
Steadying the Difficult Poise: Sino-Pak Efforts to Counter the Growing US Role in South Asia



Regional Studies
Vol XXXIV, Issue 1
pp.88-106
© Author(s)
<http://irs.org.pk>
P-ISSN: 0254-7988
E-ISSN: 2959-5459
Date of Acceptance: 4 May 2015

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Introduction

Pak-China bonhomie is no secret in international politics. While it serves Chinese strategic interests in the region, it also tends to counter the oft-hypothesized 'negative' American interference in South Asia. The sub-continent is a unique region in many respects. It is home to two new nuclear powers, Pakistan and India, who have fought three full-scale and two half wars, neighbouring two superpowers, Russia and China. Presence of religious and sectarian extremist tendencies, the burning issue of Kashmir, and continuous antagonistic posturing between India and Pakistan further complicate matters. In such a volatile and conflict-prone region, regional stability is a delicate balancing act. Any skewed behaviour from regional or international players may disturb the tantalizing balance.

This is a dangerous setting, which demands careful behaviour from all concerned. Any untoward event may send the region reeling into the throes of yet another full-scale war with a real danger of going nuclear. Within this environment, the unusual recent growth of camaraderie between India and the US is perturbing. One way to counter the situation is to boost Pak-China relationship. In this regard, this paper attempts to see China-Pakistan strategic partnership vis-à-vis Indo-US long-term cooperation. It also aims to explore whether both these interactions are providing a balancing influence in the region. Also, as an extension, this paper divulges multiple strategies of hard balancing between India and Pakistan which seem to maintain stability in the region.

The context

Considering the intricate dynamics of South Asian politics, where both India and Pakistan are proactively engaged in 'hard balancing' strategies to advance their respective national interests, risk of an armed clash is always imminent. India enjoys superiority over Pakistan in conventional military strength, which is supplemented by its strategic partnership with the US.

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Continuous sales of modern and sophisticated American weapons to India invigorate Indian military power which may adversely affect the already fragile regional balance of power. Consequently, this imbalance in military prowess of the two countries may lead both nuclear rivals to brinkmanship. In this backdrop, Pakistan-China relations appear to be a balancing strategy against Indo-US strategic partnership. As Afridi and Bajoria argue, "Beijing clearly sought to build up Pakistan to keep India off balance."¹ Despite the fact that the US lashed sanctions against Pakistan because of the latter's nuclear pathway, China has continued its military support to Pakistan; an example of their sustained strategic ties. Sino-Pakistan joint collaboration now includes joint military exercises, personnel training, intelligence cooperation, and joint counter-terrorism efforts. Pakistan has also made headway in nuclear development with the help of Chinese counterparts, and in hi-tech procurements from the latter like short-range and medium-range ballistic missiles.² In April 2015, three weeks before Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Islamabad, Pakistan's Prime Minister Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif approved a deal of purchasing eight submarines from China worth US\$5 billion.³ With this deal, it is expected that "Pakistan Navy will gain a competitive advantage in their underwater fighting capability."⁴

China not only supplied weaponry to Pakistan, it has also contributed to enabling Pakistan to develop conventional arms indigenously. Sino-Pakistan joint production of Al-Khalid tank, JF-17 Thunder fighter aircraft, and the development of Hatf, Shaheen, and Ghauri long-range ballistic missiles are a few examples in this regard. They seem to help maintain balance of power and preserve peace and stability in the region. Another milestone in non-conventional security is China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is expected to extend Sino-Pakistan strategic influence beyond South Asia to the Middle East and Central Asia.

Steadying the balance of power in South Asia

Balancing the Indian hegemonic designs is a hard job for Pakistan. Despite reaching nuclear parity with India, Pakistan still lags behind in missile technology and conventional weapons. If missile technology is sine qua non for maintaining minimum credible nuclear deterrence, the conventional weapons are equally crucial for any country, particularly to combat non-state actors. There is an urgent need to modernize Pakistan's conventional warfare capability as the country is fighting a war against terrorism and facing multiple other challenges.

