Chapter 5
India and China-Pak Axis: From India-Pak Wars to the Abrogation of Article 370

China–Pakistan axis has been a subject of continuous debate among think tanks and foreign policy formulators of India and beyond and is likely to remain so in the foreseeable future, for Pakistan is an important pivot in China’s containment of India. Though Wang Hongyu (Chen et.al. 1995, 139) and many other Chinese scholars continue to pronounce that China “does not hope to see discord between India and Pakistan, let alone reap the benefits of such a discord,” however, “iron brother” or “the all whether friend” of China has been an inalienable part of China’s strategic contours in South Asia. The hasty visits of Pakistani leadership to Beijing at the times of crisis with India reveal the depth and breadth of such a relationship.

1 Raison D’être for the Axis

What made China to establish such an entente from an Indian perspective is obvious—one, in the wake of Sino-Indian hostilities, China exploited India-Pakistan hostilities to its advantage; two, it diluted Pakistan as a US satellite in anti-communist alliance and stopped terrorism emanating from Pakistan into the restive Xinjiang. Conversely, when India strengthened its relationship with Russia and accorded high priority to its armed forces following the humiliating defeat in 1962, China accused India of “militarism” and wanted to keep Nehru’s sword “blunt” contrary to the following argument made by Wang Hongwei, a veteran India expert in China. According to Wang (1998, 264), “Nehru hated China for not giving him ‘face’ and ‘betraying his friendship.’ In Wang’s words, Nehru also grudged that the ‘sword’ in his hand was not sharp enough. While the ‘betrayal’ was beyond his control, however, the ‘sword’ could have been sharpened by strengthening national defences.” Interestingly, the concept of “face” is not an Indian notion, in other words, Wang is expressing the Chinese psyche, in fact it was China who thought Nehru did not give her a “face” and that it must take Pakistan under its wings, so that any attempt of Nehru to sharpen his “sword” is foiled.
A study compiled by Zhang (2008) and published by the Social Sciences Academy Press has refuted the Chinese claims that it does not want to see a discord between India and Pakistan let alone reap benefits of such a discord. Ye Hailin, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences confirms India’s assertions about the Sino-Pak axis. According to Ye (2008, 274–78), “in real terms, Sino-Pak relations turned hot from cold during early 1960s after the deterioration of Sino-Indian relations.” He defines Sino-Pak relationship as "mono-dimensional focussed at military security cooperation" and argues that “Sino-Pak cooperation is not endogenous, but revolves around external security concerns that is to counter India.” “This kind of cooperation, to a greater extent is due to the long rivalry of both Pakistan and China with India; as India for a long time has been number one enemy of Pakistan, and also poses major threat to the security of western China.” Therefore, “to keep away the common enemy is a decisive factor” in this relationship. In recent years, in the wake of China building the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the “one-dimensional” character of this relationship is bound to change as China wishes to make its pivot part of its economic security as well.

Now, this kind of definition of the Sino-Pak entente can be clearly gleaned through the historical as well as contemporary events. Let us examine the following:

### 1.1 India-Pakistan Wars

The worsening Sino-Indian relations in the wake of border dispute facilitated a Sino-Pak rapprochement, which according to India was a product of shared hostility towards India by these two countries. China accepted Pakistani proposal of 1961, which set to demarcate the boundary between Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) and China’s Xinjiang. Barely three months after the conclusion of 1962 War (2 March 1963), China concluded border agreement with Pakistan. The agreement was described as Sino-Pak border agreement concerning delimitation of China’s Xinjiang and the contiguous areas, the defence of which was under the actual control of Pakistan. The agreement was said to be temporary, and China would renegotiate the above border with relevant sovereign authority after the resolution of Kashmir dispute. In August 1963, China and Pakistan signed an agreement on aviation. In February and March 1965 both further signed agreements concerning cultural, economic and technological cooperation. There was frequent exchange at the highest level (Wang 1998, 269).

The Sino-Pak shared hostility towards India emboldened Pakistan to such an extent that Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan declared in the Pakistan National Assembly on 17 July 1963 that “In the event of war with India, Pakistan would not be alone. Pakistan would be helped by the most powerful nation in Asia (Ranganathan and Khanna 2000, 138).” China confirmed Pakistani claims during the 1965 Indo-Pak conflict when it created a “crisis” in Sikkim–Tibet border. According to Choudhury (1975, 189), director of research for Pakistan’s Foreign Office between 1967 and 1969, China assured Pakistan that it would respond to an
Indian attack on East Pakistan [present Bangladesh] not only in that area but also in the Himalayas.

In August 1965, Pakistan invaded Indian Kashmir and precipitated the Second Indo-Pak War in September 1965.\(^1\) China openly supported Pakistan and termed India as an aggressor. China further accused India of violating Sikkim-Tibet border and amassing forces near Sikkim border in a note of 2 September 1965. According to Wang (1998, 270, emphasis added), “China deemed it necessary to eject invader’s defences and actually supported Pakistan’s combat in the western front.” Ye (2008, 274) also support this view and says that “China staunchly supported Pakistan in its struggle for safeguarding territorial integrity.” At this point, it may be noted that in February 1979, when China invaded Vietnam, in a similar fashion it accused Vietnam of numerous incursions into China. It is an open fact that China’s invasion of Vietnam was meant to punish Vietnam for sending forces into Cambodia and destroying the Chinese supported Pol Pot regime through Soviet help. Replying to the Chinese note on 12 September, India termed Chinese accusations fictious and mischievous. It wrote that the demand of the Chinese Government to dismantle structures and to withdraw troops was meaningless as the Sikkim-Tibet border was the only section of the Sino-Indian border that was well defined. The Government of India even favoured investigations by an independent and neutral observer in this sector in order to witness the actual state of affairs (LDFO 1975, 221). As regards India’s “armed aggression against Pakistan,” India slammed China for distorting facts and recorded that it was Pakistan which committed aggression against India by sending out armed infiltrators into Kashmir across the ceasefire line and followed it up by a massive attack across the international boundary in the Chhamb area of the Indian state (now a union territory). India also cited the report of the Chief Military Observer of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan that had unequivocally stated that it was Pakistan, which violated the ceasefire line in Kashmir by sending thousands of armed infiltrators into Kashmir. This fact has also been acknowledged by the Chinese scholars and cited as the reason for outbreak of the war (Wang 1998, 269). On 16 September, China’s Foreign Office yet again notified Mehrotra, the Indian Charge d’Affairs in Beijing about the Indian violations and demanded that India dismantle all its defence structures which China considered were built on the Chinese side of the border within three days or else be responsible for all the consequences. Point three of the note touched on Kashmir and Pakistan and noted:

