

**RESEARCH PAPER****Post 9/11 Pakistan China Counter Terrorism Engagements:
Challenges and Prospects****¹Dr. Muhammad Ahmad* and ²Dr. Rehana Saeed Hashmi**

1. Lecturer, Department of Political Science, Govt. Graduate College Township Lahore , Punjab, Pakistan
2. Professor, Department of political science, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** AhmadSheikhlahore@gmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The 9/11 attacks exposed unique elements that left an enormous effect on Pakistan. Despite having an excellent track record historically, Sino-Pak ties overwhelmingly dominated by counter terrorism phenomenon. Pakistan was under attack from the virulent and deadly wave of terrorism. Similarly, China's Western border, which separates the turbulent region from the province of Xinjiang, was a major source of concern for the country. Furthermore, Beijing was concerned about the safety of its assets across a number of nations, particularly in Pakistan. Due to these consequences, Pakistan and China started working together to combat terrorism. The current study aims to evaluate Pakistan China counter terrorism partnership includes with challenges and future prospects. The study adopted a qualitative methodology and used primary and secondary sources of information. The findings reveal that Pak-China efficient counter terrorism engagements have helped to reduce the terrorist activities, and still hold potential to secure geopolitical, economic and security benefits.

KEYWORDS: China, Pakistan, Counter Terrorism, Geo-Economics, Non-State Actors**Introduction**

The 9/11 attacks revealed novel factors that significantly influenced Pakistan's diplomatic decisions. Despite having a stellar historical record, Sino-Pak relations became tough (Yaseen , et. al 2017; Ali, 2017). The continuous war on terror left an evident mark on Pakistan's way of interacting with the world. The government of General Pervaiz Musharraf instantly assessed options and alternatives for Pakistan. As a result, the planned and carried out course of action had a substantial tilt in favor of America (Abbas, 2015). Nevertheless, governments that followed General Pervaiz Musharraf (Asif Ali Zardari and Nawaz Sharif) explored fresh directions in the shadow of their diplomatic decisions, culminating in a strong inclination towards China. Beyond any stretch of the imagination, Pakistan was under attack from the vicious and deadly wave of terrorism. On the other side, China had significant worries about its Western border, which connects the troubled region to the province of Xinjiang. Furthermore, China was concerned about the security of its investments in several regions, including Pakistan in particular (Rahman, 2011). These consequences led to an increase in Pakistan and China's collaboration in the fight against terrorism. Even though they both backed America for their separate reasons, Pakistan and China increased their political interaction in order to maintain their mutual trust and mutually beneficial relationships.

Theoretical Framework

Numerous theories have been proposed over time to explain and analyze political theater situations emerging at the local, national, and worldwide levels. These theories aid in understanding the fundamental causes of the occurrences and their potential

effects (Lovett, 2006). The rational choice theory has a prominent position in this regard. In order to comprehend any scenario or occurrence, this theory combines many elements that highlight the cost-benefit analysis (Coleman & Fararo, 1992). The explanation for the actors' decisions is also given by this theory. The decision-making process of actors is influenced by a variety of circumstances. The context in which decisions are made significantly explains the actor's thought processes when coming to a particular conclusion. All these aspects are supported by a rational model that enables an understanding of how sensible a decision is and how much it helps the nation (Boudon, 2009).

The poliheuristic method involves two stages. The first is referred to as the cognitive stage and is when the rational actor evaluates various possibilities or solutions in light of the current situation. The second is the cost-benefit stage when the actor chooses the course of action that will provide the greatest gain or the least amount of loss (Herrnstein, 1990). Allison contends that while addressing the selection of the best course of action, the complexity of an administrative or bureaucratic system cannot be overlooked. When making decisions, there is fierce rivalry inside the systems. Depending on their interests, several levels or the persons involved put forth certain possibilities. There are typically contentious arguments over this proposition of draft. The powerful inner group ultimately succeeds in reaching the corresponding desirable target (Sato, 2013). Because of this, using a rational framework to reach an answer is a difficult and perplexing procedure. To better understand how decisions are made, Herbert Spencer developed the cybernetic model. He claims that the process of making decisions is complicated psychologically and cognitively. It suggests that the process of choosing decisions does not depend just on rational choices and possibilities. Instead, the players act while adopting various cognitive and psychological make-ups. Their judgments are influenced by a variety of cognitive elements that permeate their mental processes. In these circumstances, the actor frequently makes choices based on an acceptable alternative rather than the best or most advantageous course of action (Oppenheimer, 2008). This scenario reflects from the proposal's unusual presentation. The influence of expression and presentation alters the rational actor's state of mind. These cognitive and psychological difficulties might completely alter the final result.

