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PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

Trends and Challenges

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INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE
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रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

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PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: TRENDS AND CHALLENGES

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's foreign policy, like that of any other country, is determined by its geography and to a considerable extent, by its domestic politics. Anti-Indianism and an urge to establish a pliable government in Afghanistan have been constant features of Pakistan's foreign policy since its creation. It was to acquire strategic parity with India that Pakistan entered into alliances with external great powers, like the United States (US) first and China later. The endeavours to establish pliable governments in Afghanistan came in the way of friendly relations with its Western neighbour, which itself was always wary of Pakistan's intentions and refused to recognise the Durand Line as the border between the two countries.

Pakistan's domestic politics was characterised by the interference of Islamist parties that wanted to determine the shape of Pakistan's Constitution in accordance with the dictates of Islam. While the successive Pakistani regimes, both civilian and military, accommodated these views in shaping the political system, a time came when the Pakistan Government thought it useful to harness the religious extremist groups in pursuit of their foreign policy objectives. That is when such groups were given the stewardship of jihad against Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan in 1979.

In the foreign policy architecture of Pakistan, the sustained antipathy towards India, the support of external powers like the US and China and interference in the affairs of Afghanistan to acquire "strategic depth" became regular features. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989, Pakistan diverted the trained Islamist jihadis to Kashmir to intensify anti-India insurgency, under the security of the newly acquired nuclear weapons capability by 1987. Simultaneously, Pakistan supported the Taliban

rule in Afghanistan, which facilitated the massive terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda on America's heartland on September 11, 2001. This was the origin of the "war on terror" unleashed by America against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan perceiving it to be the epicentre of terrorism. The US coerced Pakistan into joining the war on terror in Afghanistan. While this war on terrorism is continuing till date, the US has remained completely dissatisfied with the sincerity of Pakistan's role and has often accused Pakistan of being duplicitous in its promises.

Although China has been cultivating Pakistan as a strategic ally to countervail India since the 1960s, the rise of China in the twenty-first century and the emergence of Xi Jinping as an ambitious leader concretised China's vision to give special importance to Pakistan in its designs to expand its influence. The most glaring example of this is China's announcement of the US\$ 62 billion China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, with Gwadar as its terminal point. Meanwhile, as if Pakistan supported insurgency in Kashmir was not enough, Pakistan-supported militant groups like Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) and Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) attacked high-value Indian targets like the Kashmir Legislative Assembly in October 2001; the Indian Parliament in December 2001; Mumbai commercial centres in November 2008; and later, security targets like the Pathankot Air Force base in January 2016, the army camp in Uri in September 2016, and the convoy of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Pulwama in February 2019.

It is against the background of such tumultuous developments that this paper tries to discern recent trends in Pakistan's foreign policy, specifically with reference to the most critical areas of Pakistan's concerns, like the attitude of the US, the indulgence of China, the unpredictabilities with Afghanistan, the deadlock with India and the revived interest of Russia in dealing with Pakistan. The attempt will be to examine the extent to which these trends are durable and beneficial to Pakistan and whether its strategy is likely to keep Pakistan in a state of confused and rudderless existence, constantly ill at ease with itself.

The paper looks at the likely impact of reduced economic and security-related American aid to Pakistan. It focuses on the possible fallout of Pakistan's overdependence on China. It discusses the peace process in Afghanistan which involves the participation of external powers like the

US, China and Russia, and how it is likely to serve the interests of Pakistan. It examines the continuing tension with India, which is accusing Pakistan of being directly responsible for heightened insurgency in Kashmir, and its impact on Pakistan. It also explores whether Pakistan's improved relations with Russia will expand its strategic options and give it a greater sense of security or land it in the arena of competition among major powers.

ALIENATION OF THE US

More than a decade-and-a half after having been coerced into joining the US-led war on terrorism and having received the attendant benefits flowing from its major non-NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) ally status, Pakistan has managed to completely alienate the US. The actions of Pakistan's political and military leadership, which are guided by the country's strategic objectives, have made the US question Pakistan's intentions towards countering terrorist groups, particularly the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network. The most obvious manifestation of this was US President Trump's address to the nation on August 21, 2017 where he earmarked plans for engaging with Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. He took a strong stand emphasising the need for Pakistan to do more to eliminate terrorism emanating from within the country if it valued its "partnership" with the US.¹ The underlying threat was not lost on Pakistan's strategic community. The possibility of unilateral action which could be taken by the US on Pakistani soil was enhanced after the removal of certain restrictions on the use of drones.

Pakistan's persistent fears about increasing Indian influence in the region, especially in Afghanistan, were stoked not only by President Trump's speech where he emphasised the need to strengthen the "strategic partnership with India",² but also by former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's address at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS),

¹ "Remarks by President Trump on the Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia", Fort Myer, Arlington, Virginia, August 21, 2017, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-strategy-afghanistan-south-asia/>. (Accessed June 20, 2018).

² Ibid.

Washington, DC, on October 18, 2017, where he focused on “shared values” between India and the US and the expectation that both the countries would work towards stabilising the Indo-Pacific region.³

Strong reactions emerged within Pakistan. An intense debate took place within the country about the importance of the US for Pakistan and the need to safeguard its sovereignty. The National Security Committee (NSC) of Pakistan questioned the role envisaged for India and a statement emphasised that “India cannot be a net security provider in the South Asia region....”⁴ The army chief briefed the parliament on the emerging national security situation in the context of the hardening US stance, in an attempt to assuage the rising indignation amongst the leadership and activists of political parties, elders in the tribal areas and the public in Pakistan.

In real terms, the US dissatisfaction due to Pakistan’s continued support for terrorist groups fomenting trouble in Afghanistan was reflected in the reduction of security assistance to Pakistan. For instance, the US Department of State confirmed on January 4, 2018 that it would suspend Foreign Military Financing amounting to US\$ 255 million earmarked for fiscal year (FY) 2016 as Pakistan had not taken “decisive action” against “the Taliban and the Haqqani network” enjoying “safe havens” within Pakistan.⁵ Further, US\$ 900 million that was supposed to be reimbursed

³ CSIS, “Defining Our Relationship with India for the Next Century: An Address by U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson”, October 18, 2017, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/defining-our-relationship-india-next-century-address-us-secretary-state-rex-tillerson>. (Accessed June 20, 2018).

⁴ “NSC Rejected India Role as Security Provider in the South Asia Region”, *Pak Tribune*, August 25, 2017, at <http://paktribune.com/news/NSC-rejected-India-role-as-security-provider-in-the-South-Asia-region-279366.html>. (Accessed June 20, 2018).

⁵ US Department of State, “*Background Briefing with Senior State Department Officials on Security Assistance to Pakistan*”, January 4, 2018, at <https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/01/276858.htm>. (Accessed June 20, 2018). Also see “US Blocks \$255m Military Aid to Pak”, *The Asian Age*, January 3, 2017; Varghese K. George, “Trump Regime Suspends Security Aid to Pakistan”, *The Hindu*, January 6, 2018; and Li Hongmei, “What Trump’s Pakistan Policy Means for China”, *The Diplomat*, April 18, 2018, at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/what-trumps-pakistan-policy-means-for-china/>. (Accessed May 21, 2018).

to Pakistan under the Coalition Support Funds (CSF) for FY 2017 was suspended by the US Department of Defense.⁶ As per the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) 2018, the release of 50 per cent of the CSF, amounting to US\$ 350 million, will be contingent on action against the Haqqani network.⁷ The provision to restrict payments based on an assessment of Pakistan's action against the Haqqani network has been invoked since 2015. The US has, over the years, tried to leverage its security aid and reimbursements to Pakistan as and when it saw fit; and these decisions are reflective of the US discontent with Pakistan.

Pakistan's inclusion on the "grey list" on June 27, 2018 by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), of which the US was then president and which makes it necessary for Pakistan to take stringent steps against money laundering and financing of terrorism,⁸ has pushed Pakistan into a corner. Pakistan's failure to show adequate progress has resulted in continued pressure to ensure compliance from the FATF, as was evident at the conclusion of the plenary meeting held in Orlando on June 21, 2019. The possibility of stringent action against individuals in the Pakistan military and intelligence services suspected of supporting militants cannot be ruled

⁶ Laura Koran, Michelle Kosinski and Ryan Browne, "US Suspends Security Assistance to Pakistan", *CNN*, January 8, 2018, at <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/01/04/politics/us-suspends-security-assistance-to-pakistan/index.html>. (Accessed June 20, 2018); and Hongmei, "What Trump's Pakistan Policy Means for China", n. 5.

⁷ "US Committee Wants Riders on Aid to Pak", *The Asian Age*, May 9, 2018; and US Congress, "National Defense Authorization Act For Fiscal Year 2018", December 12, 2017 at <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ91/PLAW-115publ91.pdf> (Accessed June 20, 2018).

⁸ Anwar Iqbal, "Pakistan Placed on FATF Grey List", *Dawn*, June 28, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1416598> (Accessed July 6, 2018); also see Usman Hayat and Shahid Karim, "Pakistan on FATF's Grey List: What, Why, and Why Now?", *Dawn*, July 6, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1418143/> (Accessed July 6, 2018).

out.⁹ The most striking feature of Pakistan's relations with its old ally in the last couple of years therefore is that the US has been estranged from Pakistan; however, more recently, the US has fallen back on Pakistan's help to conduct peace negotiations with the Taliban.

Is the US Dispensable?

