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Paper

Prospects for Pak-China Relations in 2011: Political, Militant and Public Views

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1. Introduction and Methodology

Pakistan's geostrategic location makes it a frontline state in the political, economic and military strategic contexts of regional and international relations. It also offers challenges for Pakistan to architect its foreign policy in accordance with the quadrilateral China-Pakistan-India-US linkage. The United States and China consider Pakistan as their strategic and prized partner but Islamabad's relations with Beijing have remained far more friendly and free of hiccups, which is more than what can be said of its ties with Washington.

For over six decades, Pak-China relations have had a strong foundation in mutual cooperation and interest. Since the commencement of their bilateral relations, many changes have occurred bringing qualitative and quantitative modifications to the political, strategic and economic affairs of the two neighbors. With the changing dynamics of the region pertaining to the pre- and post-9/11 scenarios the friendship between China and Pakistan has grown to higher levels of cooperation. The pre-9/11 period could be manifested as an eye opener for Pakistan on account of Washington's inclination towards New Delhi and China's immense and matchless support for Pakistan, including that rendered at the political and military/defense fronts during Pakistan's wars with India. Moreover, throughout the tensions and confrontations between India and Pakistan, China has tried to minimize the confrontation, encouraging the two neighbors to engage in political talks and ensure peace in the region.

After 9/11, Pakistan became a frontline state in the war on terror and offered vital support to the US. China has not only supported Pakistan's stance on the war on terror but also assisted the country both diplomatically and materially. China's main interest has been to curtail a nexus of the Afghan Taliban, Pakistani militants and Uyghur separatists in the Chinese province of Xinjiang.¹

China and Pakistan celebrated 2011 as the year of Pak-China friendship to commemorate 60 years of bilateral diplomatic ties. The December 2010 visit by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Pakistan expanded mutual collaboration, especially in the field of development and trade. Recent events, especially the global financial crisis, have emphasized China's crucial role in regional and global politics.

This study is an effort to understand how the mainstream political parties, religious-political parties, nationalist political parties, militant organizations and the people of Pakistan in general view Pakistan's ties with China. These views have been used to determine the level of political and socio-economic support factors in Pakistan for long-term strategic relations with China.

The key research questions on which diverse views were sought are as under:

1. Where is China placed in Pakistan's foreign policy priorities and bilateral engagements and is a readjustment required?

2. What are the areas of convergence of interest, particularly in political, socio-cultural and security/defense contexts, which promise better relations between the two countries?
3. What are the regional and global dynamics which impact Pak-China relations and how?
4. How do Pakistanis view China as an emerging superpower and what implications do they see for Pakistan?
5. How do India, the Kashmir conflict, and the war on terror influence relations between Pakistan and China?
6. Can a continued presence of actors of violence and insecurity in Pakistan adversely affect Sino-Pak relations, particularly in the context of a Uyghur separatist movement in China?

Both primary and secondary data was used to gauge the public's perception and views regarding these research questions. The primary data included 14 structured and non-structured interviews conducted in Islamabad with representatives of various political parties—including the mainstream political parties, nationalist political parties and religious-political parties. The available literature on the subject was also analyzed. Because of a lack of primary data to assess the views of the militant and insurgent groups in Pakistan, data from secondary sources, including publications of militant and religious organizations, was relied upon.

2. Political Reflections

2.1 Mainstream Political Parties

Cementing ties with China has remained a key plank of Pakistan's foreign policy regardless of the political party in power or the form of government. Therefore, it becomes all the more important for policymakers to have a clear picture of the perspective of all active political parties.

2.1.1 Pakistan People's Party (PPP)

The PPP is the main ruling party in Pakistan's central coalition government as well as a coalition partner in all the provincial governments except Punjab. The PPP envisions a foreign policy which strives to enhance and diversify the existing ties between China and Pakistan beyond political and security exchanges and to harness economic and trade links. It believes that these economic links should not only revolve around imports from China, but should also ensure access for Pakistani products to China.²

The PPP believes that Pakistan's relations with China are not one-way traffic but are mutually beneficial. Historically, Pakistan's role in bringing China and the US closer to each other in the 1970s and Pakistan's support for China for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) indicate the significance Pakistan attaches to its ties with China.