Due to Pakistan's traditional dependence on American weaponry, it could not excel in indigenous arms industry. Although Pakistan established Pakistan Ordnance Factories in early 1950s,⁵ it has not been able to compete with the growing Indian military might. Pakistan seems to have reached a decent level of indigenous arms with the production of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, Mushshak and Super Mushshak trainer aircrafts, and Al-Khalid and Al-Zarrar tanks produced in various locations throughout Pakistan.⁶

The military and economic aid coming from the United States is considered to have been used largely in fight against terrorists and militants.⁷

The US kept Pakistan highly dependent on its arms and even imposed arms embargoes historically. While on the other hand, China being a faithful ally and friendly neighbour, always supported Pakistan to strengthen its security against internal and external threats. Akram Zaki, Pakistan's former Ambassador to China, in an interview to the media about strategic partnership between Pakistan and China stated, "In ideological terms, China wants peace and stability in South Asia, but that is only possible if the imbalance created by the United States' extraordinary support to India is to some extent corrected."⁸ For Zaki, China's strategic philosophy is to make Pakistan self-sufficient in the production of defence equipment as far as possible.

In response to growing modernization of Indian military machinery, Pakistan is also making an effort to upgrade its military. Compared to conventional weapons, Pakistan has put a good deal of effort into the nuclear and missile technology which can offer some credible deterrence against potential threats. China stands as Pakistan's principal arms supplier.⁹ Pakistan's purchases are pocket-sized in comparison to Indian defence procurements though. India views itself as a rising regional player and considers military strength a crucial factor in its quest for regional ascendance. Conversely, Pakistan is vying to catch up with India to deter any threat from it. Pakistan cannot match India's military power man-for-man or gun-for-gun but Pakistan's huge investment in technological weapons and modernization of its armed forces would present an effective challenge to the enemy.¹⁰

India's conventional military superiority over Pakistan largely owes to its hike in defence expenditure over the past three decades. Its defence expenditure is six to seven times larger than that of Pakistan.¹¹ Between 1990 and 2003, Indian ability to combat offensively has outpaced Pakistan remarkably with 3:1 high performance aircraft numerical advantage. Other technological advancements in warfare technology like wide-area communications and reconnaissance are much better than Pakistan's. Asymmetry of economic resources and limited choices to acquire modern technology has slackened conventional modernization of Pakistan's armed forces. This imbalance in conventional weaponry raises strong concerns about the outbreak of another conventional war between the two countries or leading to brinkmanship on the part of India. In view of aggressive Indian policies, there is a possibility of a pre-emptive Indian air campaign against Pakistan as envisaged in the Cold Start Doctrine. In such a scenario, Pakistan's conventional and nuclear power will have to be sufficiently capable of deterring Indian conventional superiority. Since 1960s, India's defence establishment has carved out a policy to deal with Pakistan and China simultaneously by declaring two-front war strategies.¹²

Indo-US strategic defence relations

India's relations with the US have not been great historically, but a recent convergence of their interests has brought them together in a strategic partnership. Indo-US cooperation in the fields of economy and defence has experienced an agile up-thrust in the last 15 years or so. Former US president

Bill Clinton's visit to India in March 2000, proved ground-breaking in cementing mutual ties at a rapid pace. The subsequent Bush administration ameliorated mutual relationship further. It changed US stance towards China, categorizing it as a 'strategic competitor' rather than a 'strategic partner'.¹³ The then US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage visited India in May 2001 to inform his counterparts about President Bush's strategic framework that included missile defence programme and terrorism.¹⁴ India-US strategic cooperation grew further with the signing of the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in January 2002, a non-agreement on which was earlier seen as an impediment in defence cooperation. By signing GSOMIA, India got greater access to dual use technology, which further expanded sale of US arms to it.¹⁵

Building Indian military power

India clinched an arms deal with the United States in April 2002 for acquiring Raytheon System AN/TPQ-37 (V) 3 Fire-finder artillery locating radar systems. Thereafter, a subsequent deal included GE F404-GE-F2J3 engines and advanced avionics for India's indigenous Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) project.¹⁶ Furthermore, negotiations for the sale of P-3 Orion naval reconnaissance planes to India were initiated. For updating and modernizing its Special Forces, India bought a lot of military equipment, and used the Indo-US strategic partnership as a tool to balance China and bring about a global balance of power. Under Bush administration and then under the Obama administration, the US has been seeking a 'sustainable strategic partnership' with India. Although India has evolved strategically cooperative relationship with China, it is still wary of the latter's military modernization and its implications for regional security environs. The most important advancement in Indo-US strategic partnership came with the '10-year Agreement', which further consolidated India-US defence ties. Under this agreement both the countries would extensively engage in joint production and cooperation on missile defence. It would also step up efforts to conduct joint military exercises and expand cooperation in peacekeeping operations to further regional stability. This multifaceted cooperation includes 'The 2006 Indo-US Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation' under which challenges of maritime threats, transnational offences, proliferation of nuclear weapons, environmental protection, and natural calamities will be addressed.¹⁷

