

In this Issue

Broadening Pakistan's Search for Geopolitical Stability in a Contested Neighborhood

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STRATEGIC SECURITY INITIATIVE

Introduction

As tensions both in and around South Asia rise, this policy brief maps the most salient geopolitical stressors that require Islamabad's attention as Pakistan looks to rebuild and repair a post-pandemic economy at home, while ensuring survival in a challenging neighbourhood abroad. A year since India's BJP-ruled government unilaterally abrogated the special status and constitutional autonomy of the disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir, regional tensions have risen. While India has tried to present the move as an internal affair and therein fait accompli, this has been unacceptable to Pakistan which has since sharply re-centred the internationalisation of the Kashmir dispute as the mainstay of its foreign policy. This has been moderately successful. Turkey and Iran, along with China, have condemned India's attempts to unilaterally revise the status quo in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK) in contravention of existing United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions 38, 39, 47 and 51 that affirm the right to self-determination of the Kashmiri people. India's abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019 has impacted its ties with China: a deadly Sino-Indian confrontation in Ladakh this summer left many Indian soldiers dead after China resisted Indian attempts to expand its infrastructure along stretches of the un-demarcated border between the two Asian powers.¹ India has also since enhanced public visibility around its defence procurement and military modernisation, which are not without serious implications for strategic stability in South Asia. While to Islamabad's east, a stable, cold peace between China and India is far from guaranteed, to its west, Pakistan remains committed to doing what it can to aid Kabul and Washington manage a delicate intra-Afghan reconciliation now underway in Doha. India's position, one that views the Taliban's return to power as an unfavourable outcome, is an added strain to regional peace building efforts.

The Shadow of August 5

While multiple democratic governments in Islamabad have tried hard and often at significant expense to shift the relationship with India from one of conflict and crisis management to one of peace and trade, the view from Islamabad is that New Delhi's abrogation of Article 370 affording Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJK) special status has effectively undone the Shimla Agreement, which at the minimum allowed for nascent confidence-building. A year since India unilaterally abrogated Article 370, tensions between India and Pakistan remain high and diplomatic relations frozen. Following India's standoff with China this June, the Modi regime instructed the Pakistan High Commission in New Delhi to reduce its staff strength by half, prompting Pakistan to do the same.² Pakistan views the hostility of the BJP establishment as both a threat to peace and security in the region as well as its own political and territorial sovereignty. Speaking at the founding day of India's National Cadet Corps this year, Prime Minister Modi affirmed that India's armed forces needed just seven to 10 days to defeat Pakistan in war.³ Since 2019, Indian public officials have on numerous forums made clear that they now consider fomenting unrest in Balochistan and expressing rights over Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) to be publicly acceptable policy levers. Political statements to this effect re-enforce Islamabad's concern that by casting the creation of Pakistan in revanchist terms, Indian policymakers are revising the Indian public's acceptance threshold for external conflict, while justifying a foreign policy doctrine that is externally revisionist.⁴ A near-war confrontation in the skies

between the two countries in February 2019, furthermore, underscored the risks inherent in both political miscalculation and crisis escalation. The events of February also significantly altered existing beliefs of tactical deterrence, and recast bilateral spotlight on the balance of conventional capabilities in South Asia.⁵

There are similarly worries in Islamabad that India's election as a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) non-permanent member this year will likely be used by New Delhi to enhance its bid for great power status. India's UNSC ambitions could in the long-term provide a veneer of legitimacy to its annexation of IOJK, and its attempts to change the demographic structure of the disputed territory. Up to 25,000 people have been granted domicile certificates in Indian-administered Kashmir since May 18, 2020, which is likely to further inflame tensions in IOJK.⁶ On August 6, 2020, the UNSC met for the third time in the space of a year at China's behest to hold closed-door deliberations on the issue of Kashmir.⁷ These meetings are significant because they weaken if not invalidate New Delhi's assertion that Kashmir is an internal matter.⁸ Meanwhile, as India continues to reject international criticism of its actions, its attempts to forcibly integrate Ladakh as Union territory triggered a deadly standoff with China this summer after Chinese forces objected to Indian road construction in the Galwan Valley. On June 4, Wang Shida, deputy director of a Chinese ministry of state security-affiliated think tank, Institute of South Asian Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR), wrote, "On the Chinese side, India opened up new territory on the map, incorporated part of the areas under the local jurisdiction of Xinjiang and Tibet into its Ladakh union territory... This forced China into the Kashmir dispute, stimulated China and Pakistan to take counter-actions on the Kashmir issue, and dramatically increased the difficulty in resolving the border issue between China and India." Observers in Islamabad worry that the ongoing tensions between India and China may compound New Delhi's domestic compulsions to project military strength abroad, either through instigated conflict on the Line of Control (LOC) ahead of India's next state elections, or a false-flag operation in IOJK launched by the Indian government as a salve to ameliorate the public costs of having to de-escalate with the Chinese.