The PPP supports China's stance on Uyghur separatists and considers it an internal matter for the Chinese. The party also believes that a new thaw in Sino-India relations cannot affect China's friendship with Pakistan. In fact, China can help India and Pakistan improve their relations by removing bilateral misgivings and mistrust.³

The party is also of the opinion that Pakistan's decision to join hands with the US in the war on terror has not undermined Pak-China relations. PPP Information Secretary Fauzia Wahab says, "China has always acknowledged and understood Pakistan's security constraints. This fact should be seen in its historical context, as Pakistan has been a US ally since 1951 and entered into two defense pacts with the US, i.e., the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955."⁴

The PPP believes that the presence of some Uyghur Chinese separatists in Pakistan's tribal areas has disconcerted the two countries' ties to some extent. However, there is no other major factor that can damage Pakistan's ties with China. The PPP information secretary also cautions Pakistan to be diligent in strengthening its relations with China. She believes that Pakistan has to discard its covert Jihadi policies.

2.1.2 Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)

Led by Nawaz Sharif, the PML-N is a mainstream political party in Pakistan. The party has the second largest number of seats in the National Assembly and is in power in the province of Punjab. Until recently, the PPP was also the PML-N's coalition partner in the provincial government in Punjab. The PML-N attaches utmost importance to Pakistan's ties with China. The party considers China Pakistan's "all-weather friend" and believes that cooperation between the two neighboring countries is fruitful for both and for the region at large. The party considers that the leadership of both countries must take practical measures to sow the seeds of friendship between the youths of Pakistan and China to further enhance these relations. It also urges increasing people-to-people contact in all walks of life.⁵

The PML-N says that both the countries have always helped each other in times of need. The party believes that despite a fragile economy, weak political system and a volatile security situation, Pakistan is China's strategic ally amid growing US-India relations. Mutuality of interests is the focal point of the two neighboring countries' relationship.

On the question of Uyghur separatists, the PML-N maintains, "China is a sovereign state and has the right to act against any revolt or uprising within its borders." The party does not see growing trade between India and China as a threat to the longstanding Pak-China relations. However, it does not see a Chinese role in resolving the issues of discord between India and Pakistan including Kashmir, as China also has border disputes with India.

The PML-N considers that China's rise as a global power is in the best interest of Pakistan and would lead to more effective political and diplomatic support for Pakistan. The party does not think that Pakistan's decision to become a US ally in the war on terror has had any adverse implications for Pak-China relations. China realizes Pakistan's problems, the PML-N emphasizes.

2.1.3 Pakistan Muslim League-Zia (PML-Z)

The PML-Z, led by Ijazul Haq, is a faction of the Pakistan Muslim League Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q). The party does not have any seat in the national or provincial legislatures. The PML-Z considers relations with China as the cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. It sees Pak-China friendship growing not only at the state level but also at the level of the people. Due to its unique geostrategic location, Pakistan has a lot to offer not only to China but to other neighboring countries as well. However, that would happen only if Pakistan overcomes the challenges of militancy and terrorism and strengthens itself internally, the PML-Z maintains.

The party supports China's stance and policies on the issue of Uyghur separatists and considers it an internal security matter for Beijing. It also stresses that if any infiltration is occurring from Pakistan into Xinjiang it must be checked and any Uyghur militants hiding in Pakistan should be arrested and handed over to China.⁶

The PML-Z believes that Pakistan must do away with its capitulation to US policies and dictates if it wishes to continue its cordial ties with China. Although China has always understood Pakistan's constraints and security vulnerabilities, Islamabad's dealings with any other country must not be at the expense of its ties with China.

The party sees growing Sino-India trade links and economic cooperation as a positive development for the whole of South Asia, which, it says, would benefit Pakistan as well by ushering in an era of mutual cooperation and interdependence in the region. The party believes that any intermediary role by China in resolving the Kashmir dispute can be most useful at the UNSC, as being a permanent member of the Security Council China can push India to fulfill its obligations under UN resolutions. The PML-Z maintains that although Pakistan's decision to join hands with the US in the war on terror has not hurt Pakistan's relations with China, Islamabad must carefully formulate an independent foreign policy to ensure the equilibrium required to keep Beijing on board.

2.1.4 Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid-e-Azam (PML-Q)

The PML-Q remained in power from 2002 until 2007 during the regime of former President Gen Pervez Musharraf. Currently, the PML-Q is the second largest opposition party in both the National Assembly, after the PML-N, and the Punjab Assembly, behind the PPP. That makes it one of the significant political actors in Pakistan. The party considers that China has a pivotal role to play across the political spectrum in Pakistan. Faisal Saleh Hayat, the PML-Q parliamentary party leader in the National Assembly, says that China and Pakistan have multi-dimensional relations which have common geopolitical grounds and security perceptions. The PML-Q attaches great significance to Pakistan's ties with China and has endeavored to enhance people-to-people contact through various initiatives in order to diversify these ties.