US President Barack Obama defined Indo-US strategic partnership as partnership of 21st century and a priority of US Department of Defence.¹⁸ United States has declared India as a natural partner on the basis of shared interests and values. United States is struggling hard to ramp up Indian defence capability and has emerged as a reliable and transparent arms supplier to India, which is evident from deep-rooted security engagement. Since 2002, India has signed more than 20 foreign military sales agreements for procurement of defence articles and services such as C-17 and C-130J aircraft, TPQ-37 radars, Self-Protection Suites (SPS) for VVIP aircraft, specialized tactical equipment,

Harpoon missiles, Sensor-Fused Weapons, and carrier flight and test pilot school training.¹⁹

In a short time India's foreign military procurements have reached a total value of approximately US\$6 billion, and are likely to rise in future.²⁰ C-130Js were delivered to India in February 2011. These aircrafts have already been successfully employed to provide critical humanitarian assistance. Additionally, US Air Force gave training to more than 100 Indian Air Force personnel. After concluding the C-17 pact with the US, India would establish the second largest fleet of C-17s in the world. Indian navy also received updated technological weaponry to furnish its warfare skills. It has received an upswing by adding the amphibious transport dock, also called a landing platform/dock (LPD), INS Jalashwa, which was transferred in 2007. Educational exchange programme of military staff between the two countries has also expanded dramatically. India has over fifty defence laboratories. The network is being further enlarged by implementing an agreement signed in 2011, which would extend areas of joint research and acquisition of technology. Mutual cooperation further includes power and energy, micro-aerial vehicles, and human development. Indo-US defence cooperation over the last five years is much more robust and rigorous in comparison with bilateral defence cooperation between other countries. US government is committed to ramp up this defence cooperation with India by increasing people-to-people contacts, military-to-military ties, and implementing shared agreements on security, counter-terrorism, and arms production.²¹

US and Indian navies participated in five-nation joint exercises held in September 2007 in the Bay of Bengal with the navies of Australia, Japan, and Singapore. The exercises involved 25 ships, more than 20,000 personnel, and 150 aircraft. The primary objective of the exercises was to train in antisubmarine warfare, counter-piracy, and disaster response. The exercises evoked strong criticism from Beijing because it considered the multilateral venture as aimed at China.²² Indian and US militaries have conducted 56 cooperative events in fiscal year 2011. India is conducting more military exercises with the US than any other country. All the aforementioned events and the nature of joint ventures have led Washington to expect India to play a significant role regionally and globally. Former US secretary of state Hillary Clinton stated in October 2011, "United States is making a strategic bet on India's future—that India's greater role on the world stage will enhance peace and security."²³ Former defence secretary Leon Panetta's characterization of India as a 'linchpin' for 'rebalancing' towards Asia Pacific was part of a new defence strategy of United States.²⁴ Indian Air Force has shown considerable superiority over Pakistan's Air Force, but for India there is another challenge and that is from China's air-power. Indian military strategists are planning to increase Indian Air Force's expeditionary capability so that it can extend power from the Red Sea to the Strait of Malacca. Indian Air Force is preparing to achieve the capacity to combat Pakistan and China simultaneously. To accomplish this challenge, it is trying to replace old platforms such as Mig-21, Mig-23, and Mig-27.²⁵

India's large procurements of weapons from the US during last decade have had a considerable impact on modernization of Indian military. India's arms shopping spree worth US\$4.8 billion includes trainers, amphibious ships, maritime-patrol aircraft, and transport aircraft (ten huge C-17s). Another purchase of six C-130s costs another billion dollars. India's purchase of 126 modern jet fighters from France in a mega arms deal worth US\$20 billion even annoyed the White House. India is also about to buy 22 AH-64D Apache Longbow attack helicopters, more than 1,300 Hellfire missiles, and advanced radar systems. It would provide India a battle-tested system which is effectively used by the US, UK, and Israeli forces.²⁶

India is also developing a ballistic missile defence system to safeguard against any nuclear attack through ballistic missiles. India has developed long-range ballistic missiles that can now reach Beijing. The following table shows the missiles India developed with technical support from the US, Russia, and other great powers.