Arms and Influence

Military expenditure in the India-Pakistan dyad in 2019⁹

Country	World Rank	Spending (\$b.)	Change (%) ¹⁰ 2010-19
India	3	71.1	37
Pakistan	24	10.3	70

Military expenditure in the Sino-US dyad in 2019

Country	World Rank	Spending (\$b.)	Change (%) 2010-19
United States	1	732	-15
China	2	261	85

The BJP, meanwhile, has made little attempt to disguise its extensive military modernization program, aimed at enhancing its military and aerial capabilities in the region. At \$71.1 billion, India currently boasts the highest military spending in South Asia, and is the world's second-largest arms importer after Saudi Arabia.¹¹ India's recent acquisition of Rafale aircraft from France captures the dangers of its disproportionate arms build-up. According to former Indian Air Force (IAF) Chief of Air Staff B.S. Dhanoa, the combined purpose of the S-400 and Rafale, which can be adapted to deliver nuclear warheads, is to "hit Pakistani aircraft inside its territory".¹² India's S-400 air defence system is currently under production in Russia, will undergo a series of trials before its arrival in the country by the end of 2021. As part of emergency procurement amid New Delhi's troubles with Beijing, Moscow is also set to provide the IAF other kinds of missiles and bombs as well.¹³ Last year Russia's Federal Service for Military and Technical Cooperation revealed that India has ordered \$14.5 billion of Russian-made weapons, making it the single-largest buyer of Russian military hardware.

India's cabinet has simultaneously cleared a \$2.6 billion purchase of 24 multi-role MH-60R Seahawk maritime helicopters from Lockheed Martin to the Indian Navy. In addition, Lockheed Martin and Boeing are bidding for a contract to supply the IAF 114 combat planes in a deal estimated at \$15 billion.¹⁴ In a federal budget announcement in parliament in 2019, India's Finance Minister officially acknowledged, "Defence is our major spending and we give it as much as the budget allows".¹⁵ India's attempts to rapidly modernize its military enhance Pakistan's perceived vulnerability to predatory Indian behaviour. In order to restore stability, Pakistan has two choices; firstly, in the long term, to purchase similar, albeit expensive missile defence systems from the international market, namely Russia or China. Given Pakistan's economic difficulties the feasibility of this approach is an open question. Secondly, Islamabad could potentially induct an increased number of MIRV capable ballistic missiles to counter India's growing air defence shield, but which in turn risks further militarising an already heavily weaponised dyad.

Discontent in the Neighbourhood

India's relations with Bangladesh have come under recent strain, in part because of a lack of progress over a water sharing agreement in the Teesta Basin¹⁶, and in part because of India's highly controversial Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), passed by India's Parliament in December 2019.¹⁷ Observers in Dhaka reacted sharply to the legislation, which seeks to grant citizenship to Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities in the region. For many in Bangladesh, the legislation underscored the BJP's xenophobia and anti-Muslim credentials. India is already fast-tracking the deportation of an estimated 40,000 Rohingya Muslims living in the country after fleeing Buddhist-majority Myanmar. Bangladesh's geostrategic importance in the Indian Ocean is underscored by the fact that it has now surpassed India as the fastest-growing South Asian economy, according to the Asian Development Bank (ADB).¹⁸ While Dhaka's relations with Islamabad have traditionally remained cool in recent times, there are suggestions that this may be changing. Earlier this year Bangladesh approved the Pakistani High Commissioner's nomination to his post, which had been lying vacant for 20 months.¹⁹ In a subsequent yet rare phone call in July, Prime Minister Imran Khan invited his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina to visit Islamabad.²⁰ During the call, Prime Minister Khan spoke about Islamabad's commitment to "deepening fraternal relations with Bangladesh on the basis of mutual trust, mutual respect and sovereign equality".²¹ Prime Minister Imran Khan also held a subsequent phone call with Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih to emphasise the need for stronger ties between the two countries.