Talking about instability in Pakistan, the PML-Q leader stressed that China wants Pakistan to be a strong state internally and has always been ready to assist Pakistan on the security and defense fronts. In the party's view the friendly relations between China and Pakistan cannot be undermined by the difficult security situation in Pakistan. Hayat sees the unrest in Xinjiang as an issue directly linked to terrorism and says that every government in Pakistan has tried to enhance bilateral relations by taking into account issues of key concern for China, including the situation in Xinjiang.

The PML-Q thinks that Pakistan's ties with the US are undergoing a shift as Pakistan is increasingly inclined towards China in terms of trade and economic partnership. The PML-Q leader does not think that the growing ties between China and India are at the expense of Beijing's relations with Islamabad. He says that bilateral ties between Pakistan's two biggest neighbors are purely trade-based because India and China economically complement each other. Hayat does not think China can play a significant role on Kashmir, as resolution of the Kashmir dispute depends upon the will of the Kashmiri people and upon India's stance.

The PML-Q leader believes that attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan are a manifestation of militants targeting foreigners and does not think that Chinese nationals are specifically targeted. He holds that the Chinese nationals working on development projects in various parts of Pakistan face no threat from militants merely on account of their nationality.

2.1.5 Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)

The MQM is an ethno-linguistic political party which has its support base in Karachi and urban areas of the Sindh province. It is the second largest party in Sindh after the PPP in terms of representation in the legislature. The PPP and the MQM are coalition partners at the center and in Sindh. Led by Altaf Hussain, who lives in self-imposed exile in London, the MQM is known for its anti-feudal, middle-class politics. The party believes that Pakistan should do away with its pro-Western foreign policy outlook and look eastwards. In that regard, MQM considers China as the most important regional and global power with which Pakistan should enhance its ties as an equal business and economic partner. The party holds that historically Pak-China relations have been confined to defense and security cooperation but both countries need to expand cooperation in other fields as well. The spillover of China's booming economy should also reach Pakistan.⁷

The MQM thinks that despite multiple problems, mainly political instability, a weak economy and poor law and order, Pakistan has a lot to offer China including a warm-water deep-sea port at Gwadar, a gigantic market of 180 million people and most importantly a trusted ally which has always supported China on all issues. The party thinks that once Pakistan's economic condition improves, Chinese multinationals could have tremendous opportunities in Pakistan to invest in the fields of telecommunications, information technology, mining, electronics and the automobiles industry, as well as in the education and health sectors.

The MQM considers the killings of Chinese engineers and skilled workers in Balochistan a failure on Pakistan's part to protect them. It believes that such incidents would not hurt state-to-state relations but could jeopardize the ongoing development projects in Balochistan by various Chinese companies. The party feels that Pakistan should stop towing the US line if it wants to keep long-term cordial relations with China. It thinks that China's rise as a global power opens doors to various international markets for Pakistani products and thus it is in the interest of Pakistan to reformulate its foreign policy with a "look east" focus.⁸

2.1.6 Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI)

The PTI is an emerging political party and views Pak-China ties as one of the critical foundation stones of Islamabad's foreign policy. The party's spokesperson on foreign affairs, Dr. Shireen Mazari, holds that despite the country's internal difficulties, a fragile security situation and faltering economy, Chinese companies and firms have not only been investing in Pakistan but are also involved in major construction work. Pakistan is also a gateway to the Muslim world for China and also provides Beijing access to the Indian Ocean to counter efforts by the US and India to encircle it.⁹

On Uyghur separatists, the PTI supports China's anti-terror and anti-extremist policies and considers them China's internal security matters. The party does not consider the growing Sino-India trade relations as a challenge to Pakistan's ties with China, since these relations are not at the expense of Pakistan. On the contrary, the party believes that the thaw in Sino-India ties could pave the way for China to remove mistrust between India and Pakistan. The PTI thinks that China can be a more trusted intermediary from the Pakistani side. However, it thinks that China cannot play a major role in

resolution of the Kashmir dispute because it also has a border dispute with India.¹⁰ In PTI's view, given the strategic nature of Sino-Pak relations, China's rise as a global power is bound to be beneficial for Pakistan. As it grows in stature, China would also be a new and more forceful voice on international issues. China's clout would mean more diplomatic support for Pakistan on crucial issues on almost all major international forums. On Pakistan's support for the US-led war on terror, the PTI holds that Washington's pressure and the manner of Pakistan's capitulation to the US have inadvertently led to Pakistan sidelining its relationship with China.¹¹

