



RESEARCH PAPER

Pakistan's Engagement with China and Russia: Impacts on the Regional Order

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is now the gateway to Eurasia and this is increasingly becoming a reality in the light of the integration wave launched by China and patronized by Russia. It is a land bridge to Eurasian Economies and a part of Belt Road Initiatives. 9/11 led to many fundamental changes in the South Asian security framework. Most significant was the rise of Sino-Pak cooperation and the US shifting its priority towards India. The Silk Route analogy often has been drawn upon Afghanistan, but the close interface between Great Powers rendered it unstable for most of the time. Pakistan offers a maritime opportunity to most of the landlocked states of Inner Asia. Russia and China have been securing Eurasian space post-Cold war from the US hegemony. This has led to military and economic cooperation between the two. South Asian Regional Security Complex narrative that rests on India-Pak conflict is witnessing a change with Pakistan looking to engage Russia and China on the economic front and perhaps the Russian option to join defence framework at some later stage. The development is the best option for creating strategic autonomies within the SARSC.

Introduction

Pakistan has been interspersed into several regional discourses that are tiered one over another. The meta-argument states that it is frontline state in Global War on Terror (GWOT). Then there have been trans-border security concerns that co-factor Pakistan with Afghanistan under nomenclature of Af-Pak. Pakistan gained significant importance after its reorientation towards China and new economic partnership that emerged under CPEC. This projected Pakistan as economic gateway to Eurasia. And, with Eurasian Economic Region linked to Pakistan, it was not far away to expect Russia and Pakistan entêté. The geostrategic location of Pakistan is also key factor as current dynamics brings in several theatres of engagement on its

periphery; most notably from China and Iran. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan created security concern for region in which Pakistan's role gained importance for negotiating with the extremist forces. China is concerned with security situation in Afghanistan as a part of its investment policy but has to rely on Pakistan for long-term projects. Afghanistan conflict remains challenge for region in long run. The proposed New Silk Road by the US invites Pakistan-based initiatives that would join Road-Belt initiative from South (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018).

Pakistan has nearly hosted 5 million refugees from Afghanistan, out of which still 1.5 million have not preferred to return. This is further in context of presence of Afghan Taliban leadership in country. The whole gamut of refugees and resistance forces create a cross-border destabilization that has a significant impact on Pakistan's development vision. Pakistan has found few avenues with West in terms of post-drawdown strategy after 2014. The important regional framework is possibly under SCO to address issues. Russia and China share Pakistan's concern on stabilizing Durand line and return of Afghans. This has a wider impact on defeating three forces of extremism, separatism, and terrorism.

A third dimension where this trilateral relationship shall have influence is possible readjustments in South Asian Regional Security Complex. Historically, US-Pak relationship had been pitched against Indo-Soviet relations during cold war days. Now, there has been great degree of change post-9/11. Pakistan is no longer isolated state given its renewed relationship with China and at same time, the US has rephrased its South Asian priorities with India as major partner. This brought some logical thaw between Russians and the Pakistanis to explore opportunities for cooperation in a newer environment. The defence cooperation between Russia and Pakistan is matter of time, but this will have strong impact on balance of power within South Asian region (Muzaffar & Khan, 2016)

Evolving Trans-Regional Partnerships

Global politics has its momentum and Pakistan can only adjust with big winds of change. However, regional changes are of more interest as Pakistan can play a more active role in influencing outcomes. Thus, engaging Russia as part of Pakistan's Central Asia policy demands more concerted efforts. There is also an important Eurasian order that is pan-regional framework where Pakistan has only made initial beginnings by joining SCO and exploring possibility of membership in Eurasian Economic Union. The legacy of working with Great power such as US has delivered Pakistan ample experience to engage with emerging coalition of Russia and China that seeks to challenge unipolar world. A multi-polar world works in favor of Pakistan as it only adds to curtailment of regional ambitions of US which has now very restricted utility in serving Pakistan's geopolitical interests.