Simultaneously visible are signs that Bangladesh, which has long sought to strike a pragmatic balance in its relations with Beijing and New Delhi, may in fact be drawing closer to China. While India has extended three Lines of Credit to Bangladesh in the last eight years,²² Beijing remains Dhaka's top trading partner.²³ This summer the China-backed Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) approved a \$250 million loan to Bangladesh to help it counter the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁴ A Chinese company, Beijing Urban Construction Group (BUCG), meanwhile, has been awarded a contract to construct a new terminal at Osmani International Airport in Sylhet.²⁵ It should be noted that China is already implementing \$10 billion worth of infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, ranging from economic zones to power plants. Sino-Bangladeshi cooperation is not without consequence for Pakistan, given the sensitive geopolitical and historical context in which India has worked hard to play Bangladesh off Pakistan, including on the pivotal issue of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).²⁶ In 2016, Bangladesh was one of the first countries to pull out of the SAARC summit being held in Islamabad, after India refused to participate.

Nepal's relations with India also deteriorated this year over the Kalapani border dispute. India's inauguration this of a new road from Dharchula to Lipulekh on the Mansarovar Yatra route this summer angered the KP Sharma Oli government; a Constitution Amendment Bill was subsequently passed by Nepal's Parliament to add Kalapani, Lipulekh and Limpiyadhura to the country's new map.²⁷ Dispute over Kalapani also erupted when India revoked Article 370 and released a new political map denoting Jammu & Kashmir as Union territory. The map, like earlier ones, designated Kalapani as a district of Uttarakhand, prompting, youth activists and students in Nepal to take to the streets to condemn India's unilateral actions and insist that their country would "defend its international border".²⁸

Contestation in the Indian Ocean

A complex grid of regional competition is underway in the Indian Ocean. Against a backdrop of an all-encompassing Sino-U.S. rivalry, largely instigated by Washington, recent developments between Iran and

China have also recast the regional landscape in a light with implications for both Pakistan and India.²⁹ Risks stem from the fact that U.S.-led Western opinion continues to be sceptical of and hostile towards an economically rising China, which it sees as a strategic challenger.³⁰ Western officials have repeatedly suggested that Pakistan stands to lose from venturing too close to the Chinese orbit.³¹ Meanwhile, despite a legacy of non-alignment, India under the BJP too has found itself caught in the crosshairs of a fast-altering great power landscape. The Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), 2017, complicates New Delhi's desired purchase of defence and energy supplies from Russia.³² Iran, meanwhile, which has normally sought to balance close relations with both Islamabad and New Delhi, has been vocal in its criticism of the Modi regime for eliminating IOJK's special status, terming it an 'ugly act' and urging India to exercise restraint.³³ A recently concluded Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Tehran and Beijing, which provides for \$400 billion Chinese investment in Iran's petrochemical sectors, as well as in its transportation and manufacturing infrastructure, also has implications for South Asia.³⁴ An immediate effect of this agreement is India's exclusion from the 628-kilometer Chabahar-Zahedan railway line, which was eventually to be extended to Zaranj in Afghanistan. China's foothold in the development of the Chabahar Port, largely regarded until now as New Delhi's counterbalance to Gwadar, could significantly shift the balance of regional influence in China's favour. With India's exit from Chabahar port, China will likely take over operational responsibilities for Chabahar in the foreseeable future.³⁵ For Pakistan, this increases the possibility of connecting Gwadar to Chabahar, given the short, 75-kilometer distance between the two ports. Should Chabahar and its connectivity links fall within the purview of the BRI, India may have to choose between integrating its own plans to reach Afghanistan, and therein Russia and Europe, within existing Sino-Iranian architecture, or depend solely on-air connectivity which limits its outreach to West Asia.