2.2. Nationalist Political Parties

2.2.1 National Party (NP)

National Party (NP) is a pro-federation party which has roots in Balochistan and is known for its anti-feudal, middle class and socialist politics. The NP's foreign policy outlook and views about China emanate from its stance on the Balochistan conflict. These views directly relate to China's role in the construction of the Gwadar seaport, Saindak copper and gold project and other major projects which Chinese firms have undertaken in Balochistan.

Soon after gaining independence, Pakistan started taking orders from the US and Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan visited the US in 1951, the NP says. Entering into two defense pacts further pushed Pakistan into the capitalist block and under the American security umbrella, the party states.¹²

In the international scenario which has changed from a bipolar world to a uni-polar one and which is once again gradually moving toward a multi-polar order with China and India as emerging powers, the NP believes that instead of joining the Chinese or the American camp, Pakistan should maintain an independent foreign policy based on self-interest. Pakistan should have good relations with every country that supports those interests, be it China, the US, Russia or India.

The party also considers that an ideal context for mutually beneficial relations does not exist between Pakistan and China, as the internal dynamics and external policy outlooks of both countries differ widely except for two major factors, i.e., competition with India and growing US-India ties and China's dire need for access to a warm-water port to ensure smooth oil supply to its growing economy throughout the year. Dr Abdul Maalick, head of National Party, maintains, "China needs Pakistan for two main reasons. Firstly, if the US-India détente grows further Pakistan would be a balancing force for China to counter India. Secondly, if ever a situation of a blockade of China appears Balochistan would be very useful for China due to the strategic importance of the Makran coast."¹³

Regarding China's role in Balochistan, NP leader Dr. Ishaque Baloch maintains that, unlike India, China is not interfering in Balochistan. However, the party believes that China is exploiting the province's resources through the various projects it has undertaken and that Pakistan must control these projects itself.¹⁴

The party believes that the growing Sino-India relations have no adverse implication for Pakistan as China's ties with Pakistan and recent overtures towards India are guided by self-interest. For China, Pakistan continues to retain its importance.

On the issue of Uyghur separatists, the NP maintains that the Chinese look at and treat the militants in Xinjiang in the same manner as Pakistan treats militant extremists or Jihadis. The NP believes that the killings of Chinese nationals in Balochistan have not had “too much of an impact” on Sino-Pak relations. However, the party foresees that the two countries’ ties could be affected by three factors: terrorism; a conflict between China and the US where the Pakistani political establishment might have to choose one side; and infiltration of Uyghur separatists into Xinjiang from Pakistani territory.¹⁵

2.2.2 Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PkMAP)

Mehmood Khan Achakzai heads the PkMAP, which enjoys great following in the Pashtun-dominated areas of Balochistan. Leaders of the PkMAP have been elected to the provincial assembly, National Assembly and the Senate since 1988. The PkMAP was part of the All Parties Democratic Movement (APDM) and boycotted the 2008 general elections. Being a democratic, progressive and nationalist party, the PkMAP attaches great significance to Pakistan’s relations with neighboring countries including China. However, the party believes that China has not raised its voice against successive military regimes in Pakistan and holds that Beijing must support democracy in Pakistan.¹⁶

The party sees growing relations between India and China as a good omen for regional economic cooperation from which Pakistan could equally benefit. China’s policy of opening up to India would provide Pakistan with an opportunity to remove mistrust with India through China’s help. The PkMAP maintains that China has little role in resolution of the Kashmir dispute in the absence of a major breakthrough on the issue by Pakistan and India.¹⁷

The party believes that Pakistan’s decision to join the war on terror has not hurt its relations with China. It strongly condemns the killings of Chinese engineers and workers in Balochistan and thinks that the presence of Chinese Uyghur militants in Pakistan’s tribal areas could be detrimental to Pak-China relations in the long run. The PkMAP holds that Beijing must also come up with a strategy to help eliminate terrorism in both Pakistan and China. China’s rise as a global power can be beneficial for Pakistan in many ways, the party says, adding that the two sides should expand their cooperation beyond defense, nuclear power and missile technology, and work together in the health, energy and development sectors as well.

