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### 3. China-Pakistan Relations :

## **China's Role in Pakistan: International and Domestic Implications**

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#### **Introduction**

The growing activities of the People's Republic of China in Pakistan are increasingly coming under the scanner of strategic analysts along with worrying the international community, along with India - sharing borders with both the states -, for the past few years (cf. PTI, 2013a). Having maintained a rather 'behind-the-scenes' support for Islamabad for decades, Beijing, today, is exercising its influence more publicly (Wolf, 2013d; 2013c; 2013b; 2013a). Besides Chinese concerns about the security of its investment and business activities, it seems obvious that the identified strategic and economic benefits of cooperation with Pakistan are outbidding the risk perceptions. Nevertheless, besides the fact that Islamabad sees Beijing as its 'all-weather-friend', there are no doubts that Pakistan-China relations have seen remarkable ups and downs (cf. Jacob, 2010, 1; cf. Kardon, 2011). For each assessment of these bilateral ties, it is necessary to recognize the existence of serious flows and setbacks in Pakistan-China interaction. Having this in mind, this article deals with the issue of China's role in Pakistan and its impact on internal, regional, and international implications. After a brief elaboration on the historical development of Pakistan-China relations, selected cases of China's activities in Pakistan, mainly Balochistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Gwadar port will be in the spotlight. It will be argued that the relations between Islamabad and Beijing are not only highly imbalanced, but also have the potential of taking a non-favourable turn for economic development as well as democratic consolidation in Pakistan. In this context, it is pointed out that the establishment, or the ruling elite, of

Pakistan is most likely gaining remarkable profits out of the Pak-China cooperation, but only on the expense of the provinces and the regional population. This is mainly due to a lack of fair mechanism of revenue sharing from national resources as well as a lack of political will and capacities to implement federal elements. Furthermore, following additional arguments will be made: First, there is a lack of understanding or ignorance of the Chinese mindset and intentions among Pakistani leaders. Second, Beijing will be never an alternative partner (understood as replacement) for the United States. Third, India is an important but not the central issue in Pak-China relations.

### **Historical Background: Geneses and Development of Pakistan-China Relations**

Generally, Pakistan and China share a relatively long, 'special relationship' (Prakash, 1999, 125). In other words, since Pakistan came into existence in 1947, it kept a close diplomatic eye on China. Faced with the need for allies as a result of the confrontation with India (cf. Wirsing, 2003), Pakistan became the first Islamic country to recognize the People's Republic of China in 1950 (one year after India). Diplomatic ties got established between both countries in 1951 (cf. Jetly, 2012, 1). This appeasement strategy of Islamabad towards Beijing continued during the first Bandung conference in 1955 in which the Pakistani leaders assured the Chinese premier Chou-en-lai of having no fears to Chinese policies of aggression (cf. Verma, 1999, 111). In this context, Pakistanis also voted in favour of granting China a seat in the United Nations and sided with Beijing in the then newly appeared issues over Taiwan and Tibet (cf. Zaki, 2010, 31, 51). This marked the beginning of mutually supportive relations, which considerably increased after the Sino-India War of 1962. Since then, Pakistan and China have regularly exchanged high-level visits resulting in numerous agreements (cf. Sattar, 2010). For example, both countries resolved their border disputes, signing a border agreement in 1963, to the dismay of the Indian government which accused Pakistan of illegally ceding territory of Pakistan-administered Kashmir to China. Consequently New Delhi sent an 'emphatic protest' pointing out that Islamabad is not entitled to negotiate with China at all about disputed territories, especially not the areas which were handed over to the

Chinese(cf. Verma, 1999, 114). Furthermore, both countries started cooperating on major development projects on Pakistani soil, most noteworthy of which is the construction of the 1,200 km-long Karakoram Highway, the highest international road connecting China and Pakistan (Mitra/Wolf/Schöttli, 2006, 298)<sup>1</sup>. This infrastructure project is not only of enormous commercial but also tremendous strategic value to Beijing (cf. Verma, 1999). In this context one should state that, the ongoing Gwadar port project on the Makran coast in the province of Balochistan is another remarkable example that showcases the way in which China combines development projects with clear strategic and security interests (Wolf, 2013d). Besides these infrastructure focused development projects, China provides military equipment and nuclear technologies as well as established cooperation with Pakistan in the field of communication,tourism, mining, energy, and counter-terrorism -especially against the Pakistan-based militant groups operating in Chinese Xingjian province (cf. Zaki, 2010; Masood 2004; Singh, 1999; Sawhny, 1999). Another milestone in the Pak-China friendship is marked by the signing of the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighborly Relations between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan"<sup>2</sup> (cf. Niazi, 2006). The treaty binds both signatories to desist from joining "any alliance or bloc which infringes upon the sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity of the other side" and got renewed in 2010<sup>3</sup> and in July 2013 with the signing of "Common Vision for Deepening China-Pakistan Strategic Cooperative Partnership in the New Era"<sup>4</sup>.