Tensions in and contestations over the Indian Ocean also involve the United States. In recent years the renaming of the U.S. Pacific Command to the Indo-Pacific Command, the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and Western interpretations of Beijing's expanding diplomacy in the region as subversive attempts to bind the geopolitical space have all re-enforced the currency of the Indo-Pacific as a bipolar political theatre.³⁶ Of concern to strategic policy planners in Pakistan is the degree of Indo-U.S. military collusion that is borne from Washington's Indo-Pacific Strategy, bringing into question the ability of the U.S. to play the role of a neutral arbiter in South Asia, and the demands this places on Pakistan in the context of a steadily mounting Sino-U.S. competition. While the most likely theatre for direct Sino-U.S. confrontation for now remains the South China Sea, both Washington and New Delhi are likely to take note of Beijing's growing naval strength and expanding submarine fleet including aircraft carriers in the Indian Ocean, with suspicion.³⁷ In 2019, China, Russia and Iran held an unprecedented four-day joint naval exercise in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman.³⁸ The Gulf of Oman is a particularly sensitive waterway as it connects to the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil passes and which in turn connects to the Gulf. Earlier in 2019, the United States proposed a U.S.-led naval mission following attacks on international merchant vessels including Saudi tankers in Gulf waters, which the United States blamed on Iran.³⁹ Islamabad's geographic proximity to Tehran and its historical association with Riyadh require its policymakers to closely monitor developments in an increasingly crowded Indian Ocean, which may well place additional demands on Pakistan's foreign policy choices in the event of another crisis.

Guarding the Corridor: The BRI's Soft Underbelly

As Pakistan embarks on the second phase of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the project is likely to attract even more invective from both India and the United States.⁴⁰ There are two dimensions to Indo-U.S. opposition to CPEC. The first has to do with the project's geography: New Delhi has long termed the project illegal given its passage through Pakistan's northern territory including GB and AJK, a view that will likely have hardened as a result of the dramatic deterioration in ties with Beijing this summer.⁴¹ The second has to do with the project's perceived function: Indian and Western officials continue to paint CPEC to be a strategic-military project with geostrategic ends, clarifications to the contrary by Chinese and Pakistani officials notwithstanding.⁴² Observers in these circles, perhaps unsurprisingly, view Beijing's positions on international forums such as the UNSC and Financial Action Task Force (FATF) a function of China's strategic investments in Pakistan.⁴³

In reality, Islamabad considers CPEC to be an economic lynchpin in the wider strategic relationship between Pakistan and China. For Islamabad, CPEC can deliver the objective of helping Pakistan develop into a prosperous regional trade and infrastructure hub.⁴⁴ Today CPEC is one of the largest bilateral investment projects anywhere in the world and a centrepiece of China's much-touted Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), made all the more relevant by the fact that China is expected to emerge as the world's largest economy within the next decade. It is predicted that 71 countries along the BRI will benefit in terms of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increase, welfare effect, trade, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and factor return.⁴⁵ With the

sole exception of Bhutan, which does not have diplomatic relations with China, all of India's other neighbours have either directly or indirectly signed onto the BRI. In this context, of concern to Islamabad is the possibility that heightened Sino-Indian tensions may have increased the vulnerability of BRI-related projects in Pakistan to foreign targeting, and that New Delhi may use CPEC in particular as a way to clandestinely hit at Beijing. These concerns are not unfounded: an attack this summer by the separatist Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) on Karachi's Stock Exchange which houses Chinese shares underscores the vulnerability of Sino-Pakistani cooperation to geopolitical exigencies.⁴⁶

This is not the first time that the BLA has targeted Chinese investment in Pakistan: in 2018 its members tried to storm the Chinese consulate in Karachi, killing at least four people.⁴⁷ Last year the BLA attacked a five-star hotel in the port city of Gwadar, a centrepiece of the multi-billion-dollar Corridor.⁴⁸ The BLA maintains sanctuaries in both Afghanistan as well as areas along the Pak-Iran border.⁴⁹ But credible evidence suggests the militant group receives both funds and support from Indian intelligence. While these vulnerabilities are likely to place additional demands on both policing and security for CPEC-related projects in Pakistan, they also complicate the Sino-Pakistani desire to extend CPEC to other countries, including Afghanistan, to aid regional development and connectivity as a means to neighbourhood integration.⁵⁰ While a variety of Afghan stakeholders including the Taliban have expressed a keenness to see Kabul's inclusion in the project, any extension of CPEC will be contingent on an improved regional security climate, a political settlement between the Taliban and Kabul, and security guarantees that can protect both investment and on-ground infrastructure from armed groups that target Pakistan and Pakistani interests.