On the other hand, the rational choice strategy or model takes into account all the factors that could affect an actor's or leader's decision. When making a conclusion, it considers all the conceivable psychological and discrete elements. In order to maximize productivity for the nation, the actor is offered a variety of alternatives to pick from (Feddersen, 2004). To get the best alternative or decision, the actor-level and organizational-level analyses consider all the relevant elements. Because it has a wide range of possibilities, the model is best suited for the present study.

In the current research, the post-9/11 counterterrorism cooperation between Pakistan and China is analyzed. According to the literature, Pakistan initially sided with the United States in the fight against terrorism (Kamran, 2008). Later, however, considering its broader national interests and the US's over-domination, Pakistan turned its allegiance to China (Nawab, et. al 2021; Shahbaz, 2017). Rational choice theory may be used to analyze this change in Pakistan's diplomatic decision. Moreover, it also explains the strengthening of engagement from Chinese side. Rational choice theory offers all the analytic and tools needed to assess the underlying causes of Pakistan's growing anti-terrorism cooperation with China.

Though all the leaders proclaim to be rational and best suited for the country in their eras, yet the detailed analysis is most appropriate with the application of rational choice theory. Pakistan was forced to ally with the US in 2001 as a result of its strategic location and the demands of the global actors. Therefore, given the circumstances and alternatives at the moment, General Musharraf made the best judgment (Musharraf,

2006). The turn toward China under preceding governments, however, took place under quite different conditions. They encountered very different problems and difficulties. The rational choice theory is the most effective way to understand and analyze this growing Sino-Pak cooperation. Moreover, the theory offers an explanation for how the counter-terrorism engagements benefits not only Pakistan but also China. It also takes into account the ground realities on both sides.

Pakistan-China: Cooperation in Counter-terrorism

In accordance with the changing situations on a worldwide scale, the relationship between Pakistan and China had to overcome additional obstacles in the form of terrorism. Pakistan was obliged by its geostrategic location to accede to American demands and embrace the Western coalition in the battle against terrorism in its tribal region and Afghanistan (Nawaz, 2019). Additionally, there were about 20 separatist groups in China's Western area, which shared borders with unstable South Asia and Central Asia (Yasee, et. al 2023; Basit, 2018). Beijing worked with Islamabad in the war on terror to defend this region. In several parts of Pakistan, the Chinese workers were at grave risk. More than twenty terrorist incidents targeting Chinese employees and expats in Pakistan occurred between 2004 and 2017 (Mushtaq, 2019). Under these conditions, it was difficult for the leadership of both Countries to handle the complexities. Regardless of whether it was a democratic or a totalitarian government, Pakistan's leadership steadfastly backed China in this regard.

General Musharraf visited Beijing in December 2001 following the 9/11 attacks. Regarding Pakistan's cooperation with US, he trusted China. In response to the surge in terrorism, China praised Pakistan's commitment and measures (Pakistan-China Research Institute, 2015). China endorsed the UNSC's resolutions to fight terrorism throughout the world. In the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the Indian Parliament, Beijing also contributed positively to reducing tensions between India and Pakistan (Ali, 2017). Additionally, Pakistan turned over Uighur terrorists in 2004 to put an end to the separatist struggle in the Xinjiang area (Kataria & Riaz, 2014). General Musharraf ordered military action in response to the abduction of Chinese nationals in Islamabad by the Lal Masjid administration (Ahmed, 2013). After terrorist attacks in the Xinjiang province in July 2009, China urged Pakistan's democratic government to take action. After the CPEC was signed, Pak-China cooperation increased. Following 9/11, Pakistan made decisions about their national interests that were reflected in the succession of actions taken to combat terrorism. In accordance with the tenets of rational choice theory governments adopt the most advantageous or least expensive option for their people (Sato, 2013). The engagement between Pakistan and China in the war against terrorism showed a degree of trust and shared interests for both nations.

Mutual arrangements to curb terrorism

Pakistan became a significant non-NATO ally in 2004. The government in Pakistan launched a thorough counter-terrorism move as a result of internal and external complexity (Riedel, 2011). The situation at hand had to be taken into account by General Musharraf's administration while deciding the future direction of Pakistan. Notwithstanding a tendency to side with the US, ties between Pakistan and China improved in the domains of economy, defense, social sector and politics. In addition to this cooperation, a clear strategy for countering terrorism, which was a problem for both countries, was urgently needed. Leaders regularly assess the environment to adjust their talents and resources for the best outcomes. In order to have a stronger system to reduce the threat of terrorism, General Musharraf signed the militant extradition accords with China in 2003 and 2007 (Pakistan China Research Institute, 2015). The first extradition agreement between China and Pakistan was struck in 2003 during General Musharraf's visit to China in the post-9/11 world. The second agreement in this regard was reached

in 2007. The exchange of convicts between governments was one of the elements of the treaties, which improved trial and conviction procedures. Drug and substance smuggling was addressed as one of the pact's core principles (Rahman, 2009). In keeping with this, Pakistan handed over Uighurs to China in 2004. Following the signing of the 2007 treaty, the democratic government of Zardari collaborated in 2009 and 2010 in response to the revolt in the Xinjiang area, which was of great concern to China (Mushtaq, 2019). Additionally, in 2004 and 2006, China and Pakistan collaborated on anti-terrorism drills. In order to enhance their capabilities, some 200 Chinese military troops took part in the first exercise and 400 in the second (Price, 2011). These mutual agreements demonstrated the logical choices made by both nations in the particular situation.