The responses from Pakistan to the statements from the US, were partly predicated on the fact that with upcoming elections in July 2018, it became even more important for the civilian government to show that it would not cower down under US anger. The Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, at the outset made it clear that leadership in Pakistan could not be expected to "appease anyone" and that it would act keeping in mind the country's "national interest and national policy".¹⁰ Despite the fact that in the immediate aftermath of Trump's speech some high-profile visits of US officials to Pakistan had to be postponed at Pakistan's insistence, such meetings were slowly resumed, showing the inability of Pakistan to disregard the US completely.

Statements emanating from Pakistan suggested that Pakistan could do without financial assistance from the US. In fact, the economic assistance to Pakistan as well as security aid provided over the years by the US has reduced drastically as compared to when Pakistan joined the US-led war on terror (see Table 1).

⁹ Dan De Luce, "Is Trump Ready to Dump Pakistan?", *Foreign Policy*, March 26, 2018, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/26/is-trump-ready-to-dump-pakistan/>. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

¹⁰ Asad Hashim, "Pakistan in the Crosshairs of Trump's Afghan Strategy", *Al Jazeera*, August 24, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/08/pakistan-crosshairs-trump-afghan-strategy-170824052758366.html>. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

Table 1: Direct Overt US Aid Appropriations for Pakistan FY 2002–FY 2018**(in millions of dollars)**

Programme or Account	FY 2002–FY 2011	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017 (est.)	Programme or Account Total	FY 2018 (req.)
Total Security-related	5710	849	361	371	343	322	303	8259	134
Total Economic-related	7556	1067	834	608	561	246	223	11095	211
Total	13266	1916	1195	979	904	568	526	19354	345

Source: Available at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/pakaid.pdf>. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

Note: Final obligation and disbursement totals often are lower than programme account appropriations.

It is apparent from the given table that total security-related aid averaged US\$ 634 million in the nine-year period from 2002–11. However, it has drastically reduced to US\$ 134 million in 2018, a drop of almost 80 per cent in less than 10 years. Similarly, economic-related aid averaged US\$ 839 million in the nine years from 2002–11 and dropped by 75 per cent in the period from 2011 to 2018, to a figure of US\$ 211 million.

While this may be so, Pakistan's economy continues to be in dire straits. Given the precarious balance-of-payments situation, along with a widening current account deficit and dwindling foreign exchange reserves evident at the end of FY 2017–18, a fall back to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) remained a possibility. Prime Minister Imran Khan approached China, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE) for financial assistance. Though some help has been forthcoming, it has not precluded the need to hold prolonged negotiations with the IMF to ensure financial stability of the country. Pakistan has finally had to agree to undertake

structural reforms of the Pakistan economy and accept strict conditions put forth by the IMF in return for expected funds amounting to US\$ 6 billion to be disbursed over a little more than three years. Pakistan's dependence on the US will remain on account of the latter's considerable influence in international financial institutions on which Pakistan relies for help in propping up its faltering economy. While this is not the first time Pakistan has been placed on the FATF "grey list", how things eventually turn out for Pakistan will depend on Pakistan's compliance and the goodwill of the US.

Pakistan has also been a major beneficiary of arms from the US ever since it joined the US-led war on terror. These transfers have included not only those used to combat terrorism and insurgency but also those which are geared towards conventional warfare. Continued intransigence on the part of Pakistan has already put highly valued arms transfers, like that of additional F-16 fighter jets, on hold. While the US arms exports to Pakistan have decreased since 2013, China has continued to be Pakistan's biggest arms supplier in the last decade.¹¹ Yet, this does not take away from the fact that Pakistan would probably need to rely on the US for spares and for maintenance of weapons of US origin.

Pakistan's location makes it continually relevant for the US in the latter's attempts to stabilise Afghanistan. It remains a mainstay for the US operations in Afghanistan on account of its ports and air and land routes used for transporting supplies. Its importance on this account can be gauged from the situation that arose after the NATO attack on the Salala check post on November 26, 2011, after which vital supply routes for NATO trucks crossing Pakistan's border into Afghanistan were closed for a prolonged period and were only opened after an apology from the US. Pakistan's relevance came to the fore once again as President Trump wrote to Prime Minister Imran Khan in December 2018 seeking Pakistan's help

¹¹ Pieter D. Wezeman, Aude Fleurant, Alexandra Kuimova, Nan Tian and Siemon T. Wezeman, "SIPRI Fact Sheet: Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017", March 2018, p. 9, at https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/ffsipri_at2017_0.pdf. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

to bring about a peace settlement in Afghanistan. Of course, dependence on Pakistan could lessen if US plans to reduce American troops in Afghanistan by half leads up to an eventual exit of US troops.

As has been evident on earlier occasions, the US willingness to accommodate Pakistani interests became apparent when provisions in the NDAA 2018 were narrowed down to only include action against the Haqqani Network to qualify for release of US aid to Pakistan, rather than it being contingent on action taken against the LeT also, as was earlier envisaged.¹² This underscores the fact that Pakistan is able to negotiate favourably with the US on matters where the interests of both the countries do not conflict. The US has acted on Pakistan's demands for help in reigning in the Pakistani Taliban, an example of which is the killing of Mullah Fazlullah in a drone strike in June 2018.

Given the US interests in the region, the US will continue to play an important role in negotiating peace in Afghanistan, which makes it imperative for Pakistan to keep its relationship with the US intact. Also, Pakistan continues to hope that US will use its influence with India to convince it to take a softer stance vis-à-vis Pakistan. Hence, the challenge for Pakistan will be how to continue to deal with the US so that it is not denied the benefits that flow from its relationship with America and yet it does not yield to American pressure. America's inescapable involvement with Pakistan as it seeks security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons and restraint in the latter's nuclear and missile programmes, as well as the traditionally strong ties between the Pentagon and the military in Pakistan, all are likely to enable Pakistan to do just that. Meanwhile, it remains to be seen whether the momentum of talks with the Taliban, which has picked up with Zalmay Khalilzad at the helm, succeeds in bringing about a settlement satisfactory to the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¹² Anwar Iqbal, "Trump Signs Bill that Includes \$700m Reimbursement for Pakistan", *Dawn*, December 14, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/print/1376517>. (Accessed July 12, 2018); and "US Bill Delinks LeT from Haqqani Network", *Dawn*, November 14, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1370332>. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

EXCESSIVE DEPENDENCE ON CHINA

Alienated from the US and condemned by various other countries for supporting terrorism, Pakistan has tended to increasingly rely on China to be bailed out of its diplomatic and economic travails. Not only has China repeatedly sprung to Pakistan's support and commended it for its actions against terrorism in the face of international opprobrium, it has until recently, also blocked India's attempts to get the chief of Pakistan-backed JeM, Masood Azhar, designated as a terrorist at the United Nations (UN). China's opposition to India's inclusion in the Nuclear Suppliers Group on the plea that a formula should be evolved which would take into account possible membership of other non-Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) members obviously caters to Pakistan's concerns on this account. Pakistan's traditional reliance on China for nuclear weapons and missile capability, along with military hardware, has become even more entrenched with the transfer of advanced weapons and co-production. For instance, the Pakistan Air Force's operational capabilities have undoubtedly been enhanced by the induction of the JF-17 multi-role fighters jointly built by Pakistan and China. Pakistan's defence capabilities can be expected to improve further in the light of reports that a special economic zone would be set up for producing a new generation of fighter jets in Pakistan. It is expected that the two countries will work together to build navigation and radar systems and on-board weapons.¹³

China's initiative to finance the \$57 billion (later billed to be \$62 billion) CPEC has meant the deep involvement of China in developing infrastructure of Pakistan, helping it mitigate its energy crisis and giving a boost to its economic growth. One of the key indicators of this is China's quantum of investment in Pakistan which has grown from US\$ 695.8 million in 2013–14 to more than US\$ 1.5 billion in 2017–18 (see Table 2). This assumes greater significance when compared with the US investment which decreased from US\$ 212.1 million in 2013–14 to US\$ 92.3 million

¹³ Maria Abi-Habib, "China's 'Belt and Road' Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn", *The New York Times*, December 19, 2018, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-china-belt-road-military.html>. (Accessed January 4, 2019).

in 2017–18. China's total direct investment in Pakistan amounted to US\$ 4.8 billion in the five-year period from July 2013 to June 2018. Again, this becomes more noteworthy when compared to the total amount of US\$ 586.1 million that the US invested in the same period.

Table 2: Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China and the US to Pakistan

Year	FDI in (US\$ million)	FDI in (US\$ million)
July–June	China	US
2013–14	695.8	212.1
2014–15	319.1	223.9
2015–16	1063.6	13.2
2016–17	1211.7	44.6
2017–18	1585.8	92.3
Total	4876.0	586.1

Source: Government of Pakistan, Board of Investment, Foreign Investment, at <http://boi.gov.pk/ForeignInvestmentinPakistan.aspx>. (Accessed September 3, 2018).

The data clearly indicates that while the US has been an important source of FDI in Pakistan in earlier years, US investors are not only keeping away from new investments but are also moving out.¹⁴ One of the reasons is Pakistan's dismal security situation coupled with the ongoing energy crisis which has made foreign companies wary of investing in the country. Yet, given its long-term strategic interests, China has continued to increase its stakes in the country. According to the Islamabad-based Security and

¹⁴ "Other Countries Pull Out, China Increases Investment in Pakistan", *The Express Tribune*, June 18, 2016, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1124973/countries-pull-china-increases-investment-pakistan/> (Accessed July 2, 2018); also see "US Investors Pull Out as FDI Drops 24%", *The Express Tribune*, November 18, 2015, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/993402/july-october-us-investors-pull-out-as-fdi-drops-24/>. (Accessed July 2, 2018).