Spoilers in the Endgame

Meanwhile, to its west, the fragility of gains in the quest for a viable Afghan peace continues to impact security in the neighbourhood.⁵¹ According to a UN monitoring report, sanctuaries and terrorist cells in the adjoining eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan, Paktia, Paktika and Khost⁵² shelter 6,500 mercenaries belonging to the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), presenting a real-time security risk for border stability and security in the Pakistani provinces of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan.⁵³ Despite the counterterror progress of the past six years in Pakistan's erstwhile tribal regions, militant groups that launch attacks from foreign soil undercut a hard-won trust bank between Islamabad and Kabul that is vital to regional stability.⁵⁴ While Kabul denies official complicity in attacks launched against Pakistan from inside its borders, links between Kabul's powerful National Directorate of Security (NDS) and Indian intelligence are well established in sponsoring proxy warfare along the 2,600-kilometer international border between Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁵⁵

From an extra-regional perspective, India has regularly maintained that the Taliban should not be allowed back into government, in contrast to China and Iran, which, like Pakistan, have voiced their support for an inclusive Afghan-led process that does not exclude any single group. Ongoing negotiations first between the United States and the Taliban, and now between the Taliban and Afghan representatives, have implicitly been viewed by New Delhi as a setback to Indian interests in the region; with some Indian analysts calling on Indian policymakers to "reposition [their] priorities" in light of the developing situation.⁵⁶ How India chooses to do this in the coming months will be of concern to Islamabad, especially if it involves nurturing groups that are inimical to Pakistan's security or expanding the geospatial presence of spoiler outfits capable of undermining reconciliation next door.

The Road Ahead

The perception in Islamabad that India under the BJP is looking to revise the limits of what constitutes geopolitically acceptable behaviour in the neighbourhood has increased manifold since its Parliament passed the Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act last year. India's foreign policy meanwhile is evolving in the context of an increasingly unpredictable global environment, even as the Indo-Pacific and India's election to the UNSC jointly provide New Delhi new political contexts in which to raise its regional profile. Islamabad's belief that fluid great power trends may encourage New Delhi to select into crisis with its neighbours, particularly close to state elections, is not unsubstantiated. The events of February 2019 only too clearly delineated the escalatory risk inherent in any crisis between India and Pakistan. Meanwhile, as Pakistan looks to rebuild and repair a post-pandemic economy at home, it is also likely to see CPEC's second phase as a sensible play. While implementation of CPEC projects will naturally entail closer coordination with Beijing, externally Pakistan must strategically navigate both relations with Beijing and Washington, without imperilling either. On the ground, safeguarding the Corridor and its projects will be doubly imperative given

growing Indian designs in the region, including in Balochistan. Relations with Washington, meanwhile, will likely see greater clarity following November's Presidential election in the United States. While Pakistan-U.S. relations may lack substantive content for now, they continue to be driven by a shared objective of achieving a peaceful solution to the Afghan endgame next door. It will be instructive to see whether a potential Biden administration seeks to rejoin the Iran nuclear deal; should this happen, the U.S. may be able to stabilize its equation with Tehran in a manner that benefits regional stability at large. However, as the containment of China is likely to remain a mainstay of Washington's approach to the Indo-Pacific regardless of who wins in November, regional stability remains far from guaranteed. Similarly, Islamabad should expect a robust Indo-U.S. partnership to remain on track. To counter the risks arising from these challenges, proactive and pragmatic policymaking is essential in Islamabad. In particular, this Policy Brief recommends the following.

1. In light of India's publicly declared policy of hostility, Pakistan must game all potential border responses, to both its east and its west. It must continue to internationalize the Kashmir dispute at relevant global forums through a robust public and economic diplomacy campaign, while quietly exploring opportunities with Turkey, Iran, China and Malaysia to build economic and political pressure on India to revise its annexation of Indian Occupied Kashmir. It must also politically and diplomatically make a case to Washington and Moscow to refrain from making sophisticated weapons transfers to India if there is a risk these weapons may be used by against Pakistan. On nuclear issues, Pakistan should scale up the visibility of diplomatic efforts around its commitment to strategic stability and nonproliferation.

2. As Pakistan embarks on the second phase of CPEC, it must strategically steer political and economic relations with both Beijing and Washington, without jeopardising either. This requires clearly laying out CPEC's economic and geopolitical benefits, including the potential for East-West connectivity, which in turn could provide impetus for a stronger trade and economic partnership with Afghanistan. To enhance CPEC's long-term sustainability Pakistan should consider diplomatically engaging smaller South Asian, African and Gulf countries in the IOR in a bid to synergise regional economic aspirations. Policymakers in Islamabad should vigorously invest in a five-year blueprint for geo-economic diplomacy that provides a strategic framework for this.