However, it also demonstrated the disturbing impact Chinese enterprises have on Pakistan's political and socio-economic developments. The activities of Beijing in Gilgit-Baltistan are therefore exemplarily.

### **Domestic Dimension – Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan in Focus**

Regarding the negative effects on the political landscape, several observers state that Chinese activities are reinforcing the inequalities that already exist between Islamabad and the provinces in all spheres of state and society (cf. Wolf, 2013a; 2013b; 2013c; 2013d). Basically one can identify similar developments in Gilgit-Baltistan and

Balochistan. Regarding Gilgit-Baltistan, the implications of the increasing cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing became evident when China started investing heavily in major development projects such as the Karakorum Highway - which is until today the only highway in Gilgit-Baltistan connecting this neglected area with the rest of the country. This was made possible, among other determinants, mainly because of the Pakistan-China boundary agreement. From a Pakistani perspective this was interpreted as a cunning move, since it reduced the amount of disputable landmass administered by Islamabad and also appeased China - a much needed ally. In this context, it is imperative to note that Gilgit-Baltistan is also of great significance to China. Only a politically stable Gilgit-Baltistan under Pakistani control seems to serve Chinese interests, which would imply secure access to the Arabian Sea (cf. Harrison, 2010). But like in other cases, for example neighbouring Afghanistan, the respective people do not play a factor in the bilateral state relations, especially when it comes to political participation and decision-making or sharing economic benefits. In consequence, having the perception of being treated like an 'internal colony', there is a significant increase in demands for greater autonomy and self-governance, even independence by sub-national groups within Gilgit-Baltistan. Additionally suffering from dramatic economic underdevelopment and a poor social infrastructure, despite rich natural resources, the inhabitants of Gilgit-Baltistan are getting further alienated from the Pakistani state. However, instead of addressing the issues raised, Islamabad has responded in its usual way by promising reforms and to a certain degree deciding on them but not implementing them, either because of endemic corruption, the shortage of resources or lack of political will. Most likely a combination of all these factors could come into play, which may subsequently lead to the use of all kinds of political instruments to maintain control over the region - ranging from threatening and harassment of the opposition to physically attacking protesters and carrying out targeted killings of political activists. Subsequently, being not only confronted with socio-cultural and religious deprivation through the Sunni Islamisation policy, but also

with politically-economic marginalisation and coercive suppression, Gilgit-Baltistan is witnessing periodical militant upheavals in form of riots and other acts of violence. The disproportionate reaction of Pakistan's Security Forces is causing further discontent and creating an unending vicious circle of violence. In this context, the obvious rise of Chinese security forces in this area is alarming (cf. Harrison, 2010; cf. Chaudhuri, 2011).

Just as in Gilgit-Baltistan, there is also tremendous criticism among the people of Baluchistan against the State of Pakistan for systematically excluding them from decision making procedures and depriving them from their fair share of national revenues (cf. Wolf 2013b; cf. ICG, 2006). In Baluchistan, sentiments of neglect and exclusion are gaining momentum as the local population increasingly feels exploited from two sides; the government in Islamabad and the Chinese developments activities (cf. Wolf 2013a; cf. Recknagel/Siddique, 2013; Ali, 2013). The recent transfer of management of Gwadar from Singapore's PSA International to the state-owned China Overseas port Holding company on January 30, 2013 (Agencies, 2013), is paradigmatic for several reasons.

First, regarding Balochi criticism, the transfer is unconstitutional because the decision was made in Islamabad and not by the Council of Common Interest (CCI) which would include the provinces (Chief Ministers) in the decision-making process - a requirement following the 18th Amendment. Article 154 (1) of the constitution states that major ports, as listed in Part II (5) of the Federal Legislative List, are a subject in the domain of CCI (cf. IPP, 2011; ICG, 2006). Therefore, it is argued by the antagonists of the transfer that the exclusion of the Baloch from the transfer of Gwadar to the Chinese is a breach of constitutionally guaranteed provincial decision-making power (cf. Butt, 2013). The government, in response, claims that for the very same reason, i.e. the fact that Gwadar is a port, it automatically falls under the authority of the Ministry of Ports and Shipping in Islamabad and therefore is not of any concern to a provincial government - a legal technicality that is highly debatable. Clearly, this is a case that needs unbiased