Table 1**India's ballistic missile arsenal²⁷**

System	Status	Range	Propellant
Prithvi-2	Operational	250 km	Liquid
Prithvi-3	Development	350 km	Solid
Dhanush	Testing	350 km	Liquid
Sagarika/K-15 (SLBM)	Testing	700 km	Solid
Agni-I	Operational	700 km	Solid
Agni-II	Operational	2,000 km	Solid
Agni-IV	Tested	4,000 km	Solid
Agni-V	Testing	5,000+km	Solid
Agni-VI	Development	8,000-10,000 km	Solid
K-4	Testing	3,000 km	Solid
K-5 (SLBM)	Rumored Development	5,000 km	Solid

Source: <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/missiles> (Edited for this paper)

More recently, Indian missile defence system has received a boost in the wake of latest technological and technical assistance from other countries including the US. 'Agni-V' missile, tested last year, can reach deep into China and is said to be a crucial achievement for Indian missile programme.²⁸ Much of India's nuclear strategy focuses on improving delivery vehicles. India is aiming to complete a 'nuclear triad'—a system that would allow nuclear weapons to be delivered from air, land, and sea. India's nuclear-powered submarine named 'Arihant' was tested in 2009, but there are no formal reports of making it operational. Indian fighter jets are another vehicle for launching nuclear weapons, but it is not yet clear whether Jaguar IS/IB, Mirage 200-H, and Sukhoi-30 MKI models are capable of carrying nuclear payloads. Indian security expert Bharat Karnad said, "the tests had impact on Pakistan, a nuclear power that has fought three wars with India. New Delhi's shorter-range ballistic missiles already cover Pakistani territory."²⁹

Pak-US relations

International relations are based on both and long- and short-term interests of respective countries. These interests keep changing, hence the international relations. In this connection, Pak-US relations have always experienced a topsy-turvy ride. From the roller coaster of 'non-NATO allies' to

a rather sedate strategic partnership—with intermittent currents of strategic partners, partner of security alliance, forerunners of war against terrorism, and episodes of mutual distrust—there has been a long history of mutual benefits and love-hate paradigm between the two countries. Two episodes after 9/11 marked the lowest ebb of relations between the two countries. One was the Salala incident in 2011 when the US-led NATO attack on two Pakistani check posts along Pak-Afghan border resulted in the death of 25 Pakistani soldiers. The other was in May 2011 when US helicopters carried out an operation in a Pakistani town Abbottabad—without clear permission from Pakistani authorities—killing Osama Bin Laden and his aides.

Pakistan experienced at least three periods of mutually beneficial relations between the two countries: 1960s, the Ayub era; 1980s, the Russian invasion of Afghanistan; and 2000s, as a frontline partner in the war against terrorism. In all these years Pakistan received assistance from the US in various forms. This assistance came in the form of varied financial support, supply of military hardware, cooperation in military training and law enforcement, counter-insurgency support with the creation of counterinsurgency fund, aid in development sector in terms of infrastructure, trade and energy projects, international humanitarian assistance, and support in getting funding from international donor agencies like IMF, Asian Development Bank and the World Bank.³⁰

Despite the foregoing, Pak-US relations are “fluid at present, but running a clearly negative course: still based on several national interests shared by both countries.”³¹ The common perception in Pakistan has never been favourable about the US, especially after the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Many Pakistanis believed that the US left them in the lurch once their interests had been fulfilled by defeating the Russians in their backyard. The events before and after 9/11—the Kargil crisis of 1999, heavy restrictions after Pakistan went nuclear, incidents like Salala, Raymond Davis, and the killing of Bin Laden in Pakistani territory without its prior knowledge etc.—did not help either.

There has been an avid understanding in the US policymaking circles of “troubled and even deteriorated U.S.-Pakistani relations, as well as the need to balance Pakistan’s importance to U.S. national security interests with U.S. domestic budgetary pressures.”³² The negative perception in Pakistan towards the US is very high and strongly unfavourable as well. Many Pakistanis do not put the US in friends’ circle and harbour very negative emotions towards it.³³ Similarly, an alarmingly low number of US citizens, only 2 per cent, considered Pakistan an ‘ally’ in a survey conducted soon after the killing of Osama Bin Laden.³⁴

There is no doubt, however, that the US provided significant amount of aid to Pakistan, which fluctuated widely since the latter’s independence though. The post-2001 US assistance programme for Pakistan has seen notable accomplishments, not least in the area of humanitarian relief related to the country’s devastating 2005 earthquake and 2010 floods. US aid has measurably improved Pakistan’s energy, health, and education sectors, bolstered its

infrastructure, and facilitated better governance and gender equity.³⁵ In the security realm, US assistance has provided Pakistan's military and law enforcement agencies with equipment and training that has improved their capacity to combat the country's indigenous terrorism threat. It has also contributed to successes realized by the Pakistani military in offensive military operations undertaken in tribal areas, and enabled Pakistan to better support US-led military operations in Afghanistan. Pakistani law enforcement agencies have received equipment and training from the US.