2.2.3 Awami National Party (ANP)

The ANP is a left-leaning, progressive political party which advocates the vision of Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan and Khan Abdul Wali Khan. Its main area of electoral influence is the Pashtun-dominated areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Karachi. The ANP is part of the ruling coalition with the PPP in the center and the major ruling partner with the PPP in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As per its manifesto, the ANP believes that Pakistan’s relations with China should be based on impartiality and non-interference. The Pak-China relationship should not be that of a patron and client but of equal partners based on mutual respect. Pakistan should have good relations with all its neighbors including China.¹⁸

Mian Iftikhar Hussain, Minister for Information in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, proclaims on behalf of his party that there is great scope for cooperation between the two countries but in the past Pakistan and China have not benefited from each other in the manner that they should have. They could benefit a lot

more from each other only if Pakistan does away with its policy of supporting Jihadis. Due to the pervasive insecurity and terrorism in Pakistan, Chinese investors are reluctant to invest in the country.¹⁹

The ANP says that Pakistan's decision to join the war on terror has not hurt Pak-China relations per se. Hussain says that Pakistan and the US have been allies before, including during the Soviet-Afghan war and Pakistan's relations with China would not suffer on that account. The ANP is of the view that China can only play a meaningful role as a mediator on the Kashmir dispute if Pakistan and India move forward with sincerity to resolve the matter.

The party maintains that China's rise as a global power would not benefit Pakistan until Pakistan comes up with something for itself. The Gwadar seaport has provided Pakistan with an opportunity to offer China a chance to benefit from Pakistan's unique geostrategic location. However, attracting China alone would not be enough. Pakistan must make Gwadar attractive for other countries of Central and South Asia to make it more successful.

2.2.4 Jamhoori Watan Party-Talal (JWP-T)

After Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Bugti's death, the JWP was split into two factions, one led by the Nawab's son Talal Bugti and the other by his grandson Aali Bugti. Talal Bugti heads the JWP-T, which is a pro-federation party and believes in political struggle for people's rights.²⁰

The JWP-T manifesto refers to China as Pakistan's most important neighbor, its constant support for Pakistan on key issues at international forums and for being an 'all-weather friend'. However, the party thinks that Pakistan has failed to capitalize on Chinese friendship and support and has yet to learn from China's progress.²¹ The JWP-T maintains that with its weak economy, politically fragile structure and volatile security situation Pakistan can offer little to China. The party thinks that Pakistan should seek help from China to overcome its challenges. On the issue of Uyghur separatists, the JWP-T believes that China's adversaries are trying to weaken it from within and the problem in Xinjiang is a foreign-sponsored conspiracy against China.²²

The party sees Islamabad's blind capitulation to US dictates as the biggest stumbling block in Pak-China ties. However, it does not consider the increasing trade links between China and India to be detrimental for Pak-China relations. On the contrary, it opines that Pakistan should also pursue similar initiatives with India. China's rise as a global power is beneficial for Pakistan as a world led by China would be more suitable for Pakistan. The JWP-T sees no role for China in resolution of the Kashmir dispute until India and Pakistan demonstrate the required commitment to resolve the issue bilaterally.²³

The party believes that Pakistan's decision to join hands with the US in the war on terror does have some implications for Pak-China relations. JWP-T Central General Secretary Madni Baloch maintains, "The US has other objectives in the guise of the war on terror. Washington does not want to see increasing Chinese influence in the region in general and in Pakistan in particular. For instance, the Chinese have built the Gwadar port but the US does not want to see Chinese presence in Gwadar, even though China is the most suitable candidate to run the port. A lot of subversive activities are being supported by the US in Balochistan to push China out. But, the Chinese understand the regional geopolitics and despite all these incidents they are still around."²⁴ The JWP-T strongly condemns the killings of Chinese workers and engineers in Gwadar and others parts of Balochistan. The party sees involvement of foreign hands in these killings.

2.3 Religious Political Parties

2.3.1 Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F)

The JUI-F, headed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman, has parliamentary seats in the Pashtun belt of Balochistan as well as in parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The party recently pulled out of the PPP-led federal coalition government. However, it is a partner with the PPP in the Balochistan provincial government. The party is known for its religious politics and anti-America stance.