Exchange Commission, 77 Chinese companies were registered in Pakistan in 2017.¹⁵

The increasing Chinese presence in different spheres of Pakistan's economy indicates China's growing leverage with Pakistan. An aspect of this is Pakistan's burgeoning trade deficit with China which is indicative of the imbalance in the economic relationship between the two countries. The trade deficit of US\$ 6.65 billion during the period July 2016–January 2017 grew to US\$ 7.1 billion during July 2017–January 2018 (see Table 3). This remains a thorny issue in relations between the two countries as numerous negotiations on terms of trade thus far have not yielded substantive outcomes. While the second phase of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China was signed on April 28, 2019 during Prime Minister Khan's visit to China for the Second Belt and Road Forum it remains to be seen whether its implementation will redress the trade imbalance.

Table 3: Exports and Imports of Pakistan (US\$)

Country	July 2017- January 2018		US\$	July 2016- January 2017		US\$
Pakistan	Exports to China	Imports from China	Balance of Trade	Exports to China	Imports from China	Balance of Trade
	779.92 million	7.88 billion	(7.10 billion)	783.60 million	7.43 billion	(6.65 billion)

Source: Data taken from Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, at http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/tables/14.07_0.pdf and http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/tables/14.06_0.pdf (Accessed September 3, 2018).

¹⁵ Ismail Dilawar, "China, Not US, is Pakistan's New Best Friend if You Go by these Investment Numbers", April 13, 2017, *Bloomberg*, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/chinas-silk-road-push-in-pakistan-edges-out-us-investments/articleshow/58159546.cms>. (Accessed July 2, 2018).

Another aspect of Chinese involvement is China's loan of US\$ 1 billion to give a fillip to Pakistan's falling foreign currency reserves in June 2018. This highlights Pakistan's increasing dependence on China for extricating it from difficult economic situations. It is interesting to note that Pakistan had already received US\$ 1.5 billion in bilateral loans and US\$ 2.9 billion in commercial bank loans, primarily from Chinese banks, from July 2017 to May 2018.¹⁶ However, the outcome of Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China in November 2018 raises doubts about the extent to which China would be willing to help extricate Pakistan from its difficult financial situation.

Given the Chinese largesse, Pakistan needs to be on constant alert about ceding too much ground to China. This was apparent in November 2017 when Pakistan, though desperate for funding to construct the Diamer-Bhasha Dam located in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), was forced to pull out this dam from the CPEC framework after the Chinese imposed conditions pertaining to "ownership of the project, operation and maintenance cost, and securitisation" of the project which were unpalatable to Pakistan.¹⁷ At the diplomatic level too, China has tried to help develop greater understanding between the leadership of Pakistan and Afghanistan and has offered its assistance towards peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan. It is willing to work together with Pakistan and Afghanistan to extend the CPEC to Afghanistan as well.

Is Pakistan being Colonised by China?

A question being raised by Pakistani analysts is whether too much dependence on China at the cost of relations with other countries is going to compromise Pakistan's sovereignty and eventually make it look like China's colony, to deliver it strategic and economic gains more than to Pakistan. When the idea of the CPEC was first floated, it heralded great hopes of improving the economy. It was supposed to not only help

¹⁶ "China Lends \$1bn to Pakistan to Boost Plummeting Forex Reserves", *Dawn*, July 1, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1417181>. (Accessed July 2, 2018).

¹⁷ Shahbaz Rana, "Pakistan Stops Bid to Include Diamer-Bhasha Dam in CPEC", *The Express Tribune*, November 15, 2017, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1558475/2-pakistan-stops-bid-include-diamer-bhasha-dam-cpec/>. (Accessed July 2, 2018).

increase growth, and increase the supply of energy, but also create jobs. While it has brought large amounts of foreign investment into the country, the question that perturbs many is whether the Pakistan economy is going to be crippled by heavy debt instead. The projects are being funded by Chinese banks through low-interest or interest-free loans. Yet, many times, the interest rates are higher than those of the World Bank or IMF. The expectation that the extensive construction activity undertaken for putting in place massive infrastructure would provide huge job opportunities for those in Pakistan did not fructify as Chinese firms prefer to employ labour from their own country. There has also been concern about the lack of transparency about the details, terms and financing of many of the energy and infrastructure projects.

There are fears that the projects may leave Pakistan with unserviceable debt which may, in turn, force Pakistan to yield to Chinese demands at the cost of its sovereignty. For instance, the Gwadar Port has been leased to the China Overseas Port Holding Co. on a build, operate and transfer model over a period of 40 years. It gets a whopping 91 per cent of the revenue collected from operations.¹⁸ There are apprehensions that in the future, a debt-ridden Pakistan may be drawn into a web similar to that drawn by the Chinese around Sri Lanka in the Hambantota Port deal.¹⁹

¹⁸ “Gwadar Port Revenue Sharing Formula Revealed: China 91%, Pakistan 9%”, *Balochistan Voices*, November 28, 2017, at <http://balochistanvoices.com/2017/11/gwadar-port-revenue-sharing-formula-revealed-china-91-pakistan-9/> (Accessed July 12, 2018); and “China will Receive 91 pc Revenue from Gwadar Port for 40 Years”, *Pakistan Today*, November 25, 2017, at <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/11/25/china-will-receive-91pc-revenues-from-gwadar-port-for-40-years/>. (Accessed July 12, 2018).

¹⁹ While the Chinese willingly gave loans for the development of this port, the Sri Lankan Government was forced to ask for rescheduling of payments as it was mired in debts. Eventually, Sri Lanka was forced to give up control over the Hambantota Port and surrounding areas to China in exchange for debt relief. It is interesting to note that in the interim period, the Sri Lankan Government, when faced with a huge debt burden and difficulties in paying back the Chinese, had to turn to the IMF for rescue. See Khurram Husain, “Lessons of Hambantota”, *Dawn*, June 28, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1416611>. (Accessed July 12, 2018); and Maria Abi-Habib, “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port”, *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html> (Accessed July 12, 2018).

While the Chinese involvement in infrastructure projects, including power plants, roads, railways, ports and airports, has been much discussed and publicised, there are other aspects of potential Chinese involvement in Pakistan which are less known. For instance, in the agricultural sector, it is planned that Pakistan will lease large tracts of land to the Chinese. The Chinese will be allowed to run their own farms and processing facilities, and loans would be made available for the purpose from the Chinese government and the China Development Bank.²⁰ According to the CPEC long-term plan unveiled by *Dawn*, a leading daily newspaper in Pakistan, in June 2017, the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps will bring mechanisation and scientific techniques to help in livestock breeding and agriculture in Pakistan. For China, the aim is to develop Kashgar Prefecture, a poverty-ridden region within Xinjiang. While Chinese companies may bring better techniques which may benefit agriculture in Pakistan, there is concern that Pakistan may give up too much in return.²¹

A deep penetration of the industry in Pakistan is also on the anvil. The western and north-western zone have been earmarked for mineral extraction, with potential for exploring chrome ore, gold reserves and diamonds. The central zone is considered fit for cooperation in textiles, household appliances and cement. In the southern zone, the plan envisages development of petrochemical, iron and steel, harbour industry, engineering machinery, trade processing and auto and assembly of auto parts. Out of all potential areas of cooperation mentioned, if one looks more closely at China's interest in the textile industry, it really pertains to procuring cheap raw material like yarn and coarse cloth from Pakistan so as to develop the textiles and garments industry in Kashgar by employing the surplus labour available.²²

²⁰ Andrew McCormick, "Is Pakistan Agriculture Ready for CPEC?", *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2018, at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/05/is-pakistani-agriculture-ready-for-cpec/>. (Accessed July 12, 2018). Also see Khurram Husain, "Exclusive: CPEC Master Plan Revealed", *Dawn*, June 21, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1333101> (Accessed July 12, 2018).

²¹ Husain, "Exclusive: CPEC Master Plan Revealed", n.20; and McCormick, "Is Pakistan Agriculture Ready for CPEC?", n. 20.

²² Husain, "Exclusive: CPEC Master Plan Revealed", n. 20.

China has been claiming that the CPEC is mainly an economic project and one which would allow China to trade with West Asian and African countries through shorter and less costly shipping routes. It would also give it access to exit routes independent of the existing chokepoints for its shipping in the East. However, over the years, there has been enough speculation about Gwadar being developed for strategic military purposes by China. There have been suggestions recently that if Gwadar does not become an economically sustainable venture, it is possible that it may become a naval outpost for China. There are reports that China may “expand its marine corps and station new marine brigades in Gwadar.”²³ Furthermore, there is speculation that Pakistan may allow China to establish a new military base on the Jiwani Peninsula which is located between Gwadar and the Iranian border. According to a *Washington Times* report, Jiwani would provide joint naval and air facilities for Chinese forces. Pakistan has apparently been asked to undertake development of the existing airport which would then have the capacity to handle large military aircraft.²⁴ Although China has officially denied such reports,²⁵ if things proceed as suggested, Pakistan would be enabling China not only to protect its shipping lanes—as Jiwani is close to the Strait of Hormuz on the Persian Gulf—but the possibility of the base being used for intelligence purposes remains.