Russia- China

Russia and China have always supported multi-polar world order as opposed to US-led Western dominance. Asian regional orders cannot remain isolated from this contest of supremacy. South Asian region is important as it has potential to affect Central Asia, West Asia, and Southeast Asian regional orders. The region has been in grip of Great power politics since Second World War. Russia's rise under Putin has led to balance of power across Europe-Asia. Russia's tussle with West and have gained influence together with partnerships in Asia. China and Russia are trading partners and investment in oil and gas has generated their effective role in regional security and diplomacy with completion of East Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline first and second phase 2009 and 2012 respectively, boosted Russia's export of oil up-to 30 million ton per year to Asia. So, Russia's engagement in Asia, and tussle with West, and participation in many organizations like BRICS, SCO, and G-20 is creating multi-polar world (Mankoff, 2015).

Chinese Foreign minister Wang Yi said during his visit to Russia that, Russia and China are at "the best level in history". Russia and China have shared close relations since 1950 when Russia assist China and provide all facilities. Both sides shared a long cooperation history internationally, China never interrupt Crimea issue while Russia supported china over North Korea issue (Westcott, 2018). Russia is leading energy supplier and China is the world's leading energy consumer. Their partnership effectively puts maritime dependence at bay respectively. They have not only convergent economic interests but also accommodating views on terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Russia is concerned about Chechen insurgency just as China is concerned about Uyghur disaffection. They both are equally concerned about the US hegemony and efforts to dominate two. Russia and China are both looking for regional engagement with Central Asian States to pre-empt any shift towards US (Wilhelmsen & Flikke, 2011). One Belt One Road initiative links both of them into great complementariness on several projects along with this grand vision. The well-known Chinese's intellectual Wang Jisi China's rely on western part and developments on west are the China's strategic policy because the shift towards East could cause the Sino-US conflict as Obama Administration had keen interest in East Asia. March towards West by China has gained significant policy position as if it succeed, relations among China and USA could be on best position without any confrontation and military risks because both can work together and mutual cooperation will be on peak in many fields for developments (Clarke, 2016). The offensive realists claim that international system will drive China and Russia to maximize their supremacy and influence which will result in territorial extension and hostility. The defensive realist also claim that anarchic system of world will encourage Russia and China for huge security gains either for future challenges or oppose other powers. This will not only for moderation in state behaviour or restrained other state's behaviours (Hancock & Lobell, 2010).

Russia- Pakistan

Russia's Afghanistan Policy signifies international relations theory constructivism to "the other" in process of creating one's own individuality. The rising cooperation with NATO on counter-terrorism strategies, signals of alarms and criticisms concerning West's objectives and behaviour in Afghanistan, and stable development of Moscow's relations with Kabul are major developments of Russia's policy in Afghanistan. Russia is trying to draw attention of West to growing narcotics issue in Afghanistan and along with that Russia referred NATO alliance to negotiations with leading to "Pashtunization" of Afghanistan (Tsygankov, 2013).

Afghanistan's situation is a threat and opportunity for Russia as well. Russia can shelter its interests under umbrella of interference in neighbourhood. Central Asia is concerned as weak area by Russia which must be stabilized for regional security. Ex-Soviet states block CSTO is a safeguard for Central Asia against Afghan Islamist extremists. Russia and China oppose not only U.S. threats in Asia-Pacific but "colour revolutions" and Islamic terrorism (Kim et al., 2015). Russia's long partnership with India in South Asia is on weaker node because of India's tilt towards USA. Russia's Prime-minister Mikhail Fradkov's visit to Pakistan in 2007 boosted partnership. Both shared common neighbour Afghanistan and have deep concern over peace and stability in the neighbourhood and region. Pakistan considers Russia great silent contributor to regional peace and stability, development partner, and important global power (Ramani, 2018)

Pak-China

Pakistan and China have long traditional friendship and cooperation. Gwadar port development is central factor of Pak-China economic cooperation. Pak-China strategic partnership is strengthened by support of China's policy against Muslim separatists in Xinjiang by Pak president in 2000 visit to China (Faqr & Islam, 2013). The geographical location and economic corridor facilitate China and Pakistan to build new route to Middle East and Central Asia and open new horizons of socio-economic development. Gilgit Baltistan has linked Kashgar Gwadar Economic Corridor (KGEC) via other provinces KPK, Baluchistan, and Punjab. The wide range of connections will bring economic developments and prosperity within Pakistan and West part of China. The importance of KGEC has been valued by recent USA and China indirect influence and containing the game. The construction of Chabahar Port and connecting via railroad from Kazakhstan through Turkmenistan to International Corridor to North-South Transport and Russia, Iran and Indian partnership complex regional future (Perveen & Khalil, 2015). China has looking for opportunity for peace and stability in its Western province. China has Uighur minority there and which is major issue of concern for Beijing authorize. The community is connected with Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan

Islamic party (TIP), and East Turkmenistan Islamic Movement (ETIM). These groups are working for Islamic State in East Turkmenistan and Xinjiang (China). Afghanistan has significant location in region and long war in Afghanistan is important for regional stability. In other words, regional peace and prosperity are linked to Afghanistan's stability (Perveen et al., 2015).