The JUI-F considers China the most important country in terms of Pakistan's foreign policy considerations. The party maintains that in the 64 years since Pakistan's independence, China is the only country to have consistently stood by it in times of need. The JUI-F believes that China is in a position to strengthen Pakistan politically and economically and Pakistan should seek China's help to overcome its crises.²⁵

The JUI-F terms Uyghur separatism as China's internal affair. The party thinks that the nature of Pak-China relations is completely different from Pakistan's ties with the US. It says that what Islamabad can achieve by terming 2011 as "Pak-China friendship year" cannot be achieved by pursuing similar initiatives with the US.

The party believes that China's growing ties with India are a bid to explore new markets for its products, that Beijing has every right to strengthen trade links with India and that they do not pose a threat to Pakistan. The party also considers China's rise as a global power beneficial for Pakistan and thinks that as China rises, the chance of Pakistan being "blackmailed and bullied" by the US and the West would decrease. It maintains that China has always supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and would continue to play a positive role in the future as well.²⁶

Pakistan's decision to join the US-led war on terror has not harmed Pakistan's relations with China. Terrorism is an international problem and China understands Pakistan's problems related to Afghanistan and militancy.²⁷

2.3.2 Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith (MJAH)

The MJAH is a religious-political party which promotes the Ahl-e-Hadith movement in Pakistan. It used to be part of the now defunct Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA), a six-party religious alliance formed in 2002. Led by Senator Sajid Mir, the MJAH envisions a foreign policy in which Pakistan establishes friendly and cordial relation with all its neighbors, including China. The party views China as an emerging economic and political power with which Pakistan should promote good relations with a futuristic perspective.²⁸

The MJAH maintains that Pak-China relations must transcend their one-dimensional nature and both countries should equally benefit from each other. The MJAH does not consider growing Sino-India ties a threat to Pak-China friendship as these ties are not at the expense of Pakistan. The party does not see any significant role for China in resolving the Kashmir dispute as long as Pakistan and the Kashmiris themselves do not make sincere efforts to push India to hold meaningful negotiations. The MJAH is of the view that the current wave of militancy and terrorism in Pakistan's tribal areas would not affect Pak-China relations if Pakistan does everything it could to deny safe havens in Pakistan to Uyghur separatists and prevents their infiltration into China from Pakistan.²⁹

3. Reflections of Militant Organizations

Understanding the prospects for Pak-China relations require a deep understanding of the many factors that play a vital role in shaping state relations and could influence them in the future. The main militant organizations in the country include Pakistani Taliban/ Jihadi groups and militant groups with a specific Kashmir focus. With various levels of ideological and operational linkages with Uyghur separatists, some of these organizations propagate threats and damage to the Chinese establishment at different levels, making them a challenge for China. In the post-9/11 environment, these militant groups are more influenced by developments in the global jihad arena. China has repeatedly expressed concern at Islamist extremists operating in and around Xinjiang receiving support from extremist elements abroad.

3.1 Local Militant Groups

Jamatud Dawa (JD)/Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT)

The LeT is based in Muridke, near Lahore, and trains its militants at mobile training camps across Pakistan-administered Kashmir. It had trained in Afghanistan until the fall of 2001. The LeT's professed ideology goes beyond merely challenging India's sovereignty over Indian-administered Kashmir. Hafiz Muhammad Saeed is the chief of the banned LeT, which later changed its name to Jamatud Dawa.

The organization's soft stance towards China was on display during a rally organized by JD on Kashmir Solidarity Day on May 5, 2010 in order to support the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people. Saeed supported the Chinese government for issuing a different entry permit to Kashmiris—as a mark of China's treatment of Kashmir as a disputed territory—and called it better than the policy of the Pakistani government. There have been reports that some Chinese Muslims are also enrolled in madrassas run by Jamatud Dawa and after studying there they could join the LeT. The JD is active in Indian-administered Kashmir against New Delhi's there and lacks the ability to launch attacks in China without the support of Al Qaeda or local militant groups. It does not have a violent policy towards China.

Jaish-e-Muhammad (JM)

Jaish-e-Muhammad changed its name to Tehreekul Furqan on October 7, 2001 and then to Khuddamul Islam in 2002, after the group was banned by the Pakistani government on January 12, 2002. When Pakistan handed over 13 Chinese nationals studying at a Deobandi madrassa in northern Pakistan, the JM condemned the action and announced to support the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) militants.³⁰ Students at Islamabad's Lal Masjid, who had abducted nine Chinese women in June 2007, accusing them of running a brothel in the garb of a massage centre, also reportedly belonged to Jaish-e-Muhammad. Jaish-e-Muhammad is operating in Indian-administered Kashmir but its Jihadi agenda includes helping all 'oppressed' Muslims. It is one of the most violent Jihadi groups, who, if persuaded by the Chinese militant groups, can launch attacks even inside China.