Supported by the United States imperialists and their partners, the Indian Government has always pursued a policy of chauvinism and expansionism towards its neighbouring countries. Its logic for aggression is that all places it has seized belong to it and that whatever place it wants to grab but has not yet done so also belonged to it. It was this logic, which motivated the large-scale armed attack the Indian Government launched against China in 1962, and it is

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\(^1\)In early 1965, Pakistani leaders adopted a plan to foment anti-Indian uprising in Kashmir. The plan code named “Operation Gibraltar” provided for training, arming and equipping large number of Pakistanis and infiltrating them into Indian Kashmir under regular Pakistani army officers. The plan is likely to be supported by Beijing as top Chinese leaders frequently visited Pakistan during this time. Moreover, the plan was synonymous with Mao’s strategy in Vietnam.
the same logic that motivates the massive armed attack it is now launching against Pakistan. The Chinese Government has consistently held that Kashmir question should be settled on the basis of the respect for Kashmiri people’s right to self-determination as pledged to them by India and Pakistan. This is what is meant by China’s non-involvement in the dispute between India and Pakistan, but non-involvement absolutely does not mean failure to distinguish between right and wrong. It absolutely does not mean that China can approve of depriving the Kashmiri people of their right of self-determination or that she can approve of Indian aggression against Pakistan on the pretense of Kashmir issue. Such was China’s stance in the past and it remains so at present. Yet some countries have acknowledged Kashmir as belonging to India. In that case how can one speak of their non-involvement in the dispute? The question now is that India has not only refused to recognize the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination, but has also openly launched an all-out attack against Pakistan. This cannot but arouse grave concern of the Chinese Government. Reason and justice must prevail in the world. So long as the Indian Government oppresses the Kashmiri people, China will not cease supporting Kashmiri people in their struggle for self-determination; so long as the Indian Government persists in its unbridled aggression against Pakistan, China will not cease supporting Pakistan in her just struggle against the aggression. This stand of ours will never change, however many helpers you may have such as the United States of America, the modern revisionists and the United States controlled United Nations (LDFO 1975, 224–25; Wang 1998, 270).

It is remarkable that China attempted to prove its “innocence” in 1962 by pointing out to the “innocence” of Pakistan in 1965 conflict with India. Forgetting its own territorial aggrandizement, it accused India of launching “unbridled aggression” against Pakistan for territorial grab. It rebuffed Indian demand for neutral observer in the Sikkim–Tibet border, for China expressed contempt for the United Nations and other “helpers” of India [The USA and Soviet Union]. On 15 April 1966, Chen Yi, the then Vice Premier of China remarked during a reception at Dacca in East Pakistan that “If Pakistan is again subjected to aggression, and so long as the Kashmiri people still suffer from suppression, China will continue to give them support (Peking Review 1966, 7).”

It is evident from Wang’s argument cited earlier that China was fomenting trouble with India merely to assist Pakistan. When the three-day Chinese deadline expired on 19 September, China in a note of 19 September extended the deadline to 22 September. On 20 September, an agreement on ceasefire was reached with Pakistan. Upon termination of the second three-day ultimatum to India, China announced that the terms of the ultimatum had been met, but India denied the Chinese assertion.

During the 1971 Indo-Pak hostilities and the creation of Bangladesh, China vehemently criticized India for interfering in Pakistan’s internal affairs and pledged support to Pakistan. It ridiculed the creation of Bangladesh and equated it with the creation of Manchukuo² by Japan in China’s northeast in 1932. On 5 December 1971, Huang Hua, in a draft resolution submitted to the UN, condemned India for

²Manchukuo [Manzhouguo]—the Manchu State—was created by the Japanese on 9 March 1932 with the last Qing emperor Pu Yi, deposed in 1912 as its Chief Executive in order to legitimize their aggression. Japan had claimed that Manzhouguo was a spontaneous development and the Japanese action in Manchuria was necessitated by self-defence. The Indian Viceroy Lytton headed the commission; commission’s report refuted the Japanese claims and refused to recognize the legality of Manzhouguo.
“creating a so-called Bangla Desh [Bangladesh] and subverting, dismembering and committing aggression against Pakistan.” China accused India of “big Indiaism” and creating the “so-called refugee problem” as a pretext for its “unbridled armed invasion against Pakistan.” Recalling the Tibetan revolt of 1959, the “commentator” of *Renmin Ribao* wrote on 6 December 1971 that “A decade back, didn’t the Indian reactionaries also create the ‘Tibetan refugee question’?” The “commentator” further remarked that when the “rebellion of serf-owners” failed [in Tibet], India “abducted” tens of thousands of Tibetans and made it as an excuse to carry out anti-Chinese activities.

After New Delhi’s recognition of independent Bangladesh, China once again minced no words to spit venom at India and the Soviet Union. The very fact that China stood as a moot spectator to the agony of its “all weather friend” in 1971 put it in a desperate situation. It could only mince the words like “What kind of nonsense is this Bangladesh?” Does India’s intervention mean that “its neighbours can send troops into India’s West Bengal, Punjab etc. and create a ‘West Bangla Desh’ or ‘Sikhstan’?” “The puppet ‘Bangla Desh’ imposed by the ‘Indian reactionaries’ will definitely come to no good end. “Large scale massacres are taking place in East Pakistan, now under Indian troops’ occupation (*Renmin Ribao* 8 December 1971; *Peking Review*, 31 December 1971a, 1971b, 14–15).”

