

There is little doubt that China uses Pakistan as a proxy military and nuclear power against India.

Recently, China used its status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to put a hold on the UN Security Council's Al Qaida and ISIL (Daesh) Sanctions Committee's (also known as the UNSC 1267 Committee) listing of Laskar-e-Taiba (LeT) terrorist Sajid Mir, one of India's most wanted in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Earlier, China had blocked the listing of US-designated terrorists Abdul Rehman Makki and Abdul Rauf Azhar of the LeT and the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), respectively. It may be recalled that China brazenly opposed the listing of JeM chief Masood Azhar for ten years until 2019 before lifting the hold.

These terrorists are based in Pakistan and enjoy the patronage of its "deep state". Despite China's efforts to save its "all weather friend" from global censure, Pakistan continues to be in the "grey list" of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

China's misuse of its P-5 status disrupts collective efforts to counter terrorism. Such actions are in direct contrast to the consensus at the global level on the scourge that is international terrorism.

Counter-terrorism is not the only area in which the Sino-Pak tandem has weakened global efforts. The two have a long history of collusion in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery systems as well. There are other examples of collaboration in military matters and in the area of infrastructure and connectivity that have proved destabilising to regional stability in South Asia.

Missile Proliferation

The Sino-Pak nexus in the field of nuclear and missile proliferation is well recorded. The illicit A.Q. Khan network evolved into a three-way proliferation with China and Pakistan helping one another with bomb designs. Together, the two countries also helped North Korea with weapons of mass destruction (WMD) technologies.

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) had reported that between 1991 and 1993, China supplied 34 M-11 short range missiles to Pakistan in violation of the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). Subsequent cooperation included Chinese supply to Pakistan of ring magnets for high-speed centrifuges and the grandfathering of existing arrangements to deepen cooperation through the Chashma series of nuclear reactors.

Strong military ties have been the bedrock of China-Pakistan relations since the 1960s. For China, this has emerged as a low-cost tool to balance India and keep it hemmed in the sub-continent. Around 47% of China's military exports go to Pakistan and involve the full spectrum of support from small arms to fighter jets, as well as ships and submarines. These include advanced equipment such as the JF-17 fighter jets, the K-8 training aircraft, Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS), the Al-Khalid tanks and the Babur cruise missile, among others.

The so-called China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) is one of the mainstays of connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It violates the Sino-Pak border agreement of March 1963, Article 6 of which explicitly refers to its interim nature. Undertaken without any wider consultation with India, which has territorial claims over the region through which it runs, the CPEC has proved disruptive to both India-Pakistan and India-China relations.

China got engaged in the CPEC project for its own ends, more strategic than economic. The Karakoram Highway passes through the Khunjerab Pass and facilitates direct linkages between occupied Kashmir territory on both sides, including the trans-Karakoram tract of Shaksgam claimed by India, now part of China-occupied Kashmir. The CPEC offers China access to the Indian Ocean, natural resources and facilitates greater control over a strategic partner prone to upheavals.

Today, China is one of Pakistan's largest lenders, holding more than 27% of Pakistan's debt. Bilateral trade hovers around \$20 billion but is skewed in favour of China which enjoys a huge favourable balance of trade in the region of \$18 billion. There are signs of resentment in Pakistan at over-dependence on China, and the exploitative and usurious terms inherent in the CPEC projects.

One of the abiding features of the Sino-Pak collusion concerns the status of Jammu and Kashmir. During the 1950s, China's position on the Kashmir issue was relatively neutral. In the 1960s and 1970s, after the border conflict with India, China stepped up its rhetoric of support for "self-determination" for the people of Kashmir on the basis of UN resolutions. As the 1980s progressed and as relations between India and China gradually improved, China's stand underwent some change, with emphasis on resolving the issue on the basis of UN resolutions and relevant bilateral agreements.

After the abrogation of Article 370 by India in August 2019, China vehemently opposed the internal political changes effected by India. China unsuccessfully tried, thrice, to trigger discussions on J&K in the UN Security Council at the behest of Pakistan.

Itself a party to the Kashmir dispute, China is surreptitiously pushing Pakistan to alter the status of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) by converting it into its fifth province. The intention is to dilute the interim character of the 1963 agreement between the two countries and consolidate the de facto possession of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) territory by Pakistan and that of Shaksgam by China.

Political Support

Apart from synchronising their positions at the UN, China and Pakistan have created new tandems extending to other international organisations such as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Pakistan is China's main bridge to Islamic world. Pakistan plays a key role in fending off pressure on China within the OIC on account of its human rights violations in Xinjiang and the ill-treatment of its Muslim minorities, especially the Uyghurs. Pakistan also remains sensitive to Chinese concerns with regard to East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) separatists seeking refuge in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas).

As Pakistan has gradually drifted away from the U.S., it has moved closer to China. China's economic rise and growing clout is an enticing factor for a stricken economy such as that of Pakistan. As part of their Faustian bargain, the two act as hand maidens for each other on critical issues. In return for giving Pakistan a reprieve at the UN in the listing of Pak-based terrorists, China uses the former to secure its interests in the OIC. Taken in by the Sino-Pak shenanigans, the OIC has adopted hypocritical positions on the treatment of the Muslim minority in Xinjiang.

There is little doubt that China uses Pakistan as a proxy military and nuclear power against India. A key strategic objective for China is to seek access to basing facilities in Gwadar and other sites in the Indian Ocean littoral. Moreover, Pakistan's use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy appears, ironically, to be valued and encouraged by China, as demonstrated by the latter's actions at the UN.

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Expected Question (Prelims Exam)

Q. Consider the following statements-

1. The Belt and Road Initiative project is a set of projects undertaken by China to enhance connectivity in the land and sea area between Asia, Europe and Africa.
2. The Belt and Road Initiative project is also known as the 'Silk Road Economic Belt' and the Maritime Silk Road of the 21st Century.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1, nor 2

Ans. (c)

Expected Question (Mains Exam)

Q. While throwing light on the present status of India-China-Pakistan triangle, discuss what are the implications of China-Pakistan proximity for India? (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.