Pak-China defence cooperation

Technology is part and parcel of military strategy. To strengthen military capability against potential threat is indispensable. In this age of nuclear weapons, conventional arms have lost their significance but it never means they are irrelevant or obsolete. Conventional weapons are still important to respond to intra-state or inter-state security threats. Conventional weapons are becoming far more lethal and sophisticated. Military analysts speak of military-technical revolution that is ushering in weapons with dramatically enhanced capabilities. New military technologies are gradually narrowing down the difference between conventional weapons and weapons of mass destruction. A number of new conventional weapons are of dual use. They can carry chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. Modern conventional weapons with more devastative capability and accuracy can annihilate on a large scale.³⁶

Pakistan has been dependent on weapons from the US and European countries historically, but after experiencing arms embargoes during war times with India, Pakistan realized that it should achieve self-sufficiency or at least reduce dependence on unreliable partners. China stepped in to fill that gap for Pakistan. Not only this, China enabled Pakistan to produce weapons indigenously. Some of the productions are joint ventures between China and Pakistan.

Al-Khalid main battle tank

After realizing that internal balancing is more reliable than external balancing, Pakistan also established conventional military hardware indigenously. Al-Khalid, also known as main battle tank-2000 or MBT-2000, refers to the Pak-China version of a modern main battle tank, which was jointly developed by the two countries in 1990s. Al-Khalid was handed over to Pakistan Army in 2001 and is part of Pakistan's main battle tank fleet. China deals with customers of MBT-2000 internationally. Many regional and international clients show keen interest in purchase of these tanks. Al-Khalid was developed on the lines of Chinese MBT Norinco Type-90-II, but is produced in Pakistan. Ukraine is another partner in the production of Al-Khalid tank.³⁷ Its engine, Ukrainian 6TDF, is almost the same engine used in T-80/84 tanks. It is more sophisticated than other modern tanks with a maximum weight of 46 tons. Pakistan's defence production has risen to a level where it can export indigenously produced weapons. The defence production is likely to double as Pakistan plans to earn foreign exchange for national development. Pakistan is primarily focusing on

main battle tanks, Al-Khalid and Al-Zarrar, Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) Al-Saad, Al-Muhafiz security vehicle, the Baktar Shikan anti-Tank guided missiles, Super Mushshak K-8 trainer aircraft, missile boats, small arms, and a wide range of artillery. Pakistan's defence exports can be dramatically increased by exporting Al-Khalid and JF-17 fighter aircraft, developed jointly by China and Pakistan. Pakistan's defence products may not be as advanced but are more cost-effective and affordable for client states. Al-Khalid is said to be amongst the best tanks in the world. It features night-time attack capability and system to automatically track enemy tanks. Pakistani military experts compare Al-Khalid's qualities with Russian T-90 and German Leopard tanks which are considered to be the best internationally.³⁸ The crew capacity of Al-Khalid is of three and is fitted with thermal night vision devices. Its combat range is about 400 km and maximum speed is 70 km/hr. Pakistan and China reached an agreement in 1990 to jointly design and manufacture the tank. China helped in upgrading Al-Khalid as a result of several years' research. Early prototypes were manufactured in China but after completion of Pakistan's manufacturing plant in Taxila in 1992, Pakistan started producing domestically. Al-Khalid was later upgraded taking into account Pakistan's high temperatures and terrain. Pakistan-China jointly spent millions of dollars on the indigenous production of Al-Khalid tanks. Pakistan only had 20 Al-Khalid tanks in 2002. According to one source, Pakistan has planned to make some 600 tanks by the time production ends.³⁹ According to another one, an estimated 600 vehicles are already in service.⁴⁰ Knowing the efficiency of Al-Khalid tank, Malaysian and UAE delegations to the International Exhibition of Armaments 2002 expressed great interest in their purchase. Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia also showed great interest in Al-Khalid tanks.⁴¹ Syed Muhammad Ali, the first certified military tank designer of Pakistan told the press that Pakistan's Al-Khalid tank was considered among most competent main battle tanks in the world. Pakistan has also successfully manufactured Al-Khalid II with the collaboration of Ukraine and China. The upgraded tank has received a new transmission and revised electronic turret control. It is stated that Al-Khalid can be an equalizer to India's main battle tanks Arjun and T-90.