²³ C. Christine Fair, “Pakistan Can’t Afford China’s ‘Friendship’”, *Foreign Policy*, July 3, 2017, at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/07/03/pakistan-cant-afford-chinas-friendship/>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

²⁴ Bill Gertz, “China Building Military Base in Pakistan”, *The Washington Times*, January 3, 2018, at <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2018/jan/3/china-plans-pakistan-military-base-at-jiwani/>. (Accessed July 15, 2018). Also see “China’s Second Overseas Naval Base to be in Pakistan?”, *The New Indian Express*, January 9, 2018, at <http://www.newindianexpress.com/world/2018/jan/09/chinas-second-overseas-naval-base-to-be-in-pakistan-1748554.html>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

²⁵ “China Denies Plans to Set Up Military Base in Jiwani in Pakistan’s Balochistan”, *LiveMint*, January 9, 2018, at <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/stB8WVXUBhca96JR3YtvKP/China-denies-plans-to-set-up-military-base-at-Jiwani-in-Paki.html> (Accessed July 15, 2018); and “China Dismisses Speculations of Military Base near Gwadar”, *Dawn*, January 10, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1381843>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

While Pakistan has been relying on China for diplomatic support at international forums, it may eventually become difficult for China to continue to back Pakistan on the issue of terrorism for fears that its image may become tarnished internationally. For instance, the statement that emerged at the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) summit held in Xiamen, Fujian province, China, in September 2017, made a mention of four terrorist groups banned by the UN and which are considered threats to regional security but are active in Pakistan. Again, China had no recourse but to give in at the FATF meeting which included Pakistan in the “grey list”. At the plenary meeting held on February 20, 2018 in Paris, China was one of the countries which was opposed to Pakistan being placed on the watch list. Yet, it withdrew its opposition in the second meeting held on February 22, 2018 as it could no longer garner the support required to stall the move.²⁶ In June 2018, Pakistan was officially included in the “grey list” of the FATF. Most recently, China was forced to accede to concerted pressure by the US, United Kingdom (UK) and France, finally paving the way for Masood Azhar to be listed as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council 1267 Sanctions Committee on May 1, 2019.

In a country that has over the years been losing foreign investment due to uncertain security conditions, the additional stigma of being on the FATF list is likely to make it even less attractive as a destination for investors. If Pakistan fails to take satisfactory steps, then member countries of the FATF could influence international lending agencies to squeeze loans to Pakistan. China’s support in the case of Masood Azhar has earned wide disapproval. In the future, if China is constrained to yield, like it did at BRICS, at the FATF, and at the UN what will be Pakistan’s recourse? Pakistan is becoming more and more dependent on China to help weather its problems. Yet, in the future, Pakistan could be in an unenviable position as China faces resistance of most countries of the Indo-Pacific region due to its assertiveness.

²⁶ “China Says ‘Highly Recognises’ Pakistan’s Efforts Against Terror Financing”, *Dawn*, February 27, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1392085>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

PEACE OVERTURES TO AFGHANISTAN

In the last couple of years, Pakistan has made attempts to normalise relations with Afghanistan. As is well known, Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is determined by its desire to acquire strategic depth by installing a government which is fully or partially controlled by it. That explains Pakistan's determination to fully support the Afghan Taliban in a bid to enable it to capture power in Afghanistan. This endeavour of Pakistan was being obstructed by the US which perceived the Taliban as the primary source of terrorist threats to American interests.

The usual clamour from the US asking Pakistan to help stabilise the situation in Afghanistan was joined by influential voices from China encouraging Pakistan to patch up things with Afghanistan. The context was the prevailing highly vitiated atmosphere between the two countries after the initial attempts at developing a better understanding with Pakistan by President Ashraf Ghani came to naught. Ashraf Ghani slowly became critical of Pakistan and made it clear that he expected Pakistan to deal with the safe havens for the Taliban within Pakistani territory. Pakistan was finally forced to respond at the prodding of China for whom ensuring the stability of Afghanistan has become an important consideration given its need to safeguard its investments in Afghanistan and the momentum of its connectivity initiatives.

Discussions between the leadership of China, Pakistan and Afghanistan on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Beijing in June 2017 focused on the need for more cooperation on counter-terrorism and the revival of the Afghan peace process. This was soon followed up by the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Kabul and Islamabad, during which it was proposed to set up a trilateral mechanism which would enable cooperation aimed at peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan and coordination on counter-terrorism between Pakistan and Afghanistan.²⁷ This proposal was formalised at the foreign minister-level trilateral dialogue held in Beijing on December 26,

²⁷ "China Begins Push for Pak-Afghan Détente", *Dawn*, June 25, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1341605>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

2017.²⁸ The second ministerial dialogue was held at Kabul on December 15, 2018 where the three parties agreed to “continue” working towards “building mutual trust” and reiterated their “support” for “reconciliation, development cooperation and connectivity, security cooperation and counter-terrorism.”²⁹ A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Counter-Terrorism Cooperation was also signed.³⁰

At the bilateral level too, Pakistan's inclination to improve relations with Afghanistan became apparent. The NSC, in a meeting in August 2017, made known its resolve “to work... with the people and government of Afghanistan for removal of all irritants.”³¹ The multiple exchange of visits and meetings held between the political, military and intelligence leaders and officials of the two countries over the months were an attestation of the improved environment for dialogue that had been created. Pakistan also repeatedly projected its efforts towards fencing and installing check posts on the border with Afghanistan as an example of its commitment towards improving the security situation.³² Yet, the tenuous nature of the working relationship was evident as Afghanistan accused Pakistan of conducting air strikes within its territory and Pakistan, in turn, accused Afghanistan of conducting cross-border raids on Pakistani posts.³³

²⁸ “China Hosts Meeting to Improve Afghanistan–Pakistan Relations”, *Xinhua*, December 26, 2017, at http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-12/26/c_136853473.htm. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

²⁹ “Text of Joint Statement of the 2nd Afghanistan–China–Pakistan Foreign Ministers’ Dialogue”, Kabul, December 15, 2018, at <https://www.mfa.gov.af/news/joint-statement-of-the-2nd-afghanistan-china-pakistan-foreign-ministers'-dialogue>. (Accessed January 10, 2019).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Top Security Body Wants Ties with Kabul Normalised”, *Dawn*, August 17, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1352079>. (Accessed July 15, 2018).

³² Baqir Sajjad Syed, “‘Steady Progress’ being Made in Afghan Border Fencing”, *Dawn*, June 21, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1340860>. (Accessed July 18, 2018).

³³ “Islamabad, Kabul Trade Charges Ahead of Abbasi’s Visit”, *Dawn*, April 6, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1399878/islamabad-kabul-trade-charges-ahead-of-abbasis-visit> (Accessed July 18, 2018); and “Foreign Office Deplores Attacks from Across Afghan Border”, *Dawn*, April 13, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1399878/islamabad-kabul-trade-charges-ahead-of-abbasis-visit>. (Accessed July 18, 2018).

Continuing strains in the relationship have been exemplified by Afghanistan's anger over Prime Minister Imran Khan's remarks in March 2019 that forming an interim Afghan government would help the talks between the US and the Taliban.

The inaugural meetings of the five working groups under the Afghanistan and Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) were held in Kabul on July 22, 2018. While a whole gamut of issues, including counter-terrorism and security, peace and reconciliation, bilateral trade and transit, connectivity and the repatriation of Afghan refugees, are being dealt with under this framework,³⁴ it remains to be seen whether the commitments undertaken by the two countries help to assuage each other's concerns.

Complexities in Afghanistan's Response

The US forces in Afghanistan stepped up operations and air strikes against the Taliban in consonance with President Trump's policy announced in August 2017. Yet, there were ample indications about the staying power of the Taliban and their increasing control over large parts of Afghan territory. According to a report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), as on January 31, 2018, 229 districts were under the control of the Afghan government (about 56.3 per cent of the country), 59 districts were under rebel control (approximately 14.5 per cent of the country) and 119 districts (about 29.2 per cent) were contested.³⁵ Besides, the Taliban staged high-profile terrorist incidents throughout the country, showing themselves to be a major threat to peace and stability in Afghanistan. Such a scenario seems to have convinced the US that it was not going to be able to dislodge the Taliban so easily. There

³⁴ "Inaugural Session of the APAPPS Working Groups—Kabul 22 July 2018", Press Release, Embassy of Pakistan, Kabul, July 23, 2018, at <http://www.pakembassykabul.org/en/inaugural-session-of-the-apapps-working-groups-kabul-22-july-2018/>. (Accessed July 27, 2018).

³⁵ Alia Chughtai, "Afghanistan: Who Controls What", *Al Jazeera*, June 5, 2018, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2016/08/afghanistan-controls-160823083528213.html>. (Accessed July 18, 2018).

has been evidence of China and Russia also wanting to recognise the reality of the Taliban being a dominant power and wanting to do business with them. Lately, both the countries have been actively involved in various negotiating processes with the Taliban. Both the countries have also supported the US efforts towards building peace and a consensus on the importance of an intra-Afghan dialogue is visible in the joint statement agreed on by representatives of the three countries on April 25, 2019.³⁶

Afghan President Ashraf Ghani made efforts to draw the Taliban into talks in the backdrop of the unremitting violence at the beginning of 2018. The incentives offered by him at an international conference in Kabul in February 2018³⁷ did not immediately evoke a favourable response from the Taliban leadership, even though he was willing to accord various political concessions to them. Implicit in this offer was the assumption that if the Taliban agreed to talks, they would have to give recognition to the Afghan government and abide by the law.³⁸ The Taliban instead expressed their preference to talk to the US.³⁹

The Taliban went on to announce their spring offensive in April 2018.⁴⁰ In the midst of heavy fighting, Ashraf Ghani unilaterally announced a ceasefire

³⁶ US Department of State, "Joint Statement on Trilateral Meeting on Afghan Peace Process", April 26, 2019 at <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-on-trilateral-meeting-on-afghan-peace-process/> (Accessed May 10, 2019).