The relation between Soviet and Pakistan is interlinked with relations of China and U.S. Indian factor is also playing a vital role in relations. Pakistan gain benefit of dismemberment of USSR and establish a great cultural and geographical hold in Central Asia, but that was effective by Afghan situation (Azizian & Vasilieff, 2003).

In 2014, Central Asian states and Russia together have created excuse for increased Russian involvement in security affairs in region, and possibly for a greater security role for China and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as well. U.S. government has projected Turkmenistan-Afghanistan- Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) as the centre focus of its vision. The pipeline has been in discussions since 1990s and got the hype since 2011 by State Department. That would transport Turkmen gas through Afghanistan and in markets of Pakistan and India. On hand United States continuously musing about TAPI so, China engaged itself in gas deal with Turkmenistan (Collins, 2011). Pakistan and Taliban Afghanistan offered refuge to those fleeing Central Asia's repressive policies as well as a place for organization of armed resistance for national liberation based on militant Islamist principles such as those of IMU (Sinnott, 2009).

Elements of Engagement

One needs to examine macro elements of trilateral relationship of Russia-China-Pakistan that highlights its importance. One of the foremost post-cold war readjustments has been rapprochement between Russia and China. The union of these has refined Eurasia and it has significantly Central Asian States and their multi-sectoral approach. The confidence in each other has allowed China to pour in huge investments across Eurasia and Central Asia. The second element is dramatic change of geopolitical environment in South Asia post 9/11. In fact, in one line one can say that 9/11 significantly eroded Pakistan's strategic depth due to present state of difficult relations with Afghanistan government. Therefore, Pakistan has been in tight situation given fact that it too has paid a heavy price in War against Terror. There is a great need to look beyond South Asian conventional narrative of Indo-Pak conflict to retain geopolitical relevance. The role of Pakistan-China relationship in delivering Pakistan, its strategic autonomy is significant. One can see similar gains being made once there is progress in the Russia-Pakistan relationship. The scholars had made it a point with the onset of the 21st century that Pakistan is going to miss the development bogey by getting stuck into the conventional narrative of South Asian security issues. But, that fear is no longer there with the conceptualization of

the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Pakistan can provide an alternative model of regional development by integrating vast Asian regions. The linking of CPEC with One Belt and One Road (OBOR) framework is a real possibility. It would be genuine north-south corridor through which not only Inner Asian States but Europe and maritime Asia too would be linked.

Pakistan in South Asian Regional Security Complex

The big powers' interpolation in South Asia Regional Security complex is a key source of regional changing dynamics, which also highlighted the cold war legacy. To understand regional dimensions and emerging scenarios OBOR and CPEC initiatives are important, which also elaborate Indian role in region (Hudson et al., 2016). China-Pakistan relations are on a solid bedrock of historic times, but Russia-Pakistan relations are in search of such a platform. How much India plays an obstructionist's role is also a matter of concern. It is also possible that in long run, the Great Powers might have a common design for South Asia and Pakistan becomes a fulcrum of its execution. All these possibilities need to be explored.