Joint production of JF-17 Thunder fighter jets

To upgrade Pakistan Air Force, Pakistan requested the US to provide it with F-16 fighter jets in the 1980s. At the time the United States suspected Pakistan of developing nuclear weapons and was hesitant to sell F-16s. Despite reservations about Pakistan's nuclear programme, however, the US government initially agreed to sell 111 F-16 aircraft to Pakistan. This decision was made due to Pakistan's proactive role in combating Soviet troops in Afghanistan. Pakistan was expecting the delivery of the fleet, but the US government's decision to deliver F-16s to Pakistan resulted in strong opposition from the US Congress. 'Pressler Amendment' was passed in 1985 to stop all kinds of military and economic assistance to Pakistan. The aid did not stop in 1985, however, as the US president kept certifying to the Congress on Pakistan's nuclear programme. The 'Pressler Amendment' became functional in October 1990 though;

consequently all types of military deals with Pakistan were terminated and Pakistan could not acquire F-16 from the United States. This was a serious blow to Pakistan Air Force. After Pressler Amendment, Clinton Administration got the 'Brown Amendment' passed by the US Congress in 1996 to ease some pressures on Pakistan caused by brutal sanctions under the former. According to Brown Amendment, Pakistan was allowed delivery of limited military assistance for the purposes of counter-terrorism, peacekeeping, and anti-narcotics operations. Additionally, President Clinton agreed to repay Pakistan's US\$463.7 million which were paid for the F-16s.⁴²

Being a close ally and signatory of Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) pacts, Pakistan attached high expectations to its relations with the United States which were shattered later on. The United States only gave military aid which was for countering Soviet threat during Cold War, fighting terrorism, peacekeeping, and narcotic control. The US never gave military aid to strengthen Pakistan's defence against Indian aggression. Once again, China stepped up to bolster Pakistan's defence and initiated production of fighter jets JF-17 Thunder. Pakistan and China started manufacturing JF-17 Thunder which was seen as a substitute for expensive and hard to get F-16 fighter jets.

The first JF-17 Thunder was successfully manufactured in May 2003. Its first flight was made just three months later in August 2003. JF-17 Thunder was handed over to Pakistan Air Force as a 'Big Present' for Pakistan Day on 23 March 2007. The aircraft was inducted in Pakistan Air Force by replacing the aircraft of No. 26 Squadron.⁴³ JF-17 Thunder is a multi-fighter aircraft which can be operationalized in all weathers and day or night time. It's the outcome of successful joint venture between 'Pakistan Aeronautical Complex' Kamra and 'Chengdu Aircraft Industry Corporation' of China. It is not less than F-16 in any capacity and has excellent precision in air-to-air and air-to-surface combat capabilities. It has been integrated with latest technology to match with F-16 fighter jets. JF-17 Thunder features state-of-the art avionics, optimally integrated sub-systems, computerized flight controls, and capability to employ modern weapons. This provides it superiority over other jets of the same category. The aircraft can be called an asset for any air force due to its effective firepower, agility, and survivability. Pakistan Aeronautical Complex enjoys the exclusive rights of 58 per cent of JF-17 airframe co-production work. Infrastructure development is underway at a rapid pace at the complex. Potential customers for such an excellent fighter jet are desirous of buying the aircraft which is much cheaper than F-16. Among notable potential customers are Bangladesh, Islamic Republic of Iran, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Myanmar, Oman, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Syria, and the UAE.⁴⁴ China has enabled Pakistan to the level that now it can produce fighter jets and even export them to earn foreign exchange. China had been vying to make Pakistan independent in its defensive capability. Like Russia and America did with India, China gave Pakistan military aid, and also enabled it to produce weapons at home rather than purchasing them from other major powers. Its glaring example is China's laudable help in production of Al-Khalid tanks and JF-17 Thunder fighter jets.

Pakistan military, despite advance payment of US\$463.7 million, could not get F-16 fighter jets from the US and faced long economic and military sanctions. This discriminating approach of the United States towards Pakistan strengthened Sino-Pakistan military partnership and advancement in production of arms indigenously.