Backing Pakistan on the global stage: An all-weather alliance

China-Pakistan relations have matured through thick and thin for mutual growth. Both countries have steadfastly supported one another from the start of diplomatic ties on May 21, 1951 (Dwivedi, 2013). The rise of terrorism in the years following 9/11 presented them with new problems. To combat this threat, Pakistan's governments implemented counterterrorism strategies. Beijing has also consistently defended Islamabad against Indian claims of cross-border terrorism. After the 2001 attack on the Indian Parliament, Pakistan was accused of aiding the terrorist organizations that carried out those terrorist acts. Beijing was vital in helping to calm the situation. China joined the European Union in 2002 to defuse tensions between the two nations (Fazal, Irfan, & Khan, 2022). According to the tenets of rational choice theory, the interests of the countries are prioritized in the realist world. Due to logical judgments based on sensible options, the leadership of Pakistan and China consistently supported one another. Leaders choose the course of action that best serves both their personal and collective interests (DeRouen, 2010). Similar to this, China supported Zardari's democratic government diplomatically during the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Masud Azhar was declared a terrorist by India under UN Security Council Resolution 1267 (Mir, 2011). China, however, rejected this Indian proposal in favor of Pakistan and China. Additionally, in 2009, China's ambassador to India, Zhang Yan, pushed both Pakistan and India to resume negotiations to resolve the difficulties separating the two countries. These incidents offer evidence of China's support for Pakistan in the face of Indian accusations of transnational terrorism (Yaseen, et. al. 2016).

China factor in Cooperation by domestic players

Since 2008, Pakistan's democratic government has changed its approach in favor of China. Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari both wanted to improve ties with China. In particular, the Sharif administration sought to maximize the benefits of long-term Chinese economic ambitions in the region. In order to achieve this goal, President Xi Jinping's One Belt One Road strategy reaffirmed the need for political stability and peace for anticipated outcomes in the future (Kaura, 2018). The Chinese leadership had been alarmed by the ongoing wave of terrorism, especially given the weakness of their forces in Pakistan. In this regard, Beijing supported amicably resolving differences with terrorist groups in order to increase political stability. China then improved its collaboration with Pakistan's Islamic political groups.

The leader of Jamat-e-Islami, Qazi Hussain Ahmad, traveled to China in February 2009. He said that Beijing intended to play a part in the peacefully deal of separatist and terrorist forces. His political group also urged to spread Islam across China. They negotiated a memorandum of understanding with Beijing for this reason. In addition, Qazi Hussain endorsed the One China policy and their positions on Taiwan and Tibet (Mushtaq, 2019). Leaders decide after weighing their alternatives and the current situation (Breuning, 2007). This enhanced engagement with Islamic parties was

achieved due to democratic leadership in Pakistan. It also demonstrated the logic of Pakistan's and China's growing anti-terrorism engagement.

Challenges to Pak-China Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

In order to establish a stronger basis for a long-term strategic and anti-terrorism alliance, the two nations are concentrating on enhancing their economic and a commercial links and fostering connectivity. The anti-terrorism cooperation faces numerous challenges which are discussed in this section (Khan, 2012).

Attacks on Chinese labor force in Pakistan

Both Pakistan and China have extensive cooperation in many different sectors. Chinese laborers and experts have been working in Pakistan to ensure the accomplishment of these projects. Due to the increase in terrorism, these expatriates' lives have been in danger. More than twenty terrorist incidents targeted Chinese nationals between 2004 and 2017 (Basit, 2018). Nevertheless, despite these dangers, the number of Chinese workers rose to 10,000 by 2010 (Kataria & Riaz, 2014). Leaders are rational people who choose the best course of action for their nations and citizens (DeRouen, 2010). In order to carry out projects connected to long-term strategic goals of Pak-China mutual interests, Chinese leadership showed complete trust in Pakistan. Three Chinese engineers and laborers were killed in 2004. In Peshawar, Pakistan, three Chinese engineers were assassinated in 2007. Seven Chinese citizens were abducted in July 2007 by Lal Masjid's forerunners. Ten foreigners died in 2013, including two climbers from China. Ten employees who were operating close to Gwadar were killed in 2017 (Varma, 2019). These terrorist assaults raised doubts among the senior echelons of Pakistan and China. The Chinese government, nevertheless, remained steadfast and dedicated to the projects being built in Pakistan.

