**Battleground Pakistan**

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March 31, 2023

China is fast emerging as an assertive colossus in the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic domains. It is maneuvering quite imperiously to impact, define and determine international affairs in different regions of the world. It is fast acquiring the avatar of a benevolent global power and peacemaker seeking to resolve seemingly intractable geopolitical issues/crises. The Greater Middle East Region (GMER) and Europe are its focus of attention, presently.

The US is currently pre-occupied with the Sino-Russia Combine. It is massively engaged in a war of attrition against Russia in Europe and circumscribing China’s meteoric rise within the South-Central Asian Region (SCAR) and the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR). Meanwhile, it seems to have lost its iron grip on the GMER, once its sole domain. Its initiative of the Abraham Accords appears to have disappointingly run aground after some initial success. Of late, the Arabs, in particular KSA and UAE, have started showing independent streaks, making policies blatantly at variance to the US-Israel Combine’s expectations. Sensing the latent paradigm shift, the Chinese have sedulously moved into the relative power vacuum in the GMER. (The China-KSA Strategic Partnership, by this scribe, The Nation, 30 December 22 and 03 January 23). The GMER was earlier epitomized by a tri-lateral array of mutually hostile centers of power - Israel, the KSA and Iran. The US always managed a tenuous balance of power between them. Its pro-Israel inclinations however were too pronounced to allow it to ever play the honest broker’s role in regional issues.

[Imran Khan is heir of General Zia's political ideology: Fatima Bhutto](https://www.nation.com.pk/09-Apr-2023/imran-khan-is-heir-of-general-zia-s-political-ideology-fatima-bhutto)

China has now emerged as an alternate power and an accepted-by-all impartial arbiter in the region.

Much to the US-led West’s and Israel’s consternation, China has managed to bring the seemingly irreconcilable Saudis and Iranians onto the negotiating table. They have mutually decided to re-establish diplomatic relations after a hiatus of about seven years and plan to revive their security and trade agreements. The Iranian President has also accepted an invitation from the Saudi King to visit KSA. Furthermore, the rapprochement between Iran and KSA will cause the smaller Gulf Arab states to start leaning towards Iran as well. This will further pacify the region and cause a regional pull towards Iran, literally nullifying the Abraham Accords. The various hotspots in the GMER, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, (even Pakistan) where KSA and Iran are/were involved in proxy wars, are likely to cool down too. A peaceful albeit radically different GMER is bound to emerge. The two Muslim oil-rich powerhouses can jointly recalibrate the geopolitical structure and balance in the GMER. They can provide strong and resolute leadership to the Muslim world too, and decisively fight for the inalienable rights of Muslims all over the world especially in Palestine, Kashmir, India, Myanmar, etc. China is now in a position to help them achieve it.

[One solider martryed, two terrorists killed in separate attacks: ISPR](https://www.nation.com.pk/09-Apr-2023/one-solider-martryed-two-terrorists-killed-in-separate-attacks-ispr)

Regardless of the spin that the western governments and media give to it, the fact is that China is now firmly center-stage in the GMER. Chinese presence and inevitability in the affairs of the GMER will henceforth be the new normal. China buys the bulk of its energy supplies from KSA and Iran. It has a US $ 400 billion, 25-year strategic cooperative agreement with Iran and has signed deals worth billions of dollars with KSA too. They have harmonized the objectives of Saudi Vision 2030 and the BRI too. For this massive economic investment and interdependence to fructify it is imperative that regional connectivity flourishes. CPEC provides just that; it is the most viable land and sea conduit that links China to the GMER. The environment has been created for the BRI-CPEC to take off into Iran and across the Persian Gulf onto the Arabian Peninsula and beyond.

In the geostrategic dimension, China is well-positioned to acquire presence not only on the Mekran Coast but also along Iran’s entire Persian Gulf coastline. This will give it crucial presence from Shatt al Arab, the Iraq-Iran border, to the Hormuz Straits, Mekran Coast/Gwadar and then on to Sir Creek, the Pakistan-India border in the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean. The Mekran Coast/Gwadar give it unmatchable oversight and control over the Sea Lines of Communication to and from the Hormuz Straits/Persian Gulf as well as over the global East-West trade to and from the IPR. This will help provide direct and intimate security to its massive investments in Pakistan, Iran and KSA/Gulf states.

[Asad Amanat Ali Khan: the prince charming of Patiala Gharana remembered on 16th death anniversary](https://www.nation.com.pk/09-Apr-2023/asad-amanat-ali-khan-the-prince-charming-of-patiala-gharana-remembered-on-16th-death-anniversary)

While it becomes imperative for China that the BRI-CPEC thrives, the US-led West would rather see it unceremoniously blunted. Thus, Pakistan and the BRI-CPEC emerge as the inexorable key to the success or otherwise, of US and Chinese policies in the region.

This potentially volatile strategic environment portends a ferocious clash of interests of the US-led West and China; the battlefield is Pakistan. The first battle is already being fought in the economic domain. The IMF/IFIs have suddenly become totally unresponsive sending Pakistan’s economy into a veritable tailspin. Apart from China no other country in the world has offered help. The Arabs too seem uncharacteristically diffident and reticent. Further battles will ensue. Pakistan is bound to come under extensive multidimensional coercion to delay, disrupt and/or destroy the CPEC. It is likely to be maintained in a state of continuous albeit controlled chaos, hovering on the brink of an economic meltdown. Its political infighting and polarization provide the most fertile grounds for external forces to exploit. A rejuvenated war of terror, social disharmony, institutional degradations, weakened strategic organizations, curtailed defense expenditures, volatile border regions/LOC/Siachen etc will all combine to make Pakistan extremely vulnerable to hostile diktat. It will see no respite!

[Factory worker shot dead by robbers over resistance in Mian Channu](https://www.nation.com.pk/09-Apr-2023/factory-worker-shot-dead-by-robbers-over-resistance-in-mian-channu)

Pakistan must realize that it is literally inevitable for the attainment of both US’ and China’s strategic objectives in this larger region. Neither will let go easily. The war will be fought in and over Pakistan and its soul. Pakistan ought to have positioned itself well to turn this challenge into an opportunity. That would have however required strategic foresight, visionary statecraft and sublime diplomacy. Our more-than-incompetent, egotistic, self-centered ruling elites are just too consumed by their suicidal, mutual hatred and animosities to recognize and counter the looming existential threats to Pakistan!