³⁷ This was during the second meeting of the Kabul Process for Peace and Security Cooperation in Afghanistan. "Ghani Makes Taliban an Offer to Join Peace Process", *Tolo News*, February 28, 2018, at <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/ghani-makes-taliban-offer-join-peace-process>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

³⁸ Hamid Shalizi and James Mackenzie, "Afghanistan's Ghani Offers Talks 'Without Preconditions'", *Reuters*, February 28, 2018, at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-taliban/afghanistans-ghani-offers-talks-with-taliban-without-preconditions-idUSKCN1GC0J0>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

³⁹ Memphis Barker and Julian Borger, "Taliban Publish Letter Calling on US to Start Afghan Peace Talks", *The Guardian*, February 14, 2018, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/14/taliban-publish-letter-calling-us-start-afghan-peace-talks>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴⁰ James Mackenzie, "Taliban Announce Spring Offensive, Dismisses Peace Overtures", *Reuters*, April 25, 2018, at <https://in.reuters.com/article/afghanistan-taliban/taliban-announce-spring-offensive-dismisses-peace-overtures-idINKBN1HW0RW>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

during Eid celebrations.⁴¹ The Taliban's unanimous support for the ceasefire raised hopes that negotiations could pave the way forward. Building upon progress signified by the first day of peaceful ceasefire, Ghani reiterated that his government was ready for "comprehensive peace and talks". He even showed willingness to discuss what has been a major stumbling block in initiating peace talks with the Taliban, that is, "the future role of international troops" in the country. The US military officials offered to "support, facilitate and participate" in such talks.⁴²

Several rounds of peace talks have been held over the years. Pakistan's importance as a facilitator in talks with the Taliban is well recognised. Equally well understood is its propensity to derail any negotiations which are inimical to its interests. For instance, before the Afghan Government and the Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar could have substantive talks in 2010, he was detained by the intelligence services of Pakistan in a joint operation with the CIA. Again, as peace talks between the Afghan Government and the Taliban got off the ground in July 2015, the news of the death of Mullah Omar Abdullah, who had died much earlier, was revealed and the next round of peace talks was postponed.⁴³ Questions were also raised about the legitimacy of the representatives involved in the talks. Omar Abdullah's successor, Mullah Mansour, was killed in a

⁴¹ "Afghanistan Announces Ceasefire with Taliban for Eid", *Dawn*, June 7, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1412613>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴² Pamela Constable with Sayed Salahuddin, "Afghanistan Extends Cease-fire with Taliban as Fighters Celebrate Eid with Civilians", *The Washington Post*, June 16, 2018, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/afghan-government-extends-cease-fire-with-taliban-as-fighters-join-civilians-to-celebrate-eid/2018/06/16/a3fcecce-7170-11e8-b4d8-eaf78d4c544c_story.html?utm_term=.876abc7a6d1b. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴³ Ahmad Bilal Khalil, "The Tangled History of the Afghanistan-India-Pakistan Triangle", *The Diplomat*, December 16, 2016, at <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/the-tangled-history-of-the-afghanistan-india-pakistan-triangle/> (Accessed July 20, 2018); and Pamela Constable with Sayed Salahuddin, "Omar's Death Revelation could Divide Militants, Undermine Peace Talks", *The Washington Post*, July 29, 2015, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/afghan-officials-prepare-comment-amid-reports-of-taliban-leader-death/2015/07/29/a60a6396-35d9-11e5-b673-1df005a0fb28_story.html?utm_term=.b6bc6ae17ae8. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

drone strike by the US in May 2016 as there were doubts about his willingness to take part in peace negotiations.⁴⁴ Peace talks were held between the Taliban and the Afghan Government in Qatar after Mullah Mansour was killed.⁴⁵ In January 2018, a delegation from Qatar, which had the approval of the Taliban leader Mullah Akhundzada, visited Islamabad for discussions on restarting negotiations for peace.⁴⁶ The release of Mullah Baradar in October 2018 was expected to help facilitate the peace process and he was later made head of the Taliban political office in Doha, Qatar.

Pakistan got an opportunity to play its most coveted role as the unavoidable peacemaker in Afghanistan when President Trump wrote to Imran Khan in December 2018 to help in negotiating a peace settlement with the Taliban. Pakistan agreed to the US request and participated in various rounds of talks. Although details of these talks are not fully known, the specific information made known to the public after the talks in Qatar in January 2019 was that the US has agreed to withdraw its troops in return for guarantees by the Taliban not to give shelter to Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS). The US tried to persuade the Taliban to talk to the Afghan Government as well, to which the Taliban did not agree. An agreement on a ceasefire was also one of the critical components of the negotiations. The crisp statement made by Zalmay Khalilzad after the talks was: "Nothing is agreed until everything is agreed."⁴⁷ This can be

⁴⁴ Jon Boone and Sune Engel Rasmussen, "US Drone Strike in Pakistan Kills Taliban Leader Mullah Mansoor", *The Guardian*, May 22, 2016, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/21/us-airstrike-taliban-leader-mullah-akhtar-mansoor>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴⁵ James Rothwell, Mohammad Zubair Khan and Bilal Sarwary, "Taliban Holds 'Informal' Peace Talks with Afghanistan", *The Telegraph*, October 18, 2016, at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/18/taliban-holds-informal-peace-talks-with-afghanistan/>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴⁶ "Taliban Leader 'Approved' Islamabad Meeting on Peace Talks", *Tolo News*, January 18, 2018, at <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/taliban-leader-%E2%80%98approved%E2%80%99-islamabad-meeting-peace-talks>. (Accessed July 20, 2018).

⁴⁷ Siyar Sirat, "Nothing is Agreed until Everything is Agreed: Khalilzad", *Tolo News*, January 27, 2019, at <https://www.tolonews.com/afghanistan/khalilzad-says-%E2%80%98nothing-agreed-%E2%80%99-qatar>. (Accessed February 7, 2019).

interpreted to mean that differences still remain on certain vital issues between the US and the Taliban. However, the fact that the talks have continued (seven rounds of direct talks have taken place between the US and the Taliban) to be held does mean that there is a certain degree of seriousness on the part of all parties and Pakistan will continue to be relevant to this negotiating process. Even though Pakistan has been a participant in peace negotiations being held at multiple forums in Doha, Moscow and other places, it is obvious that it is giving due importance to the US–Taliban talks.

Pakistan even hosted a conference for a large number of Afghan politicians and tribal elders on June 22, 2019 in an attempt to bolster the peace process. This was soon followed by the visit of President Ashraf Ghani to Pakistan on June 27–28, 2019 at the invitation of Pakistan and a wide range of issues were discussed. In this context, it cannot be ruled out that Pakistan may be involved in behind-the-scene consultations with the Afghan Government so as to ensure that, in any final settlement, Pakistan's interests are taken care of by whoever captures power in Afghanistan.

The Taliban have not only rebuffed President Ghani's offer of talks with the Afghan Government, but they launched their spring offensive on April 12, 2019. An expected summit between the Taliban and Afghan officials to be held in Doha in the third week of April fell through over who should participate in the talks. A Loya Jirga was held in Kabul over four days beginning on April 29, 2019 to build domestic consensus on the peace process. Further, the Taliban rejected President Ghani's offer of a ceasefire made in early May this year. Developments such as these again indicate the enormous complexities that still underlie Pakistan's endeavours to bring about a favourable outcome of its strategy vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

STALEMATE WITH INDIA

India–Pakistan relations have been deadlocked for nearly three years. There has been no dialogue on critical issues plaguing the two countries, nor has there been any initiative taken by Pakistan in response to India's demands that credible action should be taken against those responsible for the Mumbai attack of November 2008 and anti-India terrorist activity on its soil should be stopped.

Under the government of Prime Minister Modi, India had started with great hope of improving relations with Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif's visit to Delhi at the swearing in of Modi in May 2014 and subsequent occasional meetings between the two leaders and other senior officials in the years 2014 and 2015 had raised the possibility of progress on contentious issues. It was in that spirit that Prime Minister Modi landed unscheduled in Lahore on December 25, 2015 to join the birthday celebrations of Nawaz Sharif.

The attack on the Indian Air Force base in Pathankot by a Pakistan-based terrorist organisation—JeM—on January 2, 2016 came as a rude shock to India. This attack on a high-value security target was deemed by India as a serious violation of India's sovereignty. It was obvious that the establishment in Pakistan, without whose acquiescence such attacks cannot take place, was not in a mood to allow any improvement of relations with India. The anger that was aroused in India as a result was compounded by the fact that while India allowed Pakistan's joint investigation team to visit the site of the terrorist attack, Pakistan denied permission to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) from India to visit Pakistan to further probe evidence about the involvement of the suspected terrorists.⁴⁸

This incident derailed the momentum built as a consequence of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's positive response to Prime Minister Modi's initiatives. The immediate fallout of the attack was that it disrupted the comprehensive bilateral dialogue which was to be held at the foreign secretary level in January 2016.