As previously indicated, the security of the Chinese workforce and citizens in Pakistan was a major priority for the Chinese authorities. The Chinese officials were shocked by the sharp spike in attacks against their employees. The democratic government of Nawaz Sharif announced the creation of a Special Protection Division for the protection of CPEC, consisting of 15,000 troops, 9,000 army personnel, and 6,000 paramilitaries. The commissioning of a special Task Force of 88 warships, unmanned aerial vehicles, assault helicopters, and surveillance technology to safeguard Gwadar was announced by the Pakistani Navy in December 2016 (Conrad, 2017). A provincial special security unit with 4200 members has also been established by the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government to protect Chinese employees, Chinese interests, and the CPEC (Gul, Jaleel, & Asgher, 2020). The democratic government of Sharif's rational decision-making process went beyond what was necessary to protect the Chinese in Pakistan. Both countries agreed to deepen their ties since the United States was uncomfortable with their cooperation and they wanted to prevent any disturbance brought on by regional dynamics.

China's apprehensions regarding the presence of terrorist elements in Pakistan

China has been concerned about the security situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan since President Xi Jinping announced the BRI (Gannon, 2016). Pakistan's engagement with China was necessary for the political stability required for the implementation of large-scale projects. The counterterrorism policy with regard to Daesh in Pakistan became more important in order to achieve these objectives. According to their convictions and available possibilities, leaders make logical judgments (Sato, 2013). With regard to taking strong action against the existence of Daesh in Pakistan, the military apparatus and political administration had to appease their Chinese counterparts. In Baluchistan, this terrorist group's presence was discovered in

2014 (Mehsud & Golovnina, 2014). A Royal Institute of the United Kingdom research indicated that Pakistan has between 2000 and 3000 Daesh members. Since entering Pakistan, Daesh is believed to have killed some 800 civilians, according to the security services (Bhojani, 2017). China had significant concerns since it was undertaking massive initiatives. Pakistan improved the security of Chinese engineers and laborers to safeguard them from the threat posed by Daesh.

Balochi Ethno Nationalism and Unrest in Pakistan

It has long been a sad story for Pakistan that Balochi politicians are worried about projects being started in the province of Baluchistan. Baluchistan's ethno-nationalists have expressed worries about the province's natural resources being used since Baluchistan was included in Pakistan's federation. In the wake of CPEC, Baluchistan's nationalist leaders also did not make an exception (Khetran & Saeed, 2017). Beginning in 2004, Chinese civilians and employees started being killed. Ten Chinese laborers were murdered close to Gwadar Port in May 2017. These assaults were carried out by the Baloch Liberation Front in an effort to obstruct the growth of the CPEC and Gwadar Port (Shah, 2017).

Pakistan employed all available resources to create a national agreement on these projects, keeping in mind the value of CPEC and the Pak-China relationship. Zardari highlighted measures to reestablish mutual trust with the Balochi leadership, including steps as the movement for Baluchistan's rights. However, the insurrection continued in this specific province. Some observers think that in order to prevent all kinds of hassles and disruptions in big projects, China should speak directly to all the stake holders of Balochistan. On the other hand, China has maintained to follow precedent and refrain from meddling in other countries' internal affairs.

Non-state actors and unrest in China

Beijing has also been home to various extremist and separatist movements. In China, there are reportedly more than 55 such movements. The majority of these organizations are active in China's western territory. In the province of Xinjiang, some 20 separatist movements are causing problems for China (Kumar, 2019). One of the revolutions in the Western region of China is the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). The local Uighurs, who are made up of individuals from Pakistan's tribal belt, Central Asia, and Afghanistan, are ruthlessly attempting to establish the independent state of East Turkestan in Zijiang. The province of Xinjiang in China borders Central and South Asia by a length of 5000 kilometers (Golley, 2007). The Chinese leadership has repeatedly pushed Pakistan and Afghanistan to intervene against the Uighur separatist groups that were supporting the East Turkestan movement. Former Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain informed his Chinese counterpart in 2015 that Pakistan would be free of any such elements. Beijing started development initiatives in Western regions as a domestic strategy to combat the problems of poverty and malpractices to prevent influencing the impoverished classes towards such movements. In order to put an end to this movement in Western China, Pakistan and China have been working together.

Future Prospects to Pak China Counter Terrorism Cooperation

In order to combat terrorism together, Islamabad and Beijing's collaboration must be strengthened. Due to both nations' shared consensus on matters pertaining to the stability and security, the cooperation has the potential to be more efficient and fruitful. Additionally, the two nations share a similar outlook on the problem of terrorism. They worry about the rise of foreign influence in the region as a result of terrorism, which they see as an imminent threat to regional stability, security, and peace. The prospects of this cooperation are discussed below (Khan, 2012).