Chinese help in missile technology

Pakistan achieved nuclear parity with India in May 1998 and then started an arms race to develop nuclear-capable missiles. If a country possesses nuclear weapons, it is a deterrent against other nuclear and non-nuclear adversaries, but if it does not have effective delivery systems to launch the nuclear weapon, the deterrence is not considered credible. India and Pakistan engaged in an arms race of nuclear-capable missiles after 1998. India had already acquired sufficient technology from Russia, Israel, and the US to develop weapons indigenously. India took considerable military and technical assistance from the United States, Russia, and other European countries which gave it superiority in developing and deploying nuclear-capable missiles. Despite being a faithful ally in the Cold War and then the war against terrorism, Pakistan did not receive any military technology from the United States which could make Pakistan self-sufficient in defence production. The United States always supported Israel out of the way and then India. The only trustworthy ally of Pakistan turned out to be China, which made Pakistan self-sufficient against Indian threat. India developed multiple missiles to bolster its defence against Pakistan and China. Considering Indian superiority in conventional weapons, and then in missile technology, Pakistan sought technical assistance from friendly countries to develop its missile technology. China transferred M-11 missiles and other missile-related components to Pakistan. Pakistan's medium range ballistic missiles (MRBMs) were developed with extensive Chinese support.⁴⁵ Following is the table of Pakistan's ballistic missile arsenal.

Table 2

Pakistan's Ballistic Missiles Arsenal⁴⁶

System	Status	Range	Propellant
Hatf-1	Operational	80-100 km	Solid
Hatf-2 (Abdali)	Tested/Development	190 km	Solid
Hatf-3 (Ghaznavi)	Operational	300 km	Solid
Shaheen-1 (Hatf-4)	Operational	750 km	Solid
Ghauri-1 (Hatf-5)	Operational	1,300 km	Liquid
Ghauri-2 (Hatf-5a)	Tested/Development	2,300 km	Liquid
Shaheen-2 (Hatf-6)	Tested/Development	2,500 km	Solid
Ghauri-3	Development	3,000 km	Liquid

Source: <http://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/missiles> (edited for this paper).

Sino-Pakistan joint effort is aimed at maintaining peace and stability in the region, which can only be ensured when there is a balance of power between India and Pakistan.

The Gwadar Port project

21st century has brought more serious challenges of security, which are not limited to traditional dimensions alone. These challenges include environmental concerns, terrorism, mass migration, epidemics and lethal diseases (HIV, Ebola etc.), and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These threats in security studies literature are called non-traditional security threats.⁴⁷ Conventional security is more about practicing sovereignty and maintaining territorial integrity. The threat under notion of conventional security comes mostly from external military aggression. In contrast, non-conventional security is more concerned with achieving the country's development and economic prosperity. The threat under notion of non-traditional security is mostly non-military. There is another comprehensive concept of security which is an amalgamation of both traditional and non-traditional.⁴⁸ China-Pakistan strategic partnership covers both dimensions of security. Pakistan's non-traditional security relationship follows the same pattern like traditional security. China is supporting Pakistan to achieve sustainable level of both types of security. China's huge investment in Pakistan's strategic areas gives an up-thrust to Pakistan's development and economy. Gwadar is a hub of Chinese investment in the underdeveloped Balochistan province of Pakistan. Gwadar Port is located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf and right outside the 'Strait of Hormuz', which gives it a strategic and economic advantage. It is of great significance as the key shipping routes used by the mainline vessels in the region with connections to Africa, Asia, and Europe are in close proximity. This makes the port commercially and strategically significant.⁴⁹

This economically and strategically significant port was constructed with massive support of China. Pakistan's former ambassador to China Masood Khan highlighted the significance of Gwadar Port for China's economic and strategic interests. He stated, "When this network is fully operational from Gwadar to Khunjerab, Urumqi, Beijing and Shanghai, it will give alternative choices to China for its trade with the Middle East and Europe. This alternative route will be much shorter than the one passing through the Malacca Straits." He said that Pakistan and China had a common objective of bringing prosperity in South Asian region. He mentioned that Pakistan and China were cooperating in various sectors including energy, telecommunications, agriculture, and infrastructure.⁵⁰