3. Pakistan must simultaneously navigate its role in the Middle East, while recognising that India's deepening engagement with the Arab Gulf has come at the expense of Arab reticence against India's atrocities in occupied Jammu & Kashmir. The recent peace deal between the UAE and Israel is likely to further cleave the Middle East, with Gulf states led by Riyadh and Abu Dhabi on one side, and Iran and Turkey on the other. Both a dispassionate reworking of Pakistan's diplomatic toolkit in the Gulf, and a clear reiteration of a desire for peace and stability in the Middle East is necessary if drumming up support for Kashmir in these key constituencies is to be successful.

4. Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia continues to be strategically important, undergirded by a belief of Riyadh's symbolic centrality to the Muslim world, and the fact that the Kingdom is home to an estimated 2 million Pakistanis whose remittances feed the economy back home. Both sides stand to benefit from continued counterterrorism cooperation in the fight against Daesh, and finding common cause in advocating for a resolution of both the Kashmir and Palestine disputes.

5. Iran is a neighbour with a hard border and shared coastline, and Pakistan needs to game new entry-points that may potentially emerge out of a U.S. return to the JCPOA should the Democrats win in November. Both Tehran's clear-eyed stance on India's illegal annexation of IOK and its growing stakes in the Afghan endgame ought to make it a key player on Pakistan's strategic radar; to this end improved Pak-Iran border management, counterterrorism and joint antinarcotics patrolling is essential for long-term peace and security, and a prerequisite to shoring up bilateral economic cooperation.

6. With the United States, Pakistan should continue to leverage the political, diplomatic and military-intelligence tools that have helped both sides identify and work towards a common shared objective in Afghanistan. U.S. support is necessary for dismantling militant infrastructure in eastern Afghanistan that presents a threat to Pakistan. Pakistani policymakers should also discourage U.S. counterparts from viewing Islamabad through either clichéd Afghan- or Indo-Pacific-centric prisms. Pakistan should meanwhile look to incentivise both the U.S. government and corporate sector to scale up investments and participation in regional connectivity projects. Both sides stand to benefit from a new public narrative around the relationship that is rooted in shared democratic principles and imperatives for regional economic development and stability.

7. In both the broader Indian Ocean and West Asian regions, Pakistan should look to vigorously enhance trade and economic cooperation. Given rising competition at sea, Pakistan should continue to invest in its Navy and merchant navy to expand maritime reach and keep sea-lanes of communication open. It should also look to enhance its role in multilateral platforms such as joint naval drills and the Combined Task Force.