Economic prospects

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is thought to be one of China's largest initiatives to date. While the project offers innumerable economic benefits to both countries, it is believed that the climate of instability in Pakistan, which is plagued with terrorism and domestic conflict, poses severe risks to the development of the corridor. The development of the CPEC and its initiatives is projected to be hampered by the increase of terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hence, China and Pakistan increased their cooperation to counter this menace. There are two patterns that assure the success of this cooperation. First, in Pakistan, terrorism has been declining; second, Beijing is taking an even greater part in boosting local economies.

The secluded heartland of terrorism is extremely drawn to the Chinese guarantees of trade routes, energy centers, jobs, and connection; as a result, the pitch of anti-Americanism and jihad against the West will likely decline significantly. Moreover, China's relationship with Afghanistan is evolving. The Chinese are assured security for the CPEC endeavors by the Pakistan government. Hence, the largest obstacle to the CPEC appears to be under control as a result of China's increased involvement with Afghanistan and a decline in terrorism in Pakistan (Hassan, 2020).

In order to fully use Afghanistan's capacity as a regional connectivity center, China, Pakistan, and Afghanistan have decided to create tighter economic connections by expanding the Beijing-supported CPEC to Afghanistan (Hussain, 2021). Rational choice theory advocates that in order to maximize productivity for the nation, the actor is offered a variety of alternatives to pick from. To get the best alternative or decision, the actor-level and organizational-level analyses consider all the relevant elements. One can say that including Afghanistan in the CPEC is one such rational move that will help control terrorism along with offering economic benefits to all the parties.

The 5th Foreign Ministers' dialogue between three countries featured Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, his Chinese equivalent Qin Gang, and Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, who was appointed by the Taliban. In the meeting, the Foreign Ministers stressed the importance of preventing every entity from using their homelands for terrorism against any country. Beijing argued that by working together, the three nations could model neighborly cooperation on pressing issues and advance regional peace and development "Pakistan-China agree to extend CPEC to Afghanistan" (The Economic Times, 2023). All the parties emphasized the significance of ongoing projects, such as TAPI, CASA-1000, Trans-Afghan Railways, etc., to improve the connectivity of the region and assure economic development and success.

Security Prospects

In Pakistan, the majority of the regions through which the route of the CPEC runs are volatile due to the existence of separatists and extremists elements. Including some KPK regions, FATA, and some vulnerable Baluchistan districts where there is a potential that both domestic and foreign actors might creating unrest. There is a constant risk to the sustainability of CPEC initiative's in the provinces of KPK, Baluchistan, and FATA, as well as to the loss of Chinese and Pakistani employees, engineers, and laborers cost to increase the Chinese concerns. According to the reports, China has asked Islamabad for help with security for the project and the workers. Pakistan organized a task force of military personnel while keeping in mind the significance of this project to address its monetary and energy demands. Additionally, Uyghur Muslims are also found along the portion of the route that runs through the Chinese region of Xinjiang. Uyghurs and the Chinese government have had tense ties for a long time. Due to this, economic activity

runs the danger of becoming unstable and being violently attacked. Hence, antiterrorism cooperation is extremely important (Yaseen et. al. 2018; Gul, 2023).

Moreover, since the security of the region is directly related to a peaceful Afghanistan, Pakistan and China are trying to take Afghanistan on board. Since it is closely related to internal security in China's westernmost region of Xinjiang, 'security' continues to be the most urgent concern of China's relationship with the Taliban. Foreign Minister Wang secured assurances from the Taliban at the 2021 Tianjin summit that they would without a doubt never permit any forces to do something damaging to Beijing's interests in Afghanistan. These were the same assurances that the Taliban had previously given to Beijing in the 1990s. Security remained a top priority for bilateral discussions between the Chinese foreign ministry and its Taliban counterparts ever since the Taliban took control (Zhou, Su, & Yuan, 2022). With respect to Afghanistan, China still has rudimentary counterterrorism capabilities of its own. In 2020, America delisted the ETIM as a terrorist group, and in recent years, its international counterterrorism operations have been far less indiscriminate. Thus, it is now mostly up to the Taliban to provide for the Chinese security demands (Sun, 2020). In fact, China's widespread non-interference policy, which was underlined by Wang Yi on his visit to Afghanistan in May 2022 when he said that China will never meddle in Afghanistan's domestic matters means any security activity on Afghan land would be severely restricted (Zhou, Su, & Yuan, 2022). However, China is also concerned about violent and terrorist groups using Afghanistan as their headquarters for setting up or disseminating propaganda, which could spread to other nations in Central and South Asia where the Chinese presence is far more significant in terms of financial investment and the number of Chinese workers. Such worries grew further as a result of recent assaults in Pakistan on Chinese nationals (Delaney, 2022).

The fact that Uighur groups are currently engaging in less propaganda and campaigning than they were in past years may be a sign of the Taliban's attempts to contain the group. Nevertheless, China's strategy is still relevant as long as the Taliban believes that there will be real present and future advantages in terms of economics, humanitarianism, and diplomacy. It also depends on the Taliban's capacity to keep strong control over a sufficient portion of the nation and influence the different non-Taliban extremist factions to uphold the promises it has made to China (Tiezzi, 2021).