Also, if we analyse Kargil coverage in the Chinese media, it had a definite pro-Pakistan tilt in contrast to China’s public pronouncements. *Wenhui Daily* of 7 June 1999 portrayed Pakistan as a peace-loving country whose resolve to solve the issue through peaceful means was spurned by India time and again. *Guangming Daily* of 9 June 1999 gave the same impression. It went on reporting to the extent that the Indian Air Force was bombarding positions inside Pakistani territory. The *Liberation Army Daily* commented with contempt in its 12 June 1999 issue that India was dreaming to be a military superpower and has been exposing its lethal weapons one after another. Yet in another article, the same paper made the following observations about India on 1 July 1999. Firstly, the Indian action in Kargil was a manifestation of its thinking that it was a world power. Secondly, India has been inspired by the NATO led attack on Yugoslavia, a lesson of winning through might. Thirdly, present political leadership was making political capital out of the issue. Li (1999) writing on Kargil in *Beijing Review* also gave the impression as if India was bent on escalating war, and only Pakistan was offering peace time and again. The Chinese must watch the interview of reputed Pakistani journalist Najam Sethi’s given to Geo News of Pakistan to know the entire truth (Sethi 2017).

In early 2019, in the wake of India’s air strikes on Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) training camp in Balakot, Pakistan the Chinese media was abuzz with all kind of reports and analysis, but one and all maintained that the source of the present tension between India and Pakistan was India holding Pakistan responsible for the Pulwama terror attack. They posit that India “without any real evidence” identified the Pakistani government as “behind-the-scenes manipulator” of the attack irrespective of the fact that “Pakistan has denied to have any track with the outfit.” Cheng Xizhong, a Senior

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3 Chinese media coverage of the Kargil conflict could also be found in *China Report*, Vol. 35, No. 4, October–December 1999: 527–545.
Research Fellow at the Chahar Institute, holds that India “unilaterally crossing the Line of Control” is solely responsible for the current tensions. According to him, “unilateral air strikes against the so-called ‘terror camp’ is a serious violation of the [ceasefire] agreement reached between India and Pakistan.” According to a CNR (China National Radio) Defence Time Military Observer, Fang Bing, the Indian airstrikes were not carried inside Pakistan but in the “Pakistan controlled Kashmir.” Chinese media bought Pakistan version that F-16 were not deployed, and that in the face of interception from the Chinese made JF17 (xiaolong or Thunder) the Indian Mirage fighters, prematurely emptied the ammo on a hilltop causing the “death” of ten trees and “did not achieve the desired effect.” Another article questions the $10 billion worth surgical strike by India, whose military assets have been “manufactured in thousand countries.” As regards the “retaliatory strikes” by Pakistan Air Force, the Chinese local media has all the praises for its third generation JF 17 successfully shooting down the “comparatively low grade MiG 21” which established the “superior features” of the Chinese aircraft and the “professional capabilities of the Pakistan pilots.” Some articles are even speculating that India and Pakistan are at the verge of fighting a fourth war, and that India’s only aircraft career Vikramaditya is eying at Karachi. Nevertheless, they say, so far “Pakistan has clearly gained an upper hand in the conflict initiated by India.” Even the loss of seven Indian Air Force personnel in an MI-17 crash was adjudged as a “big gain for Pakistan” in another headline. An article posted on the Tencent News titled “Is the US brazenly protecting India and unreasonably depriving our Iron Brother, Pakistan of its right to counterattack?” argues that “the US has not persuaded its two allies to stop the conflict in a fair and just manner. On the contrary, it has unreasonably demanded that the Iron Brother Pakistan “refrain from further military action”; to put it bluntly, the USA is asking Pakistanis “not to fight back” thus create a space for the Modi government to “win this war.” Obviously, Pakistan will not submit to India in accordance with the wishes of the USA, concludes the analyst (Deepak 2019a).

It could be discerned that though the mainstream English newspaper China Daily and Xinhua reported responsibly, however, various media outlets, especially the social media which cater to domestic consumption has reported the events otherwise. No wonder, right from the early 1960s when China formed entente cordiale with Pakistan, it has portrayed Pakistan as a victim in its domestic media even if the latter was an aggressor in all the wars it fought with India. Therefore, China sympathizing with Pakistan and its proxies the like LeT and JeM should not be surprising.

### 1.2 China’s Military Assistance to Pakistan

After forging an entente with Pakistan, China became the largest supplier of weapons to Pakistan. After Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it joined hands with the USA in arming Pakistan and various jihadi outfits. The sole object of the Chinese strategy was and still remains to exploit Indo-Pak hostility to its advantage. It is reported that from 1953 to 1977, China extended approximately $3.8 billion in aid to Asian
states. Vietnam, North Korea, Pakistan and Cambodia were the major recipients of China’s largesse, receiving a total of $2.8 billion in aid (Harding 1984, 128). Since most of these countries were dictatorial and engaged in conflicts, the chunk of the aid obviously was for military purposes. In the 1970s, China provided some 500 T-59 main battle tanks, 25 naval vassals and 300 F-6 combat aircrafts in a $600 million program. The Chinese also constructed a tank repair factory at Taxila and an air force repair factory at nearby Kamra (Talbot 1998, 224). The SIPRI also confirms these reports in its yearbooks throughout the 1970s. Between 1970 and 1976, out of $537 million Chinese weapon exports, a whopping 46 were supplied to Pakistan (SIPRI 1978, 226). In another gesture, China deferred for twenty years’ payment on a 1970 loan worth $200 million and wrote off another $110 million in earlier loans. Chinese shipment of tanks, jet fighters, trucks and small arms helped Pakistan rebuild its shattered armed forces. Citing John F. Copper, Garver (2001, 234–35) reveals that during the mid 1980s, Pakistan alone received $1 billion aid from China. Pakistan became heavily dependent on China.

