economic projects as CASA, TAPI, APAPPS and

CPEC and potential revitalization of APTTA would play a concrete role. Successful execution of these projects, along with Pakistan's continuous high-level engagement with regional countries for economic and security cooperation, would certainly bring about peace, prosperity and stability in the region.

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## **Endnotes**

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