Beijing nevertheless enjoys more clout in Afghanistan due to its alliances with other nations in the area notably, its long-maintained close bond with Pakistan's intelligence and security services (Zhou, Su, & Yuan, 2022). Although the relationship between the two countries has soured over border delineation disputes and the Taliban's harboring of the Tehrik-I-Taliban Pakistani terrorist organization, the Pakistani government has long backed the Afghan Taliban (Mir, 2022). The rational choice strategy or model takes into account all the factors that could affect an actor's or leader's decision. When making a conclusion, it considers all the conceivable psychological and discrete elements. Chinese authorities have indicated that they would want to include Afghanistan in CPEC in meetings with Pakistani and Afghan officials (ANP, 2022). CPEC is facing a number of challenges, including security concerns like assaults on Chinese firms and citizens and delayed funding inflows for scheduled projects. Risks to the economy and security would be far more prevalent in Afghanistan. Although China has long pushed for Afghanistan's economic growth and inclusion in larger regional trade, investment, and transportation networks, the increased interconnectedness and movement of products and people may bring security difficulties that can only be removed by the Taliban's cooperation (Zhou, Su, & Yuan, 2022).

Geo-political Prospects

The CPEC may have significant economic benefits, but most people believe that its geopolitical aspects are also worth discussing. Dr. Jeremy Garlick, a specialist in Chinese issues, concurs with this viewpoint. When seen from the perspective of geopolitics, it is clear that Pakistan and China's participation in the Indian Ocean through the CPEC serves a variety of geopolitical goals for both governments. Pakistan has been a prominent proponent of the CPEC due to the significant strategic and economic advantages the project would bring to Pakistan. The emergence of Pakistan as a significant regional character in the IOR will be one of the main geopolitical outcomes of the project (Gill, 2019).

Due to its geographic location and the recently constructed Gwadar port, Pakistan can act as a trade and energy corridor for the Gulf area as well as for Central Asian republics. Pakistan has grown in importance as a link between Central Asia and South Asia as well as for the surrounding regions since oil from the Middle East and Africa can now be delivered through sea, road, and rail connections to China and other places. Additionally, Pakistan provides a link to China, Iran, and Russia for Afghanistan and the CARs, both of which are landlocked. For European nations, Pakistan has emerged as the most suitable path for supplying energy to Beijing as well as obtaining energy supplies from Moscow. Pakistan offers a natural route between SCO states to connect the center of Eurasia with the Arabian Sea and South Asia. All this provides Pakistan with strategic leverage. The explanation for the emerging alliances is also given by rational choice theory.

However, Pakistan has faced several obstacles in the past and most recently, which have stopped it from being recognized as a viable transit route for the provision of energy. These include, but are not limited to, the complicated security situation in Afghanistan, growing terrorism, the tense ties between regional actors, and the attempts by regional and global powers like the United States to exert pressure on the Asian countries. With the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the eradication of terrorism, Pakistan can attain a key status in the global arena (Rizvi, Khan, & Elahi, 2022).

Additionally, China and Russia are clearly dominant forces in contemporary international affairs. Numerous factors contribute to this, including but not limited to the deterioration of US-China and US-Russian ties, the constant shifting of geopolitics, and the emergence of these two nations as economic and military superpowers giving other nations an opportunity to consider them for future alliances. Beijing might get natural resources from Russia, allowing China to join the global economy (Lukin, 2015). In the new century, Pakistan has been taking an assertive and practical approach to its international affairs, particularly in the wake of 9/11 and its participation in the fight against terrorism. It has succeeded in converting its difficulties into opportunities and has elevated itself to the forefront of states participating in the global arena. It worked hard to strengthen its ties with all of its neighbors, including Afghanistan and China. All the significant barriers are being removed with regard to Pakistan's relations with Russia and Central Asia reflecting the bilateral cooperation and indicates the healing process. With China, Pakistan is actively engaging in economic collaboration, which had been absent from Pak-Russia substantial bilateral relations (Muzaffar, & Khan, 2016).

The Second Informal Meeting on Afghanistan with the Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Russia, China, and Iran took place in Samarkand, Republic of Uzbekistan, on April 13, 2023. The foreign ministers reaffirmed their support for the "Afghan-led, Afghan-owned" concept and emphasized their utmost regard for Afghanistan's autonomy, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. They also emphasized that all countries have an interest in Afghanistan remaining secure and peaceful so that it can serve as a platform for global cooperation rather than a theater for strategic competition. This clearly implies that China's continuous anti-terrorism cooperation is not only crucial for

long-lasting peace and prosperity but also places Pakistan as a key player in world politics. (AP News, 2023)