In the 1980s, China showed great enthusiasm in modernizing Pakistan’s armed forces. It was in a better position now, as the economic reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping after Mao’s demise had started yielding dividends. Moreover, in 1980, the Carter administration issued 400 licences to China, majority of them were for the export of military technology, covering radars, electronics, transport aircrafts and helicopters (SIPRI 1981, 181). The Indian Express revealed on 30 December 1983 that Pakistan air force had been strengthened during 1982–83 with the induction of Chinese A-5 and F-6 aircrafts belonging to MiG-19 family. China started supplying these aircrafts to Pakistan since 1965, and by 1983 Pakistan had accumulated some 200. There were also about 32 Saab MF-17 trainer aircrafts, called Mashraq by Pakistan. These aircrafts costing some $1.6 million each have been built at the factory set-up with Chinese help at the capital cost of $30 million at the Pakistan aeronautical complex at Kamra. Yet in another report of 4 February 1990, the Indian Express reported that between 1978 and 1988, China supplied Pakistan with 825 T-59 tanks. Between 1988 and 1992, China further supplied 98 F-5As and 40 F-7 fighter jets. During the 1980s, added to the list were Q-5 Fantan; between 1982 and 83 alone, Pakistan ordered 162 such fighters (SIPRI 1984, 252; 1984, 411). Since 1970, China made it a point to supply Pakistan 50 T-59 battle tanks every year. Besides, submarines, surface to air missiles and Hainan Class FAC, Karakorum—eight jet trainers’ aircrafts, F-7 airguard fighters were in Pakistan’s inventory from China.

During the 1990s, the supply continued unhindered. When the USA suspended the sale of 71 F-16 to Pakistan, China readily cooperated with Pakistan in a joint development of FC-1 fighter plane thought to be equivalent of F-16 and fitted with Russian engine (Hindustan Times 27 June 1995). In 1999 alone, Pakistan ordered from China 100 F-7MG fighter aircraft (SIPRI 2000, 409). In 2002, China supplied 40 F-7MG fighter aircrafts out of an estimated order of 80 fighters. It also supplied three Type-347 fire control radar for three Jalalat-2 Class FAC produced in Pakistan, 24 C-802/CSS-N-8 Saccade anti-ship missiles for three Jalalat-2 class FAC and agreed to develop 150 FC-1 FGA aircraft to be duly delivered in 2003. Between 1994 and 2001, China delivered Pakistan 550 QW-1 Vanguard portable surface to air missiles
(called by Pakistan as Anza-2), and between 1990 and 2001 China supplied Pakistan 8,600 Red Arrow (called Baktar Shikan by Pakistan) anti-tank missiles (SIPRI 2002, 235).

Presently, China and Pakistan are jointly producing the JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft, which was introduced in 2011. In 2016, Beijing agreed to sell Pakistan eight modified Yuan-class diesel-electric attack submarines believed in operation by 2028 in a deal valued at between US$4 billion and US$5 billion (Wong 2018). SIPRI data shows that in the past 10 years (2008–18), China has supplied weapons worth over $6.4 billion to Pakistan, with the USA coming a distant second at $2.5 billion (Pubby 2019). Pakistani military is increasingly inducting Chinese platforms in the sea, air and on land, the military interoperability of the two, backed by common platforms has thrown challenges to India’s strategic choices.

1.3 Nuclear and Missile Proliferation

Worse than supplying conventional weaponry to Pakistan is China’s role in helping Pakistan to acquire nuclear weapons, which has raised serious concerns about China’s part in fostering instability in South Asia. It is believed that since the 1970s, China has been instrumental in Pakistan’s nuclear and missile programs. China provided Pakistan with highly enriched uranium, ring magnets necessary for processing uranium and training for nuclear engineers. Pakistan’s nuclear bomb, in fact, is widely believed to be based on Chinese blueprints. Worse, in 1990 and 1992, China provided Pakistan with nuclear-capable M-11 [DF-11] missiles that have a range of 186 miles. China reportedly has provided Pakistan technology to build a missile that could strike targets within a 360-mile range. New York Times of 4 June 1998 reported that China, a staunch ally of Pakistan, provided blueprints for the bomb, as well as highly enriched uranium, tritium, scientists and key components for a nuclear weapons production complex, among other crucial tools. Without China’s help, Pakistan’s bomb would not exist, remarked Gary Milhollin, a leading expert on the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The world was shocked when A. Q. Khan, the “father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb” was found guilty of running a clandestine nuclear proliferation network, and transferring nuclear technology to Iran, Libya and North Korea. On 31 January 2004, Khan was stripped of his position as advisor of the prime minister. On 3 February 2004, Pakistan formally charged four of its nuclear scientists and security officials with transferring nuclear technology to other countries at the behest of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the basis of latter’s probe into Iran’s nuclear programme. The very next day, A. Q. Khan accepted “full responsibility for all illegal transfer of technology and sought clemency from President Pervez Musharraf, which Musharraf granted on 9th February 2004 (The Hindu, February 4 and 10, 2004).” The confession and pardon charade apart, the long-suspected role of China transferring nuclear technology to Pakistan was confirmed when the designs of nuclear weapons that Libya obtained from Pakistan were found to be originated in China. According to
the reports (The Hindu 16 February 2004), “the packets of documents which included some texts in Chinese were detailed with step-by-step instructions for assembling an implosion type nuclear bomb that could be fitted atop a ballistic missile.” The wholesale transfer of nuclear technology with documentary details sent shockwaves across the globe as the experts from USA, UK and the IAEA scrutinized the documents turned over by Libya to the USA.