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- ²⁴ This project is co-financed by Asian Development Bank intending to help Dhaka with budget support for combating the pandemic. “China-backed AIIB approves \$250 million loan for Bangladesh’s COVID-19 response” (2020, May 21), *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-aiib-bangladesh/china-backed-aiib-approves-250-million-loan-for-bangladeshs-covid-19-response-idUSKBN22X08Z>
- ²⁵ “Deal signed with Chinese firm for Sylhet airport expansion” (2020, April 19), *Dhaka Tribune*. Retrieved from <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/nation/2020/04/19/deal-signed-with-chinese-firm-for-sylhet-airport-expansion>
- ²⁶ Relations between Islamabad and Dhaka stuttered in 2016 following Bangladesh’s execution of Motiur Rahman Nizami, the chief of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) Bangladesh. Subsequently, under Indian pressure, Bangladesh pulled out from the SAARC summit that was scheduled to be held in Islamabad. A little later Dhaka observed ‘genocide day’ to mark the tragic events of 1971, further straining relations between Pakistan and Bangladesh. “Bangladesh pulls out of Saarc summit as tensions rise” (2016, September 28), *Dawn*. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1286662>
- ²⁷ “Nepal to send updated map to India, UN and international community” (2020, August 2), *Indian Express*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/nepal-to-send-updated-map-to-un-international-community-6535441/>
- ²⁸ “Explained: Kalapani, a small area on the India map that bothers Nepal” (2019, November 12), *Indian Express*. Retrieved from <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-a-small-area-in-india-map-bothers-nepal-6113408/>
- ²⁹ Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif announced in early July that China and Iran were in the process of negotiating a 25-year strategic agreement, aiming to work together more closely in the coming decades.
- ³⁰ “What Happens Next with the U.S.-China Rivalry” (2020, May 2), *Time*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/5830990/happens-next-us-china-rivalry/>
- ³¹ The United States under President Trump has made good on its threat to tighten the screws on China. Observers see US-China rivalry as shifting into new and unpredictable areas, from market openings to intellectual property, to now engulfing everything including Hong Kong’s status as a global financial hub. In July, the United States ordered the closure of China’s consulate in Houston after accusing Beijing of stealing intellectual property.
- ³² “U.S. position on CAATSA unchanged despite China’s actions in neighbourhood” (2020, July 7), *The Hindu*. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/us-position-on-caatsa-unchanged-despite-chinas-actions-in-neighbourhood/article32010144.ece>
- ³³ “Iran issues rare criticism of India over Kashmir” (2019, August 30), *Atlantic Council*. Retrieved from <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-issues-rare-criticism-of-india-over-kashmir/>
- ³⁴ The opening sentence of the proposed draft reads: “Two ancient Asian cultures, two partners in the sectors of trade, economy, politics, culture and security with a similar outlook and many mutual bilateral and multilateral interests will consider one another strategic partners.” According to President Rouhani, the agreement provides “a ground for Iran and China’s participation in basic projects and development infrastructure, including the large ‘Belt and Road’ initiative (BRI), and an opportunity to attract investment in various economic fields, including industry, tourism, information technology and communication.” “*Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership*” (2020, July 22), *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/11/world/asia/china-iran-trade-military-deal.html>
- ³⁵ While there is a possibility that China’s overtures towards Iran may prompt New Delhi to rethink and rejuvenate its outreach to Tehran, for now the position taken by Indian authorities is that: “India is not part of this project as of now, since there is lack of clarity on whether the railway project will attract US sanctions.”
- ³⁶ The change in nomenclature is the result of the United States according renewed importance to the two Asian oceans connected by the straits of Malacca.
- ³⁷ The United States and India have already, largely in response to the imperative of containing China, placed a new emphasis on the “Quad” comprising the US, India, Japan and Australia. The Quad is strategically designed to enhance the security of the Indo-Pacific region and balance the power of a growing China across the sea-lanes of the Indian Ocean. A substantial portion of the world’s seaborne movement of oil and gas traverses through these sea-lanes. “Chinese Navy Submarines Could Become A Reality In Indian Ocean” (2020, June 26), *Forbes*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/hisutton/2020/06/26/chinese-navy-submarines-could-become-a-reality-in-indian-ocean/#266703354a6c>
- ³⁸ “Russia, China, Iran start joint naval drills in Indian Ocean” (2019, December 27), *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-military-russia-china/russia-china-iran-start-joint-naval-drills-in-indian-ocean-idUSKBN1YV0IB>
- ³⁹ “Iran decries ‘cowardly attack’ on oil tanker” (2019, October 12), *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-iran-tanker/iran-decries-cowardly-attack-on-oil-tanker-idUSKBN1WR05D>

⁴⁰ This June, CPEC Authority Chairman Asim Bajwa announced that the second phase of the mega project was set to commence. In addition to agricultural and socio-economic uplift, the second phase includes a revamping of Pakistan's railway structure, a new fully fenced railway track from Peshawar to Karachi, a dry port at Havelian, and a new transmission system. A White House report sent last month to the US Congress, meanwhile, asserts that BRI will give China "undue political influence and military access" in the Asian theatre.

⁴¹ In July 2018, S Jaishankar, then Foreign Secretary of India, told Chinese officials in Beijing, "CPEC violates Indian sovereignty because it runs through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir." During the same meeting, India also asked China to explain how it could take part in the CPEC project when it passes through disputed Kashmiri territory. Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue 2020 in January, Indian Naval Chief Admiral Karambir Singh further asserted that the Corridor impinged on India's sovereignty.