Conclusion

The tenacity of 9/11 attacks marked the overarching nature of terrorism at global realm. Likewise, the Sino-Pak ties experienced the new paradigm by launching counter-terrorism drive to curb this menace. Both the States faced challenges of terrorist attacks in their respective territories. Pakistan being a frontline Ally had to bear the grunt of a series of attacks. Whereas, Beijing had around 20 separatist movements in its Xinjiang region. In purview of these challenges, both the states showed commitment to counter these terrorist attacks through collaboration at all spheres. In order to study the bilateral counter-terrorism engagements, the researcher applied the rational choice theory, which helped to unearth the mutual efforts by Pakistan and China. In this respect, both the dictatorial and democratic governments of Pakistan followed an inclusive policy. Subsequently, China remained persistent to support Pakistan on all fronts to ensure tranquillity for China and Pakistan. As regards the counter-terrorism measures, both the States conducted joint military exercises, enhanced political dialogue and strategic support to eradicate the terrorist elements. In the presence of frightening atmosphere, the inception and execution of CPEC was an uphill task for both the States. CPEC as a flagship project, induced more harmonious engagement on part of both the governments. The terrorists inflicted around 20 attacks on CPEC labour force from 2004 to 2017. Pakistan and China had their respective gains from this flagship project. Pakistan had regional goals, whereas, China had global ambitions. As a result, the potential success of the project mounted on the effectiveness of bilateral counter-terrorism engagements between the two States.

References

- Abbas, H. (2005). *Pakistan's drift into extremism: Allah, the army, and America's war on terror*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Ahmed, I. (2013). *Pakistan—The Garrison State Origins, Evolution, Consequences (1947–2011)*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Ali, G. (2017). *China-Pakistan Relations: A Historical Analysis*. United Kingdom: Oxford University press.
- ANP. (2022, July 19). Pakistan, China mull extending CPEC to Afghanistan. *The Economic Times*.
- Basit, S. H. (2018): Terrorizing the CPEC: Managing Transnational Militancy in China-Pakistan Relations, *The Pacific Review*, 32(4), 694-724.
- Bhojani, F. (2017, May 5). ISIS is on the Decline in the Middle East, but its Influence in Pakistan is Rising. *The Washington Post*.
- Boudon, R. (2009). Rational Choice Theory. *Social theory*, 179.
- Breuning, M. (2007). *Foreign Policy Analysis: A Comparative Introduction*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US.
- Coleman, J. S., & Fararo, T. J. (1992). *Rational choice theory*. Nueva York: Sage.
- Conrad, P. B. (2017). China's Access to Gwadar Port: Strategic Implications and Options for India. Maritime Affairs. *Maritime Affairs: Journal of the National Maritime Foundation of India*, 73(1), 55-62.
- De Rouen, Karl. (2010). *Understanding foreign policy decision making*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Delaney, R. (2022, May 12). China faces an increase in extremist threats in central Asia, US panel is told. *SCMP*.
- Dwivedi, S. S. (2013). Exploring Strategies and Implications of an Opportunistic Alliance: a case study of Pakistan and China. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 21(3), 306-327.
- Fazal, M. S., Irfan, A., & Khan, A. W. (2022). India's Hybrid Warfare Strategy towards Pakistan in the Backdrop of Social Media (2018-2022). *Annals of Human and Social Sciences*, 3(2), 849-864.
- Feddersen, T. J. (2004). Rational Choice Theory and the Paradox of not Voting. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 18(1), 99-112.
- Gannon, K. (2016, September 30). One of Pakistan's most vicious militant groups has dramatically stepped up its attacks. *Business Insider*
- Gill, D. M. (2019). The geopolitics of the China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) and its security implications for India. *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, 17(3), 337-353.
- Golley, J. (2007). *The dynamics of Chinese regional development: Market nature, state nurture*. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Gul, S. (2023). An Appraisal Of Sino-Pak Strategic And Economic Partnership In New Security Paradigm: Prospects & Challenges. *Pakistan Journal of International Affairs*, 6(2), 525-565.
- Gul, S., Jaleel, S., & Asgher, M. F. (2020). SWOT Analysis of Gwadar and Chabahar Port. *Global Social Sciences Review*, 1, 651-659.
- Hassan, K. (2020). CPEC: A win-win for China and Pakistan. *Human Affairs*, 30(2), 212-223.
- Herrnstein, R. J. (1990). Rational Choice Theory: Necessary but not Sufficient. *American Psychologist*, 45(3), 356
- Hussain, M. (2021). CPEC and Geo-Security Behind Geo-Economics: China's Master Stroke to Counter Terrorism and Energy Security Dilemma. *East Asia*, 38(4), 313-332.
- Kamran, T. (2008). *Democracy and governance in Pakistan*. Lahore: South Asia Partnership.
- Kataria, J. R. and Riaz, A. (2014). Pakistan-China Social and Economic Relations. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 29(2), 395-410.
- Kaura, V. (2018). China's South Asia Policy Under Xi Jinping: India's Strategic Concerns, *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 12 (2), 8-29.
- Khan, R. A. (2012). Pakistan and China. *Strategic Studies*, 32 (1), 70-78.
- Khetran, M. S. B., & Saeed, M. A. (2017). The CPEC and China-Pakistan relations: a case study on Balochistan. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 3(03), 447-461.
- Kumar, S. (2019). China's South Asia policy in the 'new era'. *India Quarterly*, 75(2), 137-154.
- Lovett, F. (2006). Rational Choice Theory and Explanation. *Rationality and Society*, 18(2), 237- 272.
- Lukin, A. (2015). *Russia, China and the Emerging Greater Eurasia*. International Relations and Asia's Northern Tier. Washington, DC: Cardiff University.
- Mehsud, S., & Golovnina, M. (2014, September 14). Pakistani Taliban declare allegiance to Islamic State and global jihad. *Reuters*. Retrieved from Pakistani Taliban declare allegiance to Islamic State and global jihad, Reuters.
- Mir, A. (2011, September 2). More power to Pakistan's jihadis. *Asia Times*.
- Mir, A. (2022, May 4). *Pakistan's Twin Taliban Problem*. United States Institute of Peace.
- Musharraf, P. (2006), *In the Line of Fire*, New York, United States: Free Press.
- Mushtaq, F. (2019). Prospects for Pak-China Relations. *Global Political Review*, 4(4), 49-58.
- Muzaffar, M. & Khan, I (2016). China-Russia Relations after the Cold War *Orient Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 1 (II), 151-169

