**Higher than the Mountains and Sweeter than Honey**

[Zafar Aziz Chaudhry](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/zafar-aziz-chaudhry/)

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Our Prime Minister has proceeded on a short trip to China for bilateral talks with the Chinese. Pakistan was the first country to recognize China and established diplomatic relations in 1950. China’s border meets Pakistan’s boundary in the north and is thus our close neighbour. Prime Minister H S Suharwardy was the first leader from Pakistan to visit Beijing in October 1956, and two months later, Chinese Premier Zhou En Lai visited Pakistan and was given a rousing welcome. Later, the mutual relations between both countries improved. However, closer ties between China and Pakistan began in the wake of the 1962 Sino-Indian clash. Pakistan started receiving military assistance from China in 1966, and both countries established a strategic alliance in 1972. Economic cooperation began in 1979. China has become Pakistan’s largest supplier of arms and its third-largest trading partner.

On two occasions, these warm relations were slightly damped: first, when China found traces of Islamist militancy among the Uighurs of Xinjiang province and suspected that it was coming from the militants of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Later, the Pakistani government took adequate security measures to allay the fears of China. During the reign of terror in Pakistan in the previous decade, China registered her protest and concern when Chinese citizens working in Pakistan were made targets of terror attacks, especially on the projects of the CPEC. On Pakistan’s sincere regrets on such occasions, no harm was done to their mutual cordiality of relations.

China gave tremendous financial assistance in the form of aid and soft loans to Pakistan in multiple development projects. In 1966, China built the Karakoram Highway linking China’s Xinjiang region with Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan. Today, this highway serves as the main route for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

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China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was established in 2013 under the aegis of China, which is a collection of infrastructure projects that are under construction throughout Pakistan. Originally valued at $47 billion, the value of CPEC projects is worth $62 billion as of 2020. CPEC’s potential impact on Pakistan has been compared to that of the Marshall Plan undertaken by the United States in post-war Europe. Pakistani officials predict that CPEC will create over 2.3 million jobs between 2015 and 2030, and add 2 to 2.5 percentage points to the country’s annual economic growth.

Modern transportation networks built under CPEC will link seaports in Gwadar and Karachi with northern Pakistan, as well as points further north in western China and Central Asia. A 1,100-kilometre-long motorway will be built between the cities of Karachi and Lahore as part of CPEC. The currently stalled Karachi-Peshawar main railway line will also be upgraded to allow for train travel at up to 160 km per hour. Pakistan’s railway network will also be extended to eventually connect to China’s Southern Xinjiang Railway in Kashgar.

Over $33 billion worth of energy infrastructure is to be constructed by private consortia to help alleviate Pakistan’s chronic energy shortages, which will amount to over 4,500MW, and have shed an estimated 2-2.5% off Pakistan’s annual gross domestic product. Over 10,400 MW of generating capacity is to be brought online under CPEC. A network of pipelines to transport liquefied natural gas and oil will also be laid as part of the project, including a $2.5 billion pipeline between Gwadar and Nawabshah to eventually transport gas from Iran. Electricity from these projects will primarily be generated from fossil fuels, though hydroelectric and wind-power projects are also included, as is the construction of one of the world’s largest solar farms.

According to official statistics, 20 per cent of CPEC is debt-based finance, while 80 per cent of CPEC are investments in Joint Ventures (JV) enterprise between Pakistan and China, with the project contributing to 40,000 jobs for local Pakistanis and 80,000 jobs for Chinese.

As close strategic partners, both Pakistan and China face the prospects of growing instability and turbulence in their neighbourhood. Both countries are against hegemony and seek the resolution of outstanding disputes through peaceful means. In this context, Pakistan-China relations have acquired even greater importance. Pakistan considers China to be a voice of reason and restraint in international affairs. It is the common choice of both countries to develop a cooperative partnership that conforms to the fundamental interests of the two countries. This friendship has weathered all storms due to its unique nature and will continue to contribute constructively to regional peace and stability.

The foreign media and press out of their sheer jealousy and enmity with China have severely criticized CPEC. The American press expresses military interests of China in Pakistan as opposed to the idea of an “economic project with peaceful intent” Another American critic has termed CPEC as “Colonizing Pakistan to Enrich China”. But the real test of the success of CPEC would mostly rest with Pakistan if the workers on these ongoing projects are provided with necessary facilities and obstructions in their work in are timely removed.

Several noted scholars hold the view that while China is striving to rehabilitate its glory lost during the “century of humiliation”, it has no apparent interest in either dominating the world or recreating the world in its image. It only wants its due share and representation in global political and economic architecture. Pakistan shares this perspective of a global order that ensures equal representation of small and big countries.

The world needs cooperation and collaboration between China and the US, whose economies are closely intertwined, and their cooperation is indispensable for solving transnational issues. However, the US-China rivalry is eroding the fruits of globalization.

*The writer is a former member of the Provincial Civil Service, and an author of Moments in Silence.*