Harkatul Mujahideen (HM)

Harkatul Mujahideen is the new name for Harkatul Ansar after it was declared a terrorist outfit by the United States. Maulana Fazlur Rehman Khalil, who is stated to have close links with Osama bin Laden, is the HM chief.

Some reports had suggested the involvement of the outfit in Xinjiang but Khalil has denied these reports. In an interview, he stated that Harkatul Mujahideen was not involved in Xinjiang. "We are proud of the friendship between China and Pakistan. The enemies of the two countries are the same. The US wants to draw a line between China and Muslim countries. No Chinese Muslim is getting training in the camps of Harkat. It's mere propaganda by the US and India."

Khalil's stance gets support from another report. Hamid Mir, a journalist who shot to fame after interviewing Osama bin Laden in 2001, has reported that the US authorities had approached Khalil in 1998 to "wage jihad" against China in its oil-rich Xinjiang province. However, according to Mir, Khalil rebuffed the offer. The group was blacklisted by the US State Department as a terrorist organization in 2003. Mir also believes that US agents have penetrated Taliban. Although Harkatul Mujahideen denies its links with Islamist militants in Xinjiang, some sources state that at least some Uyghurs had received training at Harkat's camps in Azad Kashmir. Harkatul Mujahideen has the capability to launch terrorist attack in Pakistan, India and Afghanistan by virtue of its strong links with Al Qaeda and other global Jihadi networks. However, the outfit apparently holds no grudge against China and the chance of it launching or supporting any attacks in that country remain miniscule.

Harkatul Jihad-e-Islami (HuJI)

The HuJI was the first Jihadi organization in Pakistan. It has a strong organizational structure and in addition to Pakistan and Indian-administered Kashmir it also has networks in Chechnya, Uzbekistan, Burma and Bangladesh.

The HuJI was allegedly involved in facilitating the Uyghurs in fighting against Chinese rule. Associated with Al Qaeda, the HuJI apparently provided assistance to ETIM. HuJI leader Qari Saifullah Akhtar cemented ETIM's link with the Taliban and Al Qaeda. The group has camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Its deep links with Chinese Islamist militant groups provide it the capacity to launch terrorist attacks inside China. Owing to its extremely violent Jihadi agenda and close links with anti-China extremist groups in Xinjiang province, there are chances of the HuJI militants launching terrorist attacks inside China.

4. Public Standpoint

The Pakistan-China relationship at the people-to-people level is based on mutual trust. The average Pakistani considers China an all-weather friend, mainly on account of Beijing's staunch support for Pakistan on a range of issues, including Kashmir, at international forums. Moreover, due to China's unflinching support to Pakistan in its wars against India, and assistance in developing the nuclear and missile programs, the people of Pakistan hold China in high esteem. The people of the two countries share deep affection and warmth although they do not share a common religion, ideology or political projection. Harmony, abiding friendship and positive sentiments between the two people are echoed in the words often used to refer to Pakistan's friendship with China, that it is deeper than the sea and higher than the Himalayas.

After the Chinese premier's recent visit to Pakistan, the public affection for China has grown even further. Announcements of scholarships, educational benefits for Pakistani students and other development and welfare exchange programs have opened new opportunities for them. The recently inaugurated Pak-China Friendship Centre at Islamabad is also a symbol of friendship between the two countries at the public level.