Any hopes of improvement in ties were further doomed by the strike by JeM terrorists on the Indian Army camp at Uri on September 18, 2016. India retaliated by conducting surgical strikes on a number of launch pads across the Line of Control (LoC) on September 29. This was a well-considered move by India to convey a message that continued cross-border attacks by Pakistan supported militants will no longer be tolerated

⁴⁸ "Pakistan Makes it Official, Says No to NIA Visit to Probe Pathankot Attack", *News18*, April 7, 2016, at <https://www.news18.com/news/india/pakistan-backstabs-india-on-pathankot-attack-probe-says-no-to-nia-visit-1226754.html>. (Accessed, July 30, 2018).

and Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for that. The consequence was a highly raised level of tension between the two countries, further reducing the chances of a dialogue. Even though Pakistan continued to deny that any Indian strike took place across the border in its territory, the Pakistani reaction was angry and hostile.

Pakistan felt the heat of India's tough diplomatic messaging with the boycott of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit to be held in Islamabad in November 2016. Pakistan's discomfort became all the more acute as five more members, apart from India, decided to boycott the SAARC summit in protest against Pakistan's policy of supporting terrorism. Pakistan had no choice but to cancel the summit. As relations nosedived, staff from the missions in both the countries were recalled over charges of being involved in espionage activities. Both countries also blamed each other for harassment of diplomats and staffers of their respective missions. Pakistan continuously denied consular access to Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian national charged with allegedly spying for India.

There were occasional efforts on both sides to engage at appropriate levels in order to diffuse tensions. For instance, a meeting was held in Bangkok on December 26, 2017 between the national security advisers (NSAs) of both countries and the issue of cross-border terrorism was discussed.⁴⁹ Earlier, on November 10, a meeting was held at Wagah–Attari border at the director general (DG) level between the Rangers Sindh and the Border Security Force.⁵⁰

Pakistan occasionally expressed a desire to talk to India to break the stalemate. For instance, the Pakistan Army chief suggested in April 2018

⁴⁹ “India, Pakistan NSAs Met in Bangkok; From Terror Talks to Cross Border Issues, Here is All You Want to Know”, *Financial Express*, January 12, 2018, at <https://www.financialexpress.com/india-news/india-pakistan-nsas-met-in-bangkok-from-terror-talks-to-cross-border-issues-here-is-all-you-want-to-know/1011662/>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

⁵⁰ A.G. Noorani, “Pak-India Relations”, *Dawn*, January 6, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1381053>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

that “the route to peaceful resolution of Pak-India disputes—including the core issue of Kashmir—runs through comprehensive and meaningful dialogue.”⁵¹ Yet, there was no sign of Pakistan taking action against the LeT, which was responsible for the Mumbai attacks, or JeM, which was responsible for the Pathankot attack.

The admission by former Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in a statement on May 11, 2018 that Pakistan had played a role in the Mumbai attacks⁵² only served the purpose of infuriating Pakistan’s military, thereby negating any chances of a dialogue with India. The Indian position on the revival of a comprehensive dialogue was reiterated by Sushma Swaraj, the then External Affairs Minister of India, in May 2018: “We are always ready for talks with Pakistan but a caveat that terror and talks cannot go together... There cannot be a comprehensive dialogue till Pakistan shuns terror.”⁵³ This position of the Indian Government has been reiterated from time to time. Expectations that a meeting would take place between the foreign ministers of the two countries on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meeting in New York in September 2018 did not fructify.

The suicide attack on a CRPF convoy by JeM militants in Pulwama on February 14, 2019 further queered the pitch for any possible further movement towards a dialogue. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan in a televised address to the nation on February 19, 2019 said that Pakistan was

⁵¹ “‘Comprehensive Dialogue’ the Route to Restoring Peace in Kashmir: COAS”, *Dawn*, April 14, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1401592>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

⁵² In an interview with leading Pakistani daily, *Dawn*, on May 11, 2018, Nawaz Sharif said, “Militant organisations are active. Call them non-state actors, should we allow them to cross the border and kill 150 people in Mumbai? Explain it to me. Why can’t we complete the trial?” See Cyril Almeida, “For Nawaz Its Not Over till Its Over”, *Dawn*, May 12, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407192>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

⁵³ “No Comprehensive Dialogue with Pakistan till it Shuns Terrorism: Sushma Swaraj”, *The Times of India*, May 28, 2018, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/no-comprehensive-dialogue-with-pakistan-till-it-shuns-terrorism-sushma-swaraj/articleshow/64354825.cms>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

ready to take action if India provided “actionable intelligence” about Pakistan’s involvement in the attack.⁵⁴ In a first of its kind, India resorted to punitive action by launching an air attack on a JeM training camp in Balakot deep inside Pakistani territory across the LoC on February 26. On the basis of “credible intelligence” that the JeM could carry out further attacks, India conducted a ‘non-military pre-emptive’ strike in Balakot in Pakistan’s Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, and claimed to have eliminated a large number of terrorists stationed in these camps by employing 12 Mirage 2000-5 fighters. On February 27, within a day of Indian strikes Pakistan tried to target Indian military establishments across the LoC. In the dogfight that took place between the Pakistani planes and the Indian aircraft, Pakistan claimed to have downed an IAF MiG 21 that had entered its airspace and captured Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, pilot of one of the MiGs. Indian pilot Abhinandan was released as a “peace gesture”⁵⁵ Pakistan being mindful of the expectations of the international community. It was also obvious from this gesture that Pakistan thought it wise to de-escalate the situation.

In addition, India showed its resentment by taking certain other steps which further led to a deep freeze in India-Pakistan relations. For instance, India withdrew the Most Favoured Nation status for trade with Pakistan on February 15, 2019 and suspended cross LoC trade from April 19, 2019.

Will There be a Breakthrough?

The cyclical pattern of engagement and disengagement with Pakistan is hardly new. However, there have been attempts to diffuse tensions along the LoC given that the period from January to May 2018 saw the number of ceasefire violations go up to 1,300 with 908 incidents having occurred

⁵⁴ For excerpts of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s televised address to the nation on February 19, 2019 see “Pakistan Will Hit Back if India Strikes, says Imran”, *The Hindu*, February 20, 2019.

⁵⁵ For excerpts of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s televised speech to the Joint Session of Parliament on February 28, 2019 see “IAF Pilot to be Freed Today: Imran”, *The Hindu*, March 1, 2019.

along the LoC and the rest of them along the International Border.⁵⁶ The directors general of military operations (DGMOs) of the two countries, in a conversation conducted on the hotline on May 29, 2018 agreed to “fully implement the 2003 ceasefire understanding in letter and spirit.”⁵⁷ Yet, ceasefire violations continued through the second half of the year.

Pakistan has been under tremendous international pressure to curb its support to terrorism and has faced isolation at various international forums. At the regional level, as mentioned earlier, Pakistan faced isolation in the aftermath of the Uri attack when it was forced to cancel the SAARC summit to be held in November 2016 as five other member states opted out of attending in sympathy with India. The BRICS declaration of September 2017 condemned terrorism and the violence caused by various terrorist groups, including those based in Pakistan, reflecting the concerns of all the member countries. Hafeez Saeed, the chief of Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD), accused by India of masterminding the Mumbai attacks of 2008, was put under house arrest and assets of the JuD and its arm for charity, the Falah-e-Insaniyat, were seized. These measures were taken in order to show compliance with the requirements of the FATF and thus avoid any US moves to place Pakistan on the FATF watch list.⁵⁸

India's demands for taking effective action against terrorism have not been met. Though Hafeez Saeed was put under detention, he was later released and was able to campaign for the elections and thereby enter the political mainstream. His candidates contested elections under the umbrella of Allah-o-Akbar Tehreek. Also, the Anti-Terrorism Ordinance passed by the president in February 2018 with regard to the banning of the JuD and the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation lapsed without the parliament's approval as was disclosed in October 2018.

⁵⁶ Rajat Pandit, “India, Pakistan DGMOs Hold Talks on Ceasefire Violations and Terrorism”, *The Times of India*, May 30, 2018, at <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-pakistan-dgmos-hold-talk-on-ceasefire-violation-and-terrorism/articleshow/64372018.cms>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Khurram Husain, “Banning Terror Groups”, *Dawn*, February 15, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1389433>; and Amjad Mahmood, “Punjab Govt Moves to Seize Assets of JuD, its Welfare Wing”, *Dawn*, February 15, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1389524>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

On February 22, 2019 the Punjab government took administrative control over the JeM headquarters at Bahawalpur. On March 5, 2019 a number of people belonging to proscribed organisations including Masood Azhar's son and brother were taken into preventive detention. A decision was also taken to ban the JuD and the Falah-e-Insaniyat Foundation at a meeting of the NSC on February 21, 2019 followed by a notification by the interior ministry on March 5, 2019.⁵⁹ However, this was possibly a direct consequence of the international pressure faced by Pakistan post Pulwama, as the UN Security Council condemned the attack. Such steps were perhaps also taken in the hope that Pakistan may be taken off the 'grey list' during review meetings of the FATF Asia-Pacific Group held in Paris from February 18-22. Even so it is doubtful that any government in Pakistan will be able to deliver satisfactorily on terrorism in the foreseeable future, given the fact that militant organisations and their ostensible objectives seem to have acquired wide acceptability and minimal resistance within Pakistan's society.

Various civilian governments in Pakistan have tried to mend fences with India, but the military has continued to adopt a hard line, intermittently allowing space for the civilian leadership to achieve some tactical gains through dialogue. The deeply ingrained attitudes of the religious right have also been influencing the behaviour of the military and are not likely to undergo any drastic change in the near future. The military, on its part, has tried to keep the Kashmir issue alive through cross-border violations, which are invariably linked to sending infiltrators into Kashmir, in order to internationalise the Kashmir issue.