- Nawaz, S. (2019). *The battle for Pakistan: The bitter US friendship and a tough neighbourhood*. London: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers
- Nawab, M. W., Yaseen, Z., & Muzaffar, M. (2021). South Asia and the US Global Counterterrorism Policy: Strategies, Challenges and Implications, *Journal of Indian Studies* 7(2), 313– 324
- Oppenheimer, J. A. (2008). Rational Choice Theory. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Political Theory*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pakistan, China agree to extend CPEC to Afghanistan; stress on combating terrorism. (2023, May 9). *The Economic Times*.
- Pakistan-China Research Institute. (2015). *Handbook of Pak-China Relations*. Islamabad, Pakistan: Dost Publications.
- Price, D. G. (2011). China Pakistan Relations. *ECRAN*. Brief No 1.
- Rahman, S. U., & Shurong, Z. (2017). Analysis of Chinese economic and national security interests in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under the framework of One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative. *Arts and Social Sciences Journal*, 8(4), 1-7.
- Riedel, B. (2011). Terrorist intelligence capabilities: Lessons from the battlefield. *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 12(1), 26-33.
- Rizvi, A., Khan, A. R., & Elahi, M. M. (2022). Pak-China-Russo Relations and the Platform of SCO: Changing Foreign Policy and Strategic Options for Pakistan. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 6(3), 673- 682.
- Russia, China FM attend high-level conference on Afghanistan | AP News. (2023, April 13). *The Associated Press*.
- Sato, Y. (2013). *Rational choice theory*. Sociopedia
- Shah, S. A. (2017, May 13). 10 laborers killed in Gwadar as unidentified assailants open fire at construction site. *Dawn*
- Shahzad, N. (2017). Opportunities And Challenges Of The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Cpec): A Game Changer In South Asain Countries And Impact Of Cpec On Pakistani Economy. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 7(5), 860-879.
- Sun, Y. (2020, April 8). *China's Strategic Assessment of Afghanistan*. War on the Rocks.
- Tiezzi, S. (2021, August 17). The Taliban: China's deal with the devil in Afghanistan. *The Diplomat*.
- Verma, R. (2019): China's new security concept: India, terrorism, China's. *The Pacific Review*. 33(6). 991-1021.
- Xinhua, (2022, September 24). Land corridor via rail connects Afghanistan to China as 1st freight arrives, *Global Times*.
- Yaseen, Z., Muzaffar, M., & Shahbaz, K. (2023). Defensive Strategies of Central Asian Republics: From Bipolarity to Multipolarity, *Asian journal of International Peace and Security*, 7(1), 143-156

- Yaseen, Z., & Muzaffar, M. (2018). Extremism in Pakistan: Issues and Challenges, *Journal of Politics and International Studies*, 4 (1), 31-42
- Yaseen, Z., Afridi, M. K. & Muzaffar, M. (2017). Pakistan and Chinas Strategic Ties: Challenges and Opportunities in Trade Perspective. *Global Regional Review*, 2 (II),16-30
- Yaseen, Z., Jathol, I., & Muzaffar, M. (2016). Pakistan and India Relations: A Political Analysis of Conflicts and Regional Security in South Asia, *Global Political Review*, 1 (I), 1-09
- Zhou, J., Su, F., & Yuan, J. (2022). *Treading Lightly: China's Footprint in a Taliban-led Afghanistan*. SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security.