⁴² "China: No Military Aim of Corridor Project With Pakistan" (2018, April 21), *Voice of America*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/china-no-military-aim-corridor-project-pakistan>

⁴³ "China's Belt and Road Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn" (2018, December 19), *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-china-belt-road-military.html>

⁴⁴ "China's Belt and Road rejuvenated in Pakistan, \$11 billion deals signed" (2020, July 20), *TRT World*. Retrieved from <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/china-s-belt-and-road-rejuvenated-in-pakistan-11-billion-deals-signed-38271>

⁴⁵ "What's in it for the Belt-and-Road countries?" (2018, April 19), *The Economist*. Retrieved from <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2018/04/19/whats-in-it-for-the-belt-and-road-countries>

⁴⁶ Pakistani intelligence agencies said they were aware of Indian activity two months before the assault, and had already foiled four prior India-hatched terror plots in Karachi. The BLA claimed to have carried out the offensive on account of perceived China's infringement on the rights of Baloch citizens. This summer, the Baloch Raji Ajoi Sangar (BRAS) a consortium of four Baloch separatist organizations, announced in a media release an alliance with the Sindudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) a little-known separatist group operating in Sindh. According to the consortium's statement: "Sindh and Balochistan are equally affected by the expansionist and oppressive resolves of China...Through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, China aims to subjugate Sindh and Balochistan and occupy the coasts and resources from Badin to Gwadar." The threat posed by this consortium is not insignificant, as it provides a mix of militants an umbrella under which they can launch deadlier attacks against not just CPEC but all Chinese-related investments in Pakistan.

⁴⁷ "Who are the BLA and why did they attack a Chinese consulate in Pakistan?" (2018, November 23), *TRT World*. Retrieved from <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/who-are-the-bla-and-why-did-they-attack-a-chinese-consulate-in-pakistan-21909>

⁴⁸ "Gunmen attack hotel in Pakistan's Gwadar, kill five people" (2019, May 12), *Al Jazeera*. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/05/gunmen-attack-hotel-pakistan-port-city-gwadar-190511134034253.html>

⁴⁹ The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is an insurgent group that is listed by the United States, United Kingdom and Pakistan as a terrorist organization. India does not list the BLA as a terrorist group. Furthermore, Indian media reports have suggested that BLA operatives frequently receive medical treatment in Indian hospitals.

⁵⁰ In December 2017, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated "both China and Pakistan are willing to extend CPEC to Afghanistan... through Afghanistan, CPEC could be connected with the China-Central and Western Asia Economic Corridor." In June 2019, President Xi reaffirmed China's interest in playing an active role in bringing stability to Afghanistan through BRI.

⁵¹ Pakistan and Afghanistan share a 2,400-kilometer border that was drawn by the British in the 19th century and that left ethnic Pashtun tribes split. Consecutive Afghan governments have questioned the legitimacy of the division. Efforts by Pakistan to build reinforced fences and security checkpoints along the border have been met by resistance from the Afghan side. Meanwhile, in May 2018, the merger of the Federally Administered Tribal Areas with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was finally completed when President Mamnoon Hussain signed the 25th Constitutional Amendment Bill into law. This merger was seen as a cornerstone in consolidating the counterterror gains of the past decade, and an essential prerequisite to bringing stability and political normalcy to the citizens of these erstwhile alienated areas.

⁵² "Six Pakistani soldiers killed as UN says anti-Pakistan militants hiding in Afghanistan" (2020, July 29), *Arab News*. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1711676/pakistan>

⁵³ Letter dated 16 July 2020 from the Chair of the Security Council Committee pursuant to resolutions 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities addressed to the President of the Security Council. Retrieved from https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_2020_717.pdf

⁵⁴ The consequences of an unregulated border include artillery firing that vitiates the bilateral relationship. Following some of the most intense border clashes between Pakistan and Afghanistan last month, Gen. Yasin Zia, the chief of Afghanistan's army, instructed the three army corps stationed along the border areas to be "fully ready to retaliate to the Pakistani military in kind" and put his country's special forces and air force on the "highest alert," Afghanistan's Defence Ministry said in a statement.

⁵⁵ While in Pakistani custody in 2017, former TTP spokesman confirmed that Indian and Afghan intelligence services funded and facilitated Afghanistan-based TTP and Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) for terrorism in Pakistan. The spokesman revealed that NDS and RAW gave "targets" to TTP and JuA, who received remuneration for every activity they carried out in Pakistan; he also revealed that NDS issued Tazkiras (local ID documents) to TTP/JuA terrorists to allow them to move from one location to another.

⁵⁶ “Dealing With the Taliban: India’s Strategy in Afghanistan After U.S. Withdrawal” (2020, July 2), *Carnegie India*. Retrieved from <https://carnegieindia.org/2020/06/02/dealing-with-taliban-india-s-strategy-in-afghanistan-after-u.s.-withdrawal-pub-81951>

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