Russia had long *durée* in region but China-made forays with larger question of securing order due to Afghanistan crisis. The relationship between China and Russia has been the subject of increasing interest over past three years, as cooperation has appeared to intensify across a broad range of issues. In geopolitics, strategic realities catch turn before one can gaze apart, and even before countries understand it pivotal shifts occur that form future for the years. That appears to be case with traditional Cold War competitors Russia and Pakistan, which have of late seen steady heating of ties. Pakistan-Russia relations are experiencing a course of normalization, which currently is moving at a gentle pace and will take some time to reach a stage when relationship can be considered entirely normal. The regularity of high-level meetings among leaders and officials of two countries has been improved to next level. Russia had also prior lifted the self-imposed arms restriction on Pakistan. In the 2014 Russia also signed a military cooperation deal by crossing a milestone in the relations with Pakistan. This was also for the switching data on political and military matters, strengthening partnership in defence and counter-terrorism areas. Both states shared similar opinion on growth and development in Afghanistan. Russia and Pakistan agreed upon business cooperation and trade developments with each other. The China-Pakistan connection is well-known and is strong base for Russia-China-Pakistan trio. China has been long-standing supporter of Pakistan and has historically supported during core issues against India either military support or in diplomacy. Pakistan is prime importer of Chinese manufactured defence gear and is collaborated in joint ventures for producing military equipment's and more significant on is JF-17 fighter jets (Singh, 2015). China has also noticeably sponsored in Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Karakoram corridor (Yaseen, et. al. 2017).

The international relations professor at London School of Economics Barry Buzan and professor at University of Copenhagen Ole Waever advanced theory Regional Security Complex in their work "Regions & Powers: The Structure of International Security" in 2003. According to them, Security complex is one when primary security concern and national security concern are linked together and cannot separate. South Asia is a complex region having many internal conflicts, which need to be settled. Because of these internal un-solved conflicts and contradictions, region became hub of many complexities. The present discourse of South Asian Regional Security (SARS) structure is dependent on binary of power conflict and strategic balance as defined by struggle for strategic autonomy by smaller states. The paper aims to look at nature of variables and their transformation with interpolation of big powers within SARS Complex (SARSC). Pakistan's relevance in South Asian RSC is co-valent to its growing importance as transport corridor for Eurasian lines of commerce. Pakistan's geopolitical location offers multitude of possibilities that has not only economic vectors but political aspects too. The country facilitated War against Terror and international forces for US-led coalition. But, there remains significant scope for stabilizing the entire region for which Russia and China have found Pakistan as significant partner (Stobdan, 2015). It though does not propose but provides opportunity to bail out itself from a binary of Indo-Pak narrative and cultivate identity for Pakistan that is more extensive and inclusive of Inner Asia and Middle East; and, perhaps one of its own-making rather under duress of cold war hegemonies. After 9/11 many changes occur in regional politics and extra-regional powers like US, China, and Russia. In 2009 Barry Buzan gave the new concept of Macro-securitization, in which great powers' macro security structure is under discussion. US's objective to include India as part of its core security interest remains speculative proposition as it is too wieldy and South Asian Regional Security issues are dampener for the US's macro-securitization approach.

The post-9/11 South-Asian Regional Security Environment

The practical and realistic approach which was adopted by Pakistan after 9/11, gave huge support to country at global and regional level to secure diplomatic influence. The challenges became opportunities for Pakistan as a frontline state. The post 9/11 scenario brings in renewed great game in central and south Asia. This new great game initially harbored on energy geopolitics later transformed into Great Power rivalries. US's strong support for Indo-Afghanistan strategic partnership at expense of Pakistan's security implied that Pakistan need to seek realignment of its geopolitical linkages. The rise of China and its ambitions matched with Pakistan's need to secure counterweight in South Asia. South Asia has very unique and important position in international affairs, as two nuclear states are part of it and it is source of highly rich skilled manpower, natural resources, offering good strategic location of Indian Ocean and accessible routes to Central Asia. South Asia is important region for expansion of China's interest in its Asian periphery. South Asia is essentially India-dominated theatre and it makes China and Pakistan converge

their strategic interest to prevent India from dominating region. Therefore, China supports Pakistan to keep balance of power in South Asia so that states in region can maintain their strategic autonomy. The arms race in region has brought kind of triad of security challenge to South Asian region. India challenges China's dominance at Asian level and it makes Pakistan an important factor in balancing China-India relations. Pakistan has its security interests in region but it does not look at itself as a pawn in balance of power game. Pakistan would like to claim its rightful place vis-à-vis Afghanistan and South Asian region that makes its both eastern and western border secure and free from terror threats. There is also continued tension of Kashmir as India and Pakistan have not still come out with durable mechanism to discuss issue. The whole gamut of Kashmir versus terrorism has become chicken and egg story. India sees Pakistan as source of terror, whereas Pakistan has maintained that all terrorism emanates from disaffection of Kashmiris. This has another dimension too that of Indus Water Treaty. The recent mention of disrupting IWT by Indian leaders makes security environment more volatile and any further effort to sabotage this treaty can be serious threat to the interests of Pakistan and affecting South Asian security at large.