After the elections, though Imran Khan highlighted the importance of trade ties with India during his victory speech, he reiterated that "Kashmir is a core issue."⁶⁰ This was in keeping with the goals mentioned in his party

⁵⁹ Sanaullah Khan, NSC Orders Acceleration of Anti-Terrorism Ops; Reinstates Ban on JuD, Charity Arm FIF", *Dawn*, February 21, 2019 at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1465212> (Accessed May 10, 2019); for notification see Government of Pakistan, National Counter Terrorism Authority, Islamabad at <https://www.nacta.gov.pk> (Accessed May 10, 2019).

⁶⁰ "Imran Khan's Speech in Full: Transcript of the Victory Speech by PTI Chairman", *Al Jazeera*, July 26, 2018, at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/imran-khan-speech-full-180726124850706.html>. (Accessed July 30, 2018).

manifesto that had earmarked “the resolution of the Kashmir dispute” as one of Pakistan’s “core national interests”.⁶¹ This makes it obvious that his thinking is very closely aligned to that of the military in Pakistan. Initial attempts to defreeze the relationship by both sides only ended in a reiteration of their well-known positions.

Both the countries have initiated the process of opening up a new route allowing Sikh pilgrims to visit the other country and negotiations are being held in this regard. The new route will allow Sikh pilgrims from India to visit Gurdwara Darbar Sahib in Kartarpur, Pakistan. The corridor would also enable Sikh pilgrims from Pakistan to visit the Dera Baba Nanak Gurdwara in Gurdaspur, India. India and Pakistan discussed details regarding operationalisation of the Kartarpur Corridor at Attari on March 14, 2019. This was followed up by a discussion between technical experts of both sides on March 19, 2019 at the proposed “zero points” i.e. the points at which the Indian and Pakistani side of the corridor will meet. Another meeting of experts and technicians was held on April 16. India had earlier called off talks which were to be held on April 2, 2019 due to concerns that alleged supporters of Khalistan separatists had been included in a committee dealing with the corridor by Pakistan.⁶² Apart from this, there is not much hope that any meaningful progress will occur in India–Pakistan relations anytime soon.

The attack on the CRPF convoy by JeM militants on February 14, 2019 yet again underscores the fact that Pakistan continues its strategy of destabilising India and that it does not serve its purpose to wind down its reliance on terror infrastructure. India’s aerial counter attack on Balakot on February 26 called the bluff of escalation to the nuclear level in case India resorted to a conventional attack.

A dossier with details about the JeM’s involvement in the Pulwama attack, and the presence of JeM camps and top cadre in Pakistan was handed

⁶¹ Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Manifesto 2018, “The Road to Naya Pakistan”, p. 54.

⁶² “India Conveys Concerns to Pakistan over Presence of Khalistani Separatists on Kartarpur Panel”, *The Hindu*, March 29, 2019.

over to Pakistan. The ground level position stated by India with regard to its attitude towards Pakistan i.e. no dialogue unless there is “verifiable” action by Pakistan against terrorism remains the same even after the re-election of Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India. There has been an exchange of warmly worded letters between the Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of Pakistan and India after the Indian election but there has been no indication on the part of India that there will be an unconditional dialogue with Pakistan in the near future.

OPENING UP TO RUSSIA

One of the trends in Pakistan’s foreign policy has been improvement of relations with Russia. Pakistan’s relations with Russia during the Cold War were characterised by mutual distrust verging on hostility. The Islamic state’s aversion for communism and the communist state’s perception of Pakistan as an ally of the US did not allow them to come closer. Russia’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan’s stewardship of the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan reinforced the antagonism between the two countries. Russia’s close diplomatic and military ties with India and reluctance to engage with Pakistan also played a role in creating distance between them.

While the possibility of the two countries being able to engage deeply with each other may have seemed remote some time back, both Pakistan and Russia have been recently faced with certain developments which induced rethinking on their part. India’s cosying up to America and signing a nuclear deal with it in 2008 as part of a strengthened strategic partnership was not received well by Russia. Pakistan’s relationship with the US has been faltering due to its inability to take credible action against terrorists based in Pakistan and carrying on insurgency in Afghanistan. A resurgent Russia, meanwhile, is making efforts to re-establish itself as a major power on the world stage and is actively involved in trying to expand its sphere of influence by broadening its footprint in South Asia as well. Russia has, of late, shown interest in working together with Pakistan on multiple fronts and Pakistan is enthusiastically making full use of the opportunity to recreate its ties with Russia.

The first major sign of the changing dynamics between the two countries was the signing of the defence cooperation agreement in November 2014.

The wide-ranging agreement, which included “exchange of information on politico-military issues; cooperation for promoting international security; intensification of counter-terrorism and arms control activities; strengthening collaboration in various military fields...and sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations”, was signed in Islamabad during the visit of Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu on November 20, 2014.⁶³ This agreement took place in the backdrop of Russia’s annexation of Crimea and military intervention in Ukraine, which had led to tensions with the West. During this visit, discussions also took place on tackling the problems of international terrorism and drug trafficking jointly.⁶⁴

Russia’s concerns about terrorism stem from fears that such problems could spill over to the regions in its “periphery”, which had already been the target of terrorism from time to time. As such, besides initiatives at the bilateral level, Russia supported the inclusion of Pakistan as a full member of the SCO.⁶⁵ While China’s support for Pakistan’s candidature was never in doubt, the support of Russia also underscored its rising perception of Pakistan as an important actor in mitigating the problem of terrorism in the region. Pakistan was formally inducted into the SCO at the summit held in Astana on June 9, 2017.⁶⁶

Pakistan benefitted from the Russian perception that India was slowly and surely moving into the US embrace and was attempting to diversify its weapons imports. This perceived shift, along with Russia’s need to bolster its defence exports, made Russia look for alternative options. Pakistan fit the bill as a new destination for Russian defence equipment.⁶⁷ Russia’s reluctance to cooperate with Pakistan on military matters over the decades,

⁶³ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, Russia Sign Landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement”, *Dawn*, November 21, 2014, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1145875>. (Accessed August 4, 2018).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ “Pakistan Joins Security Bloc Led by China, Russia”, *Dawn*, June 10, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1338647>. (Accessed August 4, 2018).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Sanjay Pulipaka, “Russia’s New Approach to Pakistan: All About Arms Sales”, *The Diplomat*, September 28, 2016, at <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/russias-new-approach-to-pakistan-all-about-arms-sales/>. (Accessed August 4, 2018).

keeping Indian concerns in mind, gave way to a willingness to part with advanced military systems to Pakistan. Pakistan, on its part, is widening its options given its constantly conflictual relationship with the US which has been one of its major supplier of arms. The Pakistan Army Aviation Corps received four Mi-35M “Hind E” attack helicopters worth US\$ 153 million from Russia in August 2017 as per a deal signed in August 2015.⁶⁸

Besides the transfer of weapons, both the countries have also undertaken joint military exercises. For instance, the Pakistan Army and Russian Army undertook a joint training exercise (Druzhiba-III) in Pakistan in October–November 2018.⁶⁹ Previously, the special forces of Pakistan and Russia conducted a joint exercise in November 2017, which focused on counter-terrorism operations, hostage and rescue, and cordon and search operations.⁷⁰ Their first joint military exercise was held in September–October 2016. It has also been agreed that troops from Pakistan will receive training at Russian military institutes. This decision was taken during the first meeting of the Russia–Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee held in Islamabad in August 2018.⁷¹ An MoU for naval cooperation has also been signed between the two countries in July 2018.⁷²

⁶⁸ Gabriel Dominguez, “Russia Delivers Four Mi-35M Helos to Pakistan, Says Report”, *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, August 30, 2017, at <https://www.janes.com/article/73439/russia-delivers-four-mi-35m-helos-to-pakistan-says-report>. (Accessed August 4, 2018).

⁶⁹ “Russian Forces Arrive in Pakistan for Third Joint-Military Drill”, *The Economic Times*, October 22, 2018, at <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russian-forces-arrive-in-pakistan-for-third-joint-military-drill/articleshow/66315007.cms>. (Accessed January 10, 2019).

⁷⁰ “Druzba 2017: Pakistan, Russia Hold Anti-Terror Exercise”, *The Express Tribune*, September 25, 2017, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1515661/pakistan-russia-begin-military-drills/>. (Accessed August 4, 2018).

⁷¹ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Accord with Russia Signed for Training of Pakistani Troops”, *Dawn*, August 8, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1425673>. (Accessed January 10, 2019).

⁷² Maqbool Malik, “Pakistan, Russia Sign MoU for Naval Cooperation”, *The Nation*, August 1, 2018, at <https://nation.com.pk/01-Aug-2018/pakistan-russia-sign-mou-for-naval-cooperation>. (Accessed January 10, 2019).

Earlier, it was speculated that Russia turned down the transfer of Su-35 jets to Pakistan as they were more advanced than the Su-30 MKI which had been sold to India.⁷³ While this may or may not be true, Russia's defence cooperation with Pakistan is likely to proceed within certain limits.

Pakistan and Russia seem to have developed convergence of interests in another strategically important area, which is the support for Afghan Taliban. Russian fears due to the increasing presence of the IS in Afghanistan and its potential to create trouble in the Central Asian Republics has led it to support the Taliban to effectively counter the IS. Russia is also found to be supporting the peace process in Afghanistan in a bid to reconcile the differences between the Taliban and the Afghan Government.⁷⁴ Moscow hosted talks between the Taliban and the High Peace Council of Afghanistan in November 2018. It then facilitated a meeting between the Taliban and Afghan opposition leaders in February 2019. In May end Russia again hosted talks between the Taliban and senior Afghan politicians, including those who may be challenging Ghani in the presidential elections to be held in September 2019. Pakistan would naturally encourage such Russian efforts towards reconciliation.