China’s clandestine role has been confirmed by none other than A Q Khan in a letter to his Dutch wife Henny, which has been procured by a journalist called Siman Henderson and revealed to media albeit a few paragraphs from it in September 2009. This “leak” confirms China as one of the most dangerous proliferators of nuclear technology in the world and that also to rouge and dictatorial regimes, thus denigrate China as a responsible nuclear power beyond doubt. According to the letter published in the Sunday Times on 20 September, “we [Pakistan] put up a centrifuge plant at Hanzhong (250 km southwest of Xian). The Chinese gave us drawings of the nuclear weapon, gave us 50 kg of enriched uranium, gave us 10 tons of UF6 (natural) and 5 tons of UF6 (3%)”. These are the words of none other than the “father of Pakistan’s nuclear bomb” and confirms China arming Pakistan to realize its strategy of pinning down India to South Asia by hook or crook. Citing the report, Raman (2009), former Additional Secretary of Cabinet Secretariat maintains that “…the disclosures in AQ Khan’s letter of details of the Chinese assistance in developing an atomic bomb for possible use against India would add to the suspicions and fears in the Indian civil society over what they see as China’s malevolent attitude towards India.”

2 Nuclear Detonations in the Subcontinent

Exactly 24 years before the 1998 explosion, when India exploded its first nuclear device, China nervously visualized the end of the status quo in South Asian power equations. The test was viewed by Beijing as a tool to subdue its “all-weather friend” Pakistan and nuclear blackmail and nuclear threat to South Asia. It was after the Indian nuclear test in 1974 that China thought it is necessary to nuclearize Pakistan. In the words of Garver (2001, 327), given the greater disparity in Indian and Pakistan power after 1971, a “fourth round” with India using its overwhelming power to subordinate Pakistan decisively may have seemed more likely to China. In such a scenario, Beijing would face “the unpleasant choice of intervening to save Pakistan, thereby assuming the cost of another war with India, or doing nothing while its key south Asian ally was reduced to impotence. Support for Pakistan’s nuclear programme averted such a choice by diminishing the likelihood that India would opt for a decisive war against Pakistan.

Therefore, in 1998 when India went nuclear, it showed a similar nervousness and aggressiveness towards India for creating ruptures in its power equations as reflected in Zhang Wenmu’s article of 23 September 1998 in Ta Kong Pao, a mouthpiece of the PRC published from Hong Kong:
What India is playing at present seems to be the risky game that Germany, Japan, and Italy played in the 1930s and 1940s and Iraq played in the 1980s and 1990s. On the issue of India’s nuclear test and hegemonic behavior in South Asia, the West seems to be repeating the mistake they made in the 1930s when they pursued an ‘appeasement policy’ and tried to ‘shift the peril eastward.’ If the fact that Japan’s starting the ‘18 September incident in 1931,’ Germany’s sending troops into the non-military zone on the Rhine in 1936, and Italy’s annexing Ethiopia were actions not contained by an international effort, marked the beginning of the end of the Versailles—Washington Treaty System, then the mushroom cloud rising once again above South Asia is an open challenge to the forces that try to maintain the system of International treaties in the age of peace and development.

However, some Chinese scholars have pointed out that had India adopted a little cautious approach, the new negative factor [the problem of nuclear weapons] in Sino-Indian relations could have been avoided (Sun 2000, 360).

China having felt the dilution of its entente with Pakistan in the wake of Indian explosions was at loss. It encouraged Pakistan to conduct its own tests, so as the entente is sustained at any cost. The New York Times on 21st May reported Mr. Ahmed as saying that China would not impose economic sanctions should Pakistan conduct a nuclear test. When asked by reporters whether China had also asked Pakistan not to go nuclear, Ahmed replied. “China has not asked us to do anything which is not in our national interest (Dawn, 21st May 1998).” Finally, as put by Zhao (2000, 378), “Pakistan hesitated for a moment and after two weeks of observation detonated its nuclear devices on 27th and 30th May 1998.” Paying a lip service to the Pakistan’s nuclear tests, China Daily on 29 May quoted Zhu Bangzao saying that China expresses its deep regret over Pakistan’s nuclear test. The English mouthpiece of the CPC quoted Zhu under the headlines “Pakistan Evens Nuclear Account: Sharif.” After the tests, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif praised China for its support during “this hour of crisis” and said Pakistan was proud of its great neighbor (Dawn, 29 May 1998).

3 Cross Border Terrorism and China

Owing to its nexus with Pakistan, China always viewed cross-border terrorism in the subcontinent through Pakistani prism. It is for this reason that since 2009 or post 26.11 Mumbai terror attack by Pakistan based terror outfits like Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) that China has come to the rescue of kingpins of these notorious outfits like Hafiz Saeed, Zaki-ur-Rehman Lakhavi, and Masood Azhar by exercising technical hold for ‘want of evidences’ against them. It was only in 2019 when other countries of the UN threatened to bring the matter for open discussion in the UN that China went on to declare Masood Azhar as an international terrorist. China demands more evidences from India when it is known to the entire world that one of the perpetrators of the 26/11 Mumbai attack, Ajmal Kasab, a Pakistani national was caught alive and later sentenced to death. It is unbelievable
that China does not know about Masood Azhar, the leader of the JeM created by Pakistan’s Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) in the wake of 1999 hijack of AI flight 814 to Kandahar by Harkat-ul-Mujahideen (HuM) of which Masood was a member then and confined to imprisonment in India. The terrorists had then demanded release of Masood and others languishing in the Indian prisons in exchange of civilians in the passenger aircraft. So, what are the real reasons behind China’s support to these terrorists?

