**Pak-China military relations**

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On **Apr 11, 2022**

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Relations between Pakistan and China have grown and strengthened over the passage of time and have reached great heights in terms of economic cooperation, with military ties also in the process of expansion. Although China has been providing military assistance to Pakistan for quite some time now, the cooperation has deepened in recent years. Under the Trump presidency, there were fears of how Pakistan would cope with the withdrawal of billions of dollars of military aid. Islamabad however was able to fill this vacuum with Beijing’s help.

The primary focus for Pakistan has been on acquiring equipment for its Air Defense. Pakistan is quite dependent on its Air Force to provide defense for its ground formation. To achieve its aims, Pakistan has has worked on various joint projects with China such as the joint development of the JF-17 Thunder Aircraft and a tailor-made training aircraft based on China’s local Hongdu L-15 especially for the Air Force of Pakistan. The Chinese have custom designed numerous modern weapons for Pakistan such as the AL Khalid tanks, AWACS system and many others, enabling Pakistan to stand as one of the most powerful militaries in South Asia.

Moreover, not only have the two countries traded weapons, but have also scheduled joint exercises for the troops of both countries. Such a training camp was set up recently at the Sipahi Camp in Jaglot (Azad Kashmir), in order to train the Pakistan army soldiers in high altitude warfare. The Chinese instructors trained the troops not only about the special tactics required, but also enlightened them about the skills needed to endure the difficult conditions of the mountainous terrain. There are even plans of setting up a battalion by recruiting people from Gilgit-Baltistan and training them in this warfare. Furthermore, it is well known that China is the biggest investor in the Gwadar Sea Port, which holds great strategic importance as it is located in the Strait of Hormuz. It is believed that this could be used as a launch pad for the submarines and warships of the Chinese Navy. China is one of the land locked countries and finds it difficult to access the sea for defense purposes, but now has a direct route thanks to Pakistan.

Over the years, China has played a vital role in the development of the infrastructure of Pakistan’s nuclear programme, especially when Pakistan struggled in obtaining plutonium and uranium enriching equipment due to the export controls implemented by the western countries. Not only did China help Pakistan develop its key plutonium production planet, the Khushab reactor, but it also contributed to the expansion of Pakistan’s uranium reserves, which are two of the main components required in the production of nuclear weaponry. Moreover, due to China’s technical and material assistance, Pakistan was able to complete the Chashma Nuclear Power Complex—one of Pakistan’s largest nuclear power plant located in Punjab.

Many powers around the world have bitterly raised suspicions about how this alliance would end up being a trap for Pakistan, but the reality is that China has proved itself as a reliable ally time and again. The relations between the two countries are not just limited to the economic sphere as Beijing has helped Pakistan in countering terrorism and restoring stability in the region. This partnership is only going to flourish in the future.

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