Russia also acknowledges, to a certain extent, that Pakistan is playing a positive role in combating terrorism. This is significant at a time when it is in the dock vis-à-vis the US in this respect. Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, visited not only China but also Russia⁷⁵ to garner support after being castigated by President Trump for not doing enough to counter terrorism. Both Beijing and Moscow were critical of the US position on Pakistan and were of the opinion that not only should Pakistan's vital role for peace in Afghanistan be recognised but also the

⁷³ "Russia Turns Down Pak Request for Su-35 Jet Buy; Russian Media", *Defense World*, November 15, 2015, at http://www.defenseworld.net/news/17658/Russia_Turns_Down_Pak_Request_For_Su_35_jet_Buy__Russian_Media#.W2zBgEIrZnI. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁴ Uzair Younus, "Pay Attention to Russia's South Asia Strategy", *The Diplomat*, June 7, 2018, at <http://thediplomat.com/2018/06/pay-attention-to-russia-s-south-asia-strategy/>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁵ Pakistan's Foreign Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif went to China in September 2017 and to Russia in February 2018.

sacrifices made by it in the fight against terrorism.⁷⁶ In February 2018, Russia named an honorary consul to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, bordering Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, where the IS has established a strong presence. Mohammad Arsallah Khan, belonging to an influential business family in north-west Pakistan, is expected to promote commercial ties with Russia in the hope that such ties would help tackle the problem of terrorism.⁷⁷

Some developments pertaining to economic cooperation between Pakistan and Russia, particularly in the energy sector, have also been witnessed recently. An MoU was signed in June 2018 between the ministries of energy of both the countries for a feasibility study for the installation of an undersea gas pipeline.⁷⁸ Besides, an agreement for the construction of North–South gas pipeline was signed by the two countries in October 2015. The gas pipeline, with a capacity of 12.4 billion cubic metres per year and stretching over 1,100 kilometre, is expected to join the liquefied natural gas terminals at Karachi Port with Lahore. While commissioning was planned for 2018, there have been delays due to disagreements over the gas transit tariff.⁷⁹ The two countries have also been conducting negotiations for upgradation of a 600 megawatt (MW) gas-fired power plant at Jamshoro with Russian investment.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Asif to Embark on Three-Nation Tour to Discuss US Policy”, *Dawn*, August 26, 2017, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1354043>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁷ “Analysis: Why is Russia Warming Up to Pakistan?”, *Dawn*, February 27, 2018, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1392060>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁸ “Pakistan, Russia Ink MoU to Conduct Feasibility Study for Undersea Gas Pipeline”, *Pakistan Today*, June 8, 2018, at <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/06/08/pakistan-russia-ink-mou-to-conduct-feasibility-study-for-undersea-gas-pipeline/>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁷⁹ “Russia’s Rostec Set to Launch Construction of North–South Gas Pipeline in Pakistan in 2018”, *TASS*, April 27, 2018, at <http://tass.com/economy/1002160>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁸⁰ Khaleeq Kiani, “Russia to Join CASA-1000, Set Up 600MW Plant in Jamshoro”, *Dawn*, October 6, 2016, at <https://www.dawn.com/news/1288247>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

Pakistan has also invited Russia to join the CASA-1000 project by transmitting thermal energy from Russia to Pakistan on transmission lines which would be available during periods of low hydel electricity transmission from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁸¹ Further, Pakistan's strategic location could enable it to play a central role in future regional connectivity projects that may come about as a result of the expected merger of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) with the Eurasian Economic Union.⁸²

The improvement of Pakistan's relations with Russia certainly boosted its morale at a time when Pakistan's economy was in a bad shape and its international image had taken a beating because of its abetment of terrorism. However, it remains to be seen whether Russia will go the whole hog in meeting Pakistan's demands in various fields given Russia's relations with India and the competition that it would face from the US in this region. Pakistan offered a "multidimensional strategic partnership" to Russia in May 2018.⁸³ Most recently, a convergence of views was apparent as Pakistan and Russia signed a joint statement on 'No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space' on the sidelines of the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting held at Bishkek in May 2019.⁸⁴

It must be noted that Pakistan's opening up to Russia and the multidimensional relationship outlined above are very significant

⁸¹ Zafar Bhutta, "Pakistan Invites Russia to Join CASA-1000", *The Express Tribune*, October 6, 2016, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1194194/bolstering-cooperation-pakistan-invites-russia-join-casa-1000/>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁸² Gregory Shtraks, "Next Steps in the Merger of the Eurasian Economic Union and the Belt and Road Initiative", The Jamestown Foundation, *China Brief*, Vol. 18, No. 11, June 19, 2018, at <https://jamestown.org/program/next-steps-in-the-merger-of-the-eurasian-economic-union-and-the-belt-and-road-initiative/>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁸³ Kamran Yousaf, "Pakistan Offers Russia 'Strategic Partnership' for the First Time", *The Express Tribune*, May 2, 2018, at <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1700256/1-pakistan-offers-russia-strategic-partnership-first-time/>. (Accessed August 6, 2018).

⁸⁴ "Pakistan, Russia Join Hands to Prevent Outer Space Becoming Arena of Military Confrontation", *The Nation*, May 23, 2019, at <https://nation.com.pk/23-May-2019/pakistan-russia-join-hands-to-prevent-outer-space-becoming-arena-of-military-confrontation> (Accessed May 27, 2019).

achievements in the overall foreign policy architecture of Pakistan. Nevertheless, it will have implications for India too in the long run. Keeping in mind the nature of India-Russia relations, Russia is likely to keep in mind Indian concerns as it develops its relationship with Pakistan. This is apparent from the Sochi summit between India and Russia in May 2018, which testified to the durability of India-Russia relations.

CONCLUSION

The trends in Pakistan's foreign policy noted here brings one to the conclusion that while Pakistan's geopolitical situation has given it certain advantages, its inability to control terrorism emanating from its soil has earned it the alienation of some major powers and the antipathy of its neighbours. It was Pakistan's strategic location which led the US to rope it in as a member of its alliance during the Cold War days and continue to rely on it to be the vanguard of the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. Again, it was because of its geographical location that China found it useful to cultivate it as a countervailing force against India. But Pakistan became a prisoner of its own excessive dependence on militant Islam as an instrument of its foreign policy, which prevented it from taking credible action against the Afghan Taliban operating from its territory. This led to disillusionment of the US with Pakistan, even though it continues to rely on Pakistan for certain limited purposes like peace talks with the Taliban.

As far as China is concerned, there is considerable degree of romanticism in its relationship with Pakistan. China hopes that Pakistan's dire need to countervail India with the help of China and to have a substitute for US as a source of economic and military aid would enable it to dominate Pakistan and use it as an extremely valuable strategic outpost. While this "higher than the mountains" friendship may seem tempting in the current circumstances and may even endure for a decade or two, it is likely to cut into Pakistan's sense of self-respect, sovereignty and strategic autonomy anytime in the future.

There is no doubt that Russia has entered as a new player in Pakistan's foreign policy structure with promises of defence cooperation and convergence of approach in the Afghanistan peace process. But Pakistan must also realise that when leading global players like the US, China and Russia enter a strategically important but a highly conflicted region like

Afghanistan–Pakistan, they have their own objectives to achieve. The interplay of their interests is more likely to make the entire region an object of their long-term competitive presence, rather than serving Pakistan's interests.

Pakistan's peace overtures to Afghanistan will depend for their success on the outcome of the settlement between the Afghan Government, the Taliban, the US and to some extent, China and Russia. The Afghan Government is not an independent actor because of its highly limited military and economic capability and excessive dependence on foreign forces. Therefore, Pakistan will not find it easy to normalise its relations with Afghanistan until a satisfactory peace settlement is arrived at, which will take time because of sharply conflicting interests of the parties involved.

As far as Pakistan's attitude towards India is concerned, there is no genuine step being taken which would give hope that India's demand for credible action against terrorists operating from Pakistan would be satisfactorily met. India's policy in the last three years has shown that it is not in a hurry to hold a dialogue with Pakistan unless there is any forward movement on its part. Dialogue for the sake of dialogue makes no sense. And in a situation when Pakistani militant groups have been mainstreamed to enable them to have a greater voice in Pakistan's power structure, there is no hope that the stalemate between Pakistan and India would be broken anytime soon.

Pakistan's most critical foreign policy concerns in the last few years relate to the deadlock in relations with India and India's success in isolating Pakistan regionally and internationally due to its support for terrorism. The success of its peace overtures to Afghanistan are constrained by various complexities arising out of the unpredictable situation in Afghanistan and the role of external powers like the US, China and Russia in the ongoing peace process. It has felt the impact of US dissatisfaction with its role in the war on terror with a reduction in economic assistance and security related aid and though it would like to believe that it can function independent of US patronage, it has discovered that it may not be easy to do so given the latter's diplomatic outreach and clout in international financial institutions. While Pakistan has continued to rely on China for diplomatic and economic gain, it will have to figure out how to maintain its sovereignty and strategic autonomy vis-à-vis China. Pakistan's relations with Russia have improved considerably given a convergence of interests, yet the extent to which this will expand Pakistan's strategic options remains to be seen. This paper explores such trends in Pakistan's relations with important countries and challenges it faces in the formulation of its foreign policy.

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