India raises objections over Chinese involvement in Gwadar Port construction and Chinese economic and strategic interests in Gwadar deep sea port. Indian analysts are worried that China is involved in Gwadar project not for economic but military purposes. Sino-Pakistan defence cooperation is perceived by India as China's maritime encirclement of India. According to a US Department of Defence report, China's involvement in Gwadar Port is part of its 'Strings of Pearl strategy'.⁵¹ China does not see encirclement of India as a strategic goal. China considers Gwadar Port a strategic asset for Pakistan.⁵² China's extensive efforts to make use of this economic and strategic route is for exporting Chinese goods and resources to West Asia. Secondly, the port can provide an easy access to the routes of Red Sea, Arabian Sea, and the Persian

Gulf. China and Pakistan are jointly developing Gwadar project and “China’s activities at Gwadar Port are linked with China’s construction of Qinghai-Tibet railway and expansion of Karakoram Highway.”⁵³ Pakistan’s favourable geography provides an easy route for Chinese products to Middle East. To strengthen strategic and economic linkage between China and the Middle East, Pakistan provides China with safe passage through Pakistan. Gwadar has acquired greater significance after China became the largest oil importer in the world.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which has been finalized between Pakistan and China after Chinese President Xi Jinping’s visit to Pakistan in April 2015 and is likely to bring US\$46 billion investment in Pakistan. It is going to be a game-changer for Pakistan’s political and economic stature in the region. Indian government has disapproved of this investment in Pakistan and has termed it against Indian interests. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stated that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi ‘very strongly’ raised concerns regarding China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) during his recent visit to Beijing, and termed the project ‘unacceptable’.⁵⁴

India and Pakistan have become members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in July 2015. This platform provides a diplomatic forum for both the nuclear rivals to resolve their disputes through dialogue.⁵⁵ China and Russia are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and have great stakes in the region. They may also facilitate peace process between India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes through dialogue. But there is a need for a realization on India’s part that it should stop exercising hegemony in the region, which invokes Pakistan to balance Indian might. The nuclear balance of power and the notion of credible minimum deterrence is keeping both regional powers at par. Balance of power is a stabilizing factor in the subcontinent and must be preserved.

Conclusion

India and Pakistan have a history of limited and full scale wars. They went to full-fledged wars in 1965 and 1971; had small or half wars in 1948 and 1999; and are having continuous exchanges of fire in conflict zones like Siachen, Line of Control (LoC), and the Working Boundary. Many critics attribute these wars to, inter alia, the persistent and chronic imbalance between them.

Balance of power on the nuclear front, after the 1998 nuclear tests by both the countries, arguably brought them to the negotiating table. The Lahore visit of former Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in 1999, the Agra *yatra* of Pakistan’s former president Pervez Musharraf in 2001, and their subsequent developments can be cited as examples in this connection. Concurrently, for many experts, despite the see-saw relations between the two countries, war no more remains an option. This has become particularly important after Pakistan carried out its nuclear tests. Resultantly, it has been argued that after the Kargil crisis of 1999 both Pakistan and India learnt that

they did not want to escalate the smaller fronts into a full-fledged war because of the existing balance of power.

Hard balancing between both the countries is still the dominating trend. The use of soft power is still not the priority for both as it remains lurking as an undercurrent under the spiking tides of increased expenditures on military hardware, unabated test-firing of various types of conventional and nuclear missiles, and persistent muscular posturing along the LoC, working boundary and international border between the two countries.

Regionally speaking, China is an important stakeholder in South Asian affairs because of its recent rise in international economic, strategic, and political spheres. Any prolonged armed clash between India and Pakistan has a potential of turning nuclear and China may not be excluded because of Indo-Chinese strategic rivalry. On the other hand, China has planned huge long-term investments through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), development projects in Afghanistan, and improved trade relations with India. The development of western and south-western Chinese regions appears to be a priority for China. New industrial zones in these regions are underway, which require their products to be exported to the outside world through South Asia, preferably the CPEC.

In the same vein, China has a lot of stakes in Afghanistan. Therefore, the former is all set to be the largest development partner in the latter, bypassing India and Pakistan. It is also contributing to peace in terms of facilitating a peace process—in collaboration with Pakistan, and the US—between Afghan Taliban and Afghan government. If peace prevails in South Asia, it would provide a conducive environment for China's rise. Maintenance of peace would actually favour India and Pakistan more than China. Traditionally, hard balancing has proved more costly for both India and Pakistan in economic as well as political terms. However, the next best option is soft balancing which would maintain the balance and would not undermine economic growth, democratic institutions, and prosperity of the region enabling both the countries to vouch for more result-oriented negotiations in the long run.

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