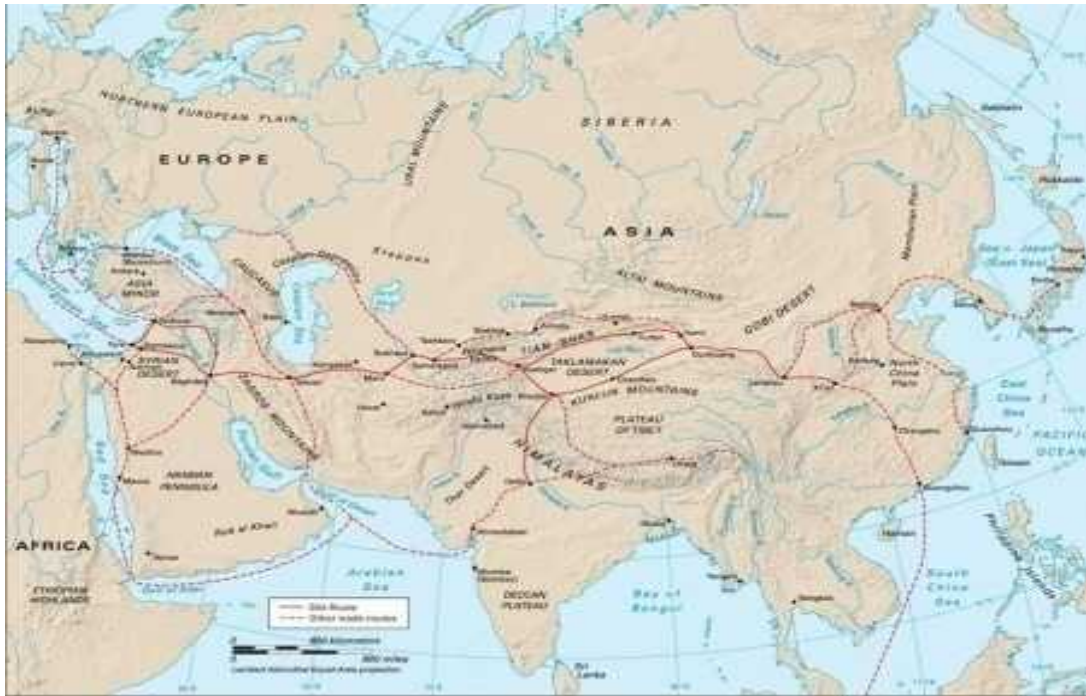
The events of 11 September had powerful influence on Russia-Pakistan relations and have increased procedure of normalization. Moscow and Islamabad are in same camp alongside similar allies, chasing mutual objective which is struggle against terrorism. Both Moscow and Islamabad fear instability in Afghanistan, weakness of central government, and warlords' excesses. They appear to be sincerely concerned in ensuring peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan (Azizian & Vasilieff, 2003).

Pakistan's Geo-economic Interests within BRI-CPEC Framework

Pakistan and China have had very friendly and cordial relationship for last fifty-five years. The relations were largely confined to political and defence-related field until recently since both seek to develop economic relations. Both sides realized that to meet level of comprehensive cooperation, strong and effective economic cooperation is needed, which also helps in stability and peace of region. The economic developments between Pakistan and China are increasing day by day. The recent development of Gwadar sea port is example of economic cooperation, which will be play important role in developing region and enhancing connectivity of region (Rahman, 2007 & Rahim, 2018).

China is financing and back up in development of New Silk Road along with Pakistan and Central Asia. China has deep and strong relations with Pakistan based over half of century as "a near neighbour is better than a distant cousin". Now China improved its relation by favourable larger investment plans in economic zone. Chinese investment in Pakistan is high as was characterised by recent visit of Chinese

President Xi Jinping. Its capacity is about USD 46 billion and it is for creation of Beijing's vision of new Silk Road. This new route will assist Central Asian States' trading and would increase stability in region due to its economic activity. It will also provide access to Gwadar sea-port and from these to Central Asian region, it is expected that regional economy will be flourish rapidly via new route (Waraich, 2015). In 2013 in Astana (capital of Kazakhstan) Chinese President Xi Jinping formally launched "One Belt, One Road" initiative, also called "New Silk Road" initiative (Witte, 2013).