First and foremost, the JeM and LeT etc. terror outfits have been created by Pakistan with the motive to separate Kashmir from India and flare up insurgency there and elsewhere in India. Since China doesn’t recognise Ladakh and Kashmir as parts of India, therefore, disturbances there serve the Chinese purpose of helping Pakistan in the conflict and force India to fight the proxy war. It is for the same reason, how the Chinese press absolved Pakistan from 26.11 Mumbai terror attacks and blamed it on some ‘Hindu fundamentalists’ as Kasab and others were supporting the Hindu sacred thread on their wrists. Secondly, China’s axis with Pakistan, at least since the advocacy of ‘Belt and Road Initiative’ is not limited to the so-called ‘mono-dimensional’ military security cooperation but goes beyond, especially the maritime and energy security which is evident from the Chinese commitment to invest $71 billion in building the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. India not supplying enough “evidences” to China on all the occasions is a mere excuse, and the real Chinese intention as argued by three Chinese experts in an article published in the *Global Times* becomes obvious. According to Liu Zongyi, a senior fellow at the Shanghai Institute for International Studies, “if New Delhi succeeds in having both the JeM and its leader blacklisted [read with China’s support] Islamabad would be branded as a state sponsor of terrorism and isolated on the international stage.” The scholar also says that China’s “technical strategy” is to question India’s definition of terrorism. Implying that China sees the issue of terrorism with the prism of Pakistan, i.e., to differentiate between the good and bad terrorists. Another scholar, Long Xingchun, a non-resident fellow at Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies says that if China supports India’s position, it will repudiate its own previous position of technical hold leaving the impression that China was “deliberately blocking India’s bid in the past.” Zhang Jiadong, Director of Centre for South Asian Studies, Fudan University, is perhaps hinting at the Tibetan émigré, when he says that “Many anti-China terrorists organizations and their leaders are still active in many countries and regions and are sometimes treated as guests” an obvious reference that China must not support India when “Tibetan separatists” are operating from India (GT 2019).

4 China–Pakistan Economic Corridor

The “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI) was propounded by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. The “Belt” refers to Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) that aims to integrate China’s westward development strategy with the Eurasian landmass. The “Road” refers to the Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR) connecting
China with Africa and Europe by ocean. The BRI envisages to absorb China’s capital and overcapacities through five major goals identified as promoting policy coordination, facilitating connectivity, uninterrupted trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonding.

In order to facilitate the above “five connectivity goals,” China identified six major economic corridors along the BRI for a new type of regional development model. These are China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC); New Eurasia Land Bridge; China, Mongolia, Russia Economic Corridor; China Central Asia Economic Corridor; China, Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor; and China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC). The CMEC was added to the list during the Second Forum on BRI in 2019 replacing Bangladesh, China, India, Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM). Of these, CPEC has been considered as the flagship in which China has committed to pump more than $70 billion. China initially committed $46 billion to the CPEC, gradually enhancing the investment to $62 billion and then to $73 billion at present (Live Mint 2017; TRT World 2020). The signing of the CPEC in 2015, especially some of the projects like the Gwadar Port, an oil pipeline from Gwadar to Kashgar, and hydel projects in Gilgit Blatistan instantly changed the behaviour of the Indian government, as all these projects were being executed by China in the Indian claimed territory of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. India’s lukewarm approach to the BRI on account of not been consulted by China prior to declaring the BCIM as a part of the BRI now turned to aggressive opposition to the project. India’s sensitivities related to sovereignty were spelled out by the then India’s Foreign Secretary, S. Jaishankar during the sidelines of India-China restructured strategic dialogue in 2017. Jaishankar said (2017), “The fact that China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is part of this particular initiative. CPEC violates Indian sovereignty because it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).”

If the proceedings of the CPEC are correlated with other hubs and spokes of China’s pivot to Asia, India will not buy the Chinese argument (Lin 2017) that “ if India looks at the Chinese initiative from the prism of geopolitics, its connotations becomes entirely different.” They are bound to become different if China has plans to connect G219 Lhasa–Kashgar highway to G314 Karakoram highway at Shaksgam (area ceded to China by Pakistan in 1963) Pass, then India’s fear about China having DBO base as well as Siachin in its strategic calculus comes true. Therefore, China’s incursions in the Western sector in May 2020 that resulted in bloody clashes at Patrolling Point 14 in Galwan could be regarded as China doing a Kargil the way Pakistan did it in 1999. Despite of the massive deployment from both the sides, the stand-off has not resulted in a conflict like Kargil, nonetheless, if China remains insensitive to India’s sensitivities, the conflict may escalate to new proportion.

5 Abrogation of Article 370 by India

The Article 370 of the Indian Constitution that accorded special status to Jammu and Kashmir was abrogated by the president of India on 6 August 2019 after both
the houses of the parliament passed a motion revoking the status and bifurcating the state into two union territories. The abrogation invited strongest reactions from both Pakistan and China. Reacting to the abrogation and bifurcation, Hua Chunying, the spokeswoman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) told during a press briefing on 6 August that “China has always opposed the Indian side’s transfer of Chinese territory in the western sector of the Sino-Indian border into the administrative jurisdiction of India. This position is firm and consistent and has never changed. Recently, the Indian side has continued to damage China’s territorial sovereignty by unilaterally modifying the domestic law. This practice is unacceptable and will not have any effect. We urge the Indian side to be cautious on the border issue, strictly abide by the relevant agreements reached between the two sides, and avoid taking actions that further complicate the border issue” (Deepak 2019).

The statement of the MOFA was not all, Chinese media was set ablaze by rhetoric like “India unilaterally annexes Chinese territory of Ladakh, which equals 7 Shanghais (some said 40 Hong Kongs) into the Indian political map. Even the Chinese scholarship on India scrambled for varied explanations.” According to Hu Shisheng (2019) of China Institute of Contemporary International Relations, the move is aimed at “strengthening effective control,” “establishing a strong image” and the “promotion and revival of Hindu nationalism.” Hu is of the view that some politicians and elites whose rights have been compromised may encourage the people to engage in violent activities; moderates may join hands with the radicals; and some extremist forces seeking independence may even create terrorist attacks; however, he believes that ultimately normalcy would be restored.