5. Findings

- All mainstream and religious-political parties consider China a cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. However, these parties assert that these relations must be diversified beyond political and security exchanges; cooperation should be enhanced in other fields as well and people-to-people contact should be expanded.
- Nationalist political parties mainly have two sets of views on China. Some nationalist parties, such as the mainstream and religious-political parties, refer to China as a country of utmost importance in their manifestos. While some others have an ambivalent attitude towards Pak-China relations. Without attaching any significant importance to Pakistan's ties with China, political parties in the latter category consider China a neighbor like any other. These views are shaped by the political parties' regional political outlook.
- All political parties think that the growing Sino-India ties are neither a challenge nor a threat to Pakistan-China friendship. On the contrary, they believe cordial ties between China and India are in the best interest of the region and China's warming relations with India would remove the trust gap between India and Pakistan and might lead to trilateral trade cooperation in the future.
- The regional and mainstream political parties stress upon stemming the rising tide of militancy and extremism as they believe that they could undermine Pakistan's ties with China.
- Across the political and ideological spectrum, all political parties believe that Pakistan's decision to join hands with the US in the war on terror has not affected Pak-China relations. However, if Islamabad continues to tow Washington's line meekly such subservient attitude could undermine its relations with Beijing in the long run.
- The political parties do not see a major role for China in resolution of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan. Some, however, think that being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council China could play a positive role in pressing India to address the Kashmir issue.
- The rise of China as a global power is seen positively in Pakistan and the political parties believe that that is in Pakistan's best interest.
- Political parties consider the issue of Uyghur separatism in China's Xinjiang province as Beijing's internal security matter. They believe that on grounds of mutual collaboration and friendship any complaint by the Chinese regarding infiltration from Pakistani territory must be effectively addressed and not only must the infiltration be stopped but all those posing a threat to China's security must be apprehended and handed over to the Chinese authorities.
- The Kashmiri Jihadi groups do not pose any threat to China as these groups have a specific focus on India-held Kashmir.

- Due to the TTP's close links with Chinese militants, the possibility of the Pakistani Taliban launching attacks inside China cannot be ruled out.

6. Conclusion

Relations between Pakistan and China have stood the test of time and Beijing has not only understood Islamabad's constraints and security vulnerabilities vis-à-vis India but has also stood by Pakistan through difficult times. China's rise as a global power and its growing ties with India offer new opportunities of economic cooperation and increased peace and stability for the entire region. Doing away with the traditional mistrust between Pakistan and India can usher in a win-win scenario for all regional countries. To put its relations with China on an even more solid footing and to make them more meaningful and mutually beneficial, Pakistan has to pursue an independent foreign policy based on self-interest and must abandon the tendency to submit to US dictates. Moreover, Pakistan has to stem the rising tide of militancy and extremism and pacify the insurgency in Balochistan if it wants to benefit from the emerging regional and global trends in which China is bound to rise as a dominant player.

Notes:

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- ¹ Kanti Bajpai, "Managing Ambivalence: Pakistan's Relations with the United States and China since 2001," in *Pakistan in Regional and Global Politics*, ed. Rajshree Jetly (New Delhi: Tolstoy House, 2009), 84.
 - ² Fauzia Wahab (Information Secretary, PPP), telephonic conversation, January 19, 2011.
 - ³ Ibid.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Siddiqui Farooq (Central Spokesperson, PML-N), interview by Nida Naz in Islamabad, January 15, 2011.
 - ⁶ Muhammad Ijazul Haq (President, PML-Z), telephonic conversation, January 14, 2011.
 - ⁷ Haider Abbas Rizvi (an MQM leader and member of National Assembly), January 28, 2011.
 - ⁸ Ibid.
 - ⁹ Dr Shireen M. Mazari (Spokesperson, PTI), email message to Nida Naz, February 6, 2011.
 - ¹⁰ Ibid.
 - ¹¹ Ibid.
 - ¹² Dr. Abdul Maalick Baloch (President, National Party), interview by Nida Naz in Islamabad, January 18, 2011.
 - ¹³ Ibid.
 - ¹⁴ Dr. Ishaque Baloch (Member of the National Party), January 26, 2011.
 - ¹⁵ Ibid.
 - ¹⁶ Usman Kakar (Senior Vice President, PkMAP), January 17, 2011.
 - ¹⁷ Ibid.
 - ¹⁸ Zahid Khan (Information Secretary, ANP), January 17, 2011.
 - ¹⁹ Mian Iftikhar Hussain (Minister of Information Khyber Pakhtunkhwa), January 14, 2011.
 - ²⁰ *Daily Aaj Kal*, (Urdu), Islamabad, May 26, 2009.
 - ²¹ Madni Baloch (Central Deputy General Secretary, Jamhoori Watan Party), January 14, 2011.
 - ²² Ibid.
 - ²³ Ibid.
 - ²⁴ Ibid.
 - ²⁵ Senator Ismail Baledi (a leader of the JUI-F), January 17, 2011
 - ²⁶ Ibid.
 - ²⁷ Ibid.
 - ²⁸ Professor Sajid Mir (Chief, Markazi Jamiat Ahl-e-Hadith), January 19, 2011.
 - ²⁹ Ibid.
 - ³⁰ *Jaish-e-Muhammad* (Urdu), monthly magazine of Jaish-e-Muhammad, June 2009.