Source: UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2014

This Chinese tactic is aimed at creating a planetary-wide "attraction system", necessary to channel mineral, energy, and food resources needed by China to keep developing while safeguarding social consistency of its 1400 billion-strong inhabitants (Valantin, 2015). The "New Silk Road" is huge procedure for growth of land and maritime transport, as well as energy, mineral, and cyber organisations. It will be convoy by masses of commercial contracts and political deals between Chinese public and private sector and its counterparts in different countries and continents crossed by "One Belt, One Road". According to Shannon Tiezzi, China's "New Silk Road" idea offers strongest vision however also portray China's future pathway to conduct mainland and maritime economic affairs around Europe and Asia (Tiezzi, 2014).

CPEC development provides much cheap and easy way for Central Asia. The future of region is brighter as port has significant for economy and trade. CPEC made port trading hub not only at regional but international level. This is game-changer for region as wide trading opportunities could grab international market. Central Asia has shortest route under Gwadar project via Saindak, which is one of massive construction plans. The other project which is significant for Central Asian region is highway via Afghanistan to Central Asia which can reduce distance by approximately 500km. The importance of Gwadar seaport for trade and economy can be highlighted via few points:

- Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Central Asian States) are producers of dry goods and cargoes. Gwadar port is the shortest way to get access to hot water for them. It will reduce cost and make trade more valuable.
- Central Asian States are oil and gas-rich. Central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan send their liquid cargos via Gwadar port which offers shortest route. Gwadar route reduced distance to 1400km which is much less than 1800 km Mediterranean Sea route.
- The cost of Liquid cargo through the Gwadar route via pipeline is much less than other possible facilities around. Gwadar will cost around 2-2.5 billion dollars while other route via Caspian will cost 3.3 billion dollars. The route from China will cost around 35 billion dollars which is more profit capacity (Malik, 2012).

Gwadar is blessing for landlocked Central Asia. It will open many opportunities for region. Regional integration is important factor nowadays as world is changing day by day and globalization converted world into small village. Gwadar port and CPEC project is important element in regional integration. Gwadar will help in developing region and international world. The significant features which are highlighted under Gwadar are:

- Central Asian region Energy and Oil resources.
- The South Asian manpower and its influence over regional growth.
- Oil resources in West Asia and its trade (Anwar, 2010).

Conclusion

According to Buzan South Asian Regional Security Complex no longer remains binary of India-Pakistan confrontation. Pakistan is link between Eurasia and South Asia reclaiming its historical legacy. The financial challenges to regional geopolitical order are now manageable for Pakistan as its relatively smaller economy gets linked with China's giant economy. Although Pakistan is an economically fragile country yet China needs it more than anything else. China can never fulfil its dream of CPEC if Pakistan remains docile in the completion of this economic corridor on

efficient grounds. The defence and security issues emerging from Afghanistan are no longer a US-dominated discourse. Pakistan is now able to work with Russia, China, and Turkey to sustain its economic system. South Asia no longer remains India-centric as more Great Powers balancing Indo-US partnership with Russia-China-Pakistan partnership. There need not be neo-realistic assumption of whole dynamics. The whole idea of South Asia may get potentially changed once big powers act constructively in region. Pakistan has had little success with India on major issues, including, the Kashmir issue. The new alignments perhaps may offer some desirable readjustments towards acceptable solution. The Economic corridors not only consolidate Pakistan's economy they also provide opportunities to other smaller states of South Asia as well. Therefore, it depends upon leadership of Pakistan how it utilizes opportunity of CPEC instead making it liability for region. Pakistan has been working proactively and has left its apologetic approach in foreign policy making. However, internal political instability may undermine Pakistan's economic corridor. China is very much concerned about peace process in region. After US withdrawal from Afghanistan, more humiliation from West and new challenges for region may arise time and again. Pakistan and China have to be ready for facing all new challenges in region. China is already facing Australia, UK and US on one hand and Japan, and India on other. Golden Ring (GR) is opportunity for Pakistan and other regional actors. GR is opportunity for member countries (China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey) and opportunity always comes to prepared mind. It needed pragmatism instead of living in expectations from other countries.

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