Zhao (2019), a researcher with Shanghai Institute of International Studies in an article titled, “Indian Government is carried away by populism” takes a more aggressive line. Reiterating position of the Chinese government, he says that the Indian move “undermined the status quo of the disputed western sector of China and India, which has caused great concern to China.” Zhao does not claim entire Ladakh as Chinese territory, but does mention that it was a “subsidiary of Tibet in history.” He also makes mention of the 33,000 km² disputed Aksai Chin under the Chinese jurisdiction. According to him, by amending the constitution and creating the union territory of Ladakh, India has “obviously unilaterally changed the status quo of the disputed boundary in the Western sector.” Zhao either is ill informed about the history of the region or is deliberately brushing aside the instrument of accession, when he says that India annexed some parts of Kashmir following the India–Pakistan conflict. According to him, the carving of a new union territory is an “affront to China.” He says that in 1987, Indian government created the so-called Arunachal Pradesh in a similar fashion. Wang (2020) a researcher at the China Institute of Contemporary International relations has even attributed the abrogation of the article 370 to the bloodshed in Galwan and says that it has “dramatically increased the difficulty in resolving the border issue between China and India.”

Another article written by Lan (2019) of China Institute of International Studies on 15 August in China Daily opines that the abrogation of the Article 370 has opened a “Pandora’s box” and that “India’s unilateral move to fundamentally change the administrative division of the region and seize Pakistani and Chinese territories has
angered its two neighbours and invited strong reactions from both.” Voicing concerns of the Kashmiris that the move will change the demography of the region, he attributes it as a “careless move” while ignoring China’s own demographic changes in Xinjiang and Tibet since the 1950s. He opines that the prevailing situation in Kashmir “could trigger a new round of violence in the restive region and the resulting security disaster could trigger a devastating storm in South Asia.”

Forget about the articles published by the jingoistic *Global Times* and the statements such as “We don’t know how India dares to flatly scrap Kashmir’s autonomy” by its equally cacophonous editor Hu Xijin. Chinese media and scholars must know that the “special status” accorded to Kashmir is by India not by any other country and was temporary in nature. It was again India, which took it to the United Nation at a time when China did not even repose its trust in the international organization. Since the UN failed to vacate Pakistan Occupied Kashmir from its armed forces, a prerequisite for the plebiscite, India increasingly adopted bilateral approach demonstrated by the 1972 Shimla Agreement. However, rather than finding a bilateral solution, Pakistan has exported terror by creating terror outfits like Jaish e Mohamed, Lashkar e Taiba, Jamaat ud Dawah, etc., as instruments of state policy. It is in this context that India deemed it fit to put a full stop to the policies which did not yield desirable results in Kashmir. It was also in this context that the Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar told his Chinese counterpart on 12 August on the sidelines of the second high-level cultural and people-to-people exchange mechanism that the abrogation of the Article 370 was an internal affair of India and that the move would have no implication for either the external boundaries of India or the Line of Actual Control with China.

Not satisfied with the Indian reply, China pushed the letter of Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi on Kashmir for closed-door informal consultations at the UN Security Council without any outcome, nonetheless, China’s Ambassador to the UN, Zhang Jun told the media after the meeting that the members of the Security Council “expressed serious concerns” regarding the situation in the Jammu and Kashmir, as well the situation of “human rights” there. He reiterated what Wang Yi had told Qureshi in Beijing that the issue must be resolved according to the “relevant Security Council resolutions, the UN Charter and bilateral agreements,” and that it is an internationally recognized dispute. He also said that the “unilateral actions” of India have “changed the status quo” and will aggravate the tensions. As rightly pointed out by Syed Akbaruddin, India’s Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UNSC that the “two states” [China and Pakistan] have tried to pass off their own statements as the will of the international community. Most appalling was Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Yao Jing’s statement when he said on 4 October in Islamabad that “We (Chinese) are also working for Kashmiris to help them get their fundamental rights and justice. There should be a justified solution to the issue of Kashmir and China will stand by Pakistan for regional peace and stability” forcing India to lodge a strong protest and seek clarification as regards the change in Chinese position (IE 2019).
6 Strategic Implications and Choices for India

China’s rapprochement with Pakistan irrespective of ideological differences is becoming stronger, especially with Pakistan’s fallout with the USA and China’s massive investment in the CPEC. It is a well calculated move from China’s foreign policy-makers that would have far-reaching implications to India. Militarily, it poses a two front threat [in fact three front before the creation of Bangladesh] to India. Both China and Pakistan would have the last laugh if they are successful in reactivating the third front as well. If the posturing of China in the neighbourhood is to be believed, China is creating more pivots in the neighbourhood. Economically, India would have to divert massive funds to its military build-up at the cost of national economic growth and development. Politically, continued India-Pak embitterment and armed clashes would draw the attention of international community and China could sit on the fence to watch the show on the one hand and develop its economy on the other. As remarked by Garver (2001, 188), the internecine feud with Pakistan pulls India down to the level of Pakistan to China’s benefit. In the light of this, what are the possible lessons and options for India?

6.1 India Has to Live Up with the Axis

As Pakistan is obsessed with India militarily and diplomatically and is willing to play the pawn, India needs to live up with this nexus and calculate it in its own military as well as foreign policy calculus. Since it serves the strategic goals of China, it is futile to expect China to dehyphenate India–Pakistan relations. Nonetheless, India must continue to work towards this goal by aggressive diplomacy on the one hand and by strengthening our internal economic and political drivers on the other. Meanwhile, the focus must be shifted from Pakistan to China, as threat from China is bigger than that emanating from Pakistan. Pakistan at best can be handled at local level without making noises about it. Logic demands that India should simply ignore Pakistan baiting in any regional or global forums, for it drags India to the level of Pakistan and indirectly serves the Chinese purpose.

6.2 Expand Our Footprints in the Neighbourhood

Strategic engagement also calls for engagement with and improved political, economic and military relations with Southeast Asia, and other South Asian countries, thus integrate India to these countries in a holistic way. India has already initiated a Look/Act East Policy and has increased its presence in Myanmar, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand and Japan, etc., countries. As regards its immediate
neighbours, India needs to be more magnanimous in its approach while resolving bilateral issues.

6.3 Adjust to Regional and Global Balance Favouring China

Today, China feels that it has achieved the goal of transforming China into an Asian power and have started to influence the world affairs with the turning of its economic success story. This is evident from forcing its views on climate change, human rights and preventing the Western leaders to host and meet the Dalai Lama. India must not look for parity with China, but acknowledge the fact of regional balance favouring of China. Therefore, the kind of understanding India had reached with China in the 1980s and 1990s has been belied by China’s assertiveness and belligerence along the border. Nevertheless, India must assert confidence and stand up to China’s assertiveness, as was the case in Doklam and Galwan. It should not be what Sumit Ganguli’s (2001, 96) calls Congress’s policy of “appeasement and muddling through” and the policy of “genuflection before the Middle Kingdom.”

6.4 Coalition of Democracies

Post-Covid-19 and Galwan throw new challenges and opportunities to India’s engagement in the neighbourhood and beyond. India must free herself from the delusion that China will be sensitive towards India’s core interests and sensitivities in the neighbourhood. One view is that India may engage with middle powers like France, UK, Japan, Australia, South Korea, etc., in a more proactive manner in the Indo-Pacific. Secondly, India can strengthen its coalition with countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand, Mayanmar and Philippines in Southeast Asia. Thirdly, since the USA is the most important offshore balancer in the region and India’s security and economic interest are getting closed intertwined, it is pertinent for India to shed the erstwhile ambivalence and ambiguity. At the same time, the Russian factor in the region cannot be ignored, India cannot afford to antagonize Russia, rather explore possibilities so as Russia’s relations with the west are normalized.

6.5 Counter-Terrorism as an Opportunity

China perhaps for the first time acknowledged publicly on 12 November 2001 at the sidelines of the Foreign Ministerial International Anti-terrorism Conference that it was also a victim of terrorism in Xinjiang (Renmin Ribao 14 November 2001). Tang Jiaxuan, the then Foreign Minister of China said:
“The “Eastern Turkestan” terrorists were being trained and funded by international terrorist groups, and have engaged in terrorist activities in Xinjiang and other places in China. The out and out “Eastern Turkestan” terrorism is a part of international terrorism and must be dealt firmly.”

It was probably in the wake of 11 September terrorist strikes that China started showing greater interest in Indian offer for establishing a bilateral dialogue mechanism against terrorism. It is apparently concerned over Islamist extremism in Pakistan. They have suspected Uighur Muslims to be trained in Pakistan. Since 2002, there have been many attacks on Chinese engineers working in Balochistan, in two of these, Uighurs were suspected and in one in 2007. Therefore, it becomes increasingly important for China to have an environment of peace in Pakistan on two accounts: one, to prevent the Uighurs’ training in terrorist camps in Pakistan and to carry out the construction work of the projects it has undertaken under the CPEC in violence affected areas in Baluchistan and other parts inside Pakistan. It may be reminded that its commercial port cum naval base in Gwadar and the development of the Saindak copper-cum-gold mines are in Balochistan. The Balochi are strongly opposed to the Gwadar project, which they view as essentially meant to serve the economic and military interests of the Punjabis. Distrusting the Balochis, the then regime of President General Pervez Musharraf resettled a large number of Punjabis, many of them ex-servicemen, in Balochistan, particularly in the Mekran Coast, for working in the Gwadar project as well as in another Chinese-aided infrastructure project for the construction of a coastal road connecting Gwadar and Karachi. The Chinese exploration at Saintan had created a huge hue and cry in the Pak media, alleging that due to no supervision mechanism, the Chinese were extracting more than the desired quantity. This kind of relationship could be shaken at any given point under changed equations and circumstances.

7 Conclusion

Sino-Pak nexus is not limited to China arming Pakistan to teeth, but also its tactical, political and economic support to Pakistan in the times of crises. It is obvious that China has all along exploited India–Pakistan hostilities to its advantage; be it the 1965, 1971, 1999, 2019 India-Pak conflicts or the recent abrogation of Article 370. India steering out of China’s South Asia status quo game plan has made it extremely nervous and paranoid. The most astounding example is India’s civil nuclear cooperation with the USA and India’s close proximity with the USA, Japan and Australia. As regards the former, just three days before the NSG meet in Vienna in 2008, CPC’s official newspaper slammed the deal and described it as “a major blow to the international non-proliferation regime.” At NSG also contrary to its earlier commitment that it will play a positive role at the NSG, China joined hold out countries like Austria, New Zealand, Ireland and Switzerland and took a different line creating problems for a consensus on the waiver. It was only after India expressed its disappointment through a demarche to China and George W Bush’s words with the Chinese President Hu
Jintao that China agreed to a consensus. As regards the latter China was nervous and worried as it thought that the quadrangle was formed in order to contain China. There are other issues such as implicit opposition to India’s bid to the United Nations as a permanent member, even though China has expressed it “supports India’s aspirations to play a greater role in the United Nations, including the Security Council”.

China may continue to harp that its “all whether, all dimensional friendship” with Pakistan is not directed towards any third country, however, the bonhomie would continue to generate anxiety in India exactly in the same fashion as the presence of the Dalai Lama and Tibetan émigré in India has been creating for China, notwithstanding India’s reiteration that Tibet is a part of China. India, therefore, needs to live with this strategic consideration of Beijing and continues to develop relations with both the countries realistically. More importantly, India needs to engage Pakistan rather than to isolate it.

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