clarification by the Supreme Court. But here the question arises how far the Supreme Court is willing to go. A verdict that challenges the transfer would not only provoke the executive/government, which conducted the deal, and the armed forces, which are hoping to improve their navy base facilities(cf. Bokhari/Hille, 2011), but also the national establishment in general of whose members include most of the judiciary. In the past, it seemed that the judges were busier with matters relating to their own cause -especially when it comes to improving their status in the political power structure of the country- instead of taking care of the concerns of the provinces. Such matters would include strengthening federalism, revenue distributions, protection of minorities, tackling religious fundamentalism, education, and corruption. It will be interesting to observe to which extent the constitution is used by the Supreme Court as an instrument in its attempt to keep the executive and the soldiers in check or to enhance the stability of the political system as well as to grant all people in Pakistan their legitimate rights, even if it is against the partial interest of the 'own folks'. The Baloch leaders want to rely on the constitution in order to solve the Gwadar problem and related issues (cf. Butt, 2013). No matter what the Supreme Court's actions would imply, the transfer has once again enhanced the impression among many Baloch that Islamabad is doing everything to ensure and protect Chinese interests in their province at the locals' expense (cf. Wirsing, 2008).

Second, based on the assessments of several Baloch groups and international observers, it has become increasingly apparent that there is a strong correlation between Chinese activities in Pakistan and human rights violations(cf. Wolf 2013a). There are strong indications that in order to protect Chinese interests in Balochistan, Islamabad and its security apparatus won't hesitate to apply extra-legal measures to eliminate any opposition towards Chinese activities in the region. According to international human rights reports, various kinds of repressive tactics are applied including abductions, arbitrary arrests, torture, and unlawful killings. Some of the latest dramatic examples of 'kill and dump' activities (cf. AI, 2011, 2010) were

MehboobWadela and ArifRehman (cf. AHRC, 2011), both key figures in the Baloch movement who were critical of China's role and presence in Balochistan. It comes as no surprise for many unbiased Baloch experts that these crimes are committed with 'flagrant impunity'. Journalists who are trying to shed light on these occurrences are frequently subjects of so-called 'target killings'. Having this in mind, the proclaimed 'new freedom of press' in Pakistan needs a careful assessment when it comes to provinces in Pakistan in which China exercises its interests. It seems that the Chinese don't mind oppression of the Baloch movement because they pose a threat to Chinese workers in the region, Chinese commercial and security interests (cf. Haider, 2005). The latter relates to Beijing's fear of spill-over of secessionist-driven instability in its own troubled Xinjiang region (cf. Khalid Rahman, Rashida Hameed, 2009). An independent Balochistan would most likely embolden independence movements in territories under China's control.

Third, Chinese activities in Pakistan have severe implications for the latter's civil-military relations. After the ousting of Pakistan's latest military ruler, Pervez Musharraf, and the subsequent elections in 2008, it seemed that the troubled civil-military relations were improving. But this does not imply that the soldiers ceased to exercise political influence (cf. Rizvi, 2013). At least, there were rudimentary signs that civilians were trying to reclaim decision-making power in a significant number of policy fields, which had traditionally been dominated by the all-powerful army. However, since January last, year after a six-day visit of then General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in Beijing, the Chinese started a policy of boosting the image of the army by emphasizing the contribution of the soldiers for strengthening the strategic ties and cooperative partnership between both countries and appreciating the tremendous efforts of the armed forces in fighting terrorism (cf. ET, 2012; cf. Raman, 2012).<sup>5</sup> This is a clear indication that the Chinese are quite comfortable with a Pakistani military being in charge of strategic and security related aspects of governance (cf. Raman, 2012). This is not a new phenomenon as it can be observed in China's relations with states where it



deems the army as the most reliable and influential political actor. In spite of the fact that China has refrained issuing official statements that could be interpreted as its siding with the Pakistani army, it is disturbing the civil-military equation in Pakistan. Undoubtedly, this is to the detriment of the decision-making ability of civilians. The exercise to build up the soldier's prestige and crucial role in strategic affairs is creating a political climate in which it will be easier for the army to undermine the position of the democratically elected political leaders as supreme authority in all policy fields (cf. Wolf, 2013f; 2013e). In other words, China is indirectly supporting the notion that decisions in strategic and security matters should be reserved domains for the soldiers. In consequence, this is challenging the notion of civilian control of the military which is a necessary ingredient for liberal democracy and its consolidation (cf. Croissant/Kuehn/Chambers/Wolf, 2011; 2010).

Fourth, in the recent years, it was obvious that China was holding back to initiate new mega project in Balochistan because of the instability and threats towards Chinese workers in Balochistan (cf. Wirsing, 2008; Haider, 2005). It preferred to extend its engagements in Pakistan to 'safer' areas like Gilgit-Baltistan where the Islamabad has granted Chinese companies numerous mining licences and the permission to build up all necessary infrastructure for exploration and exploitation of the region (cf. Jacob, 2008). Also here, Islamabad did not deem it essential to consult the local people and the institutions. But it is important to note that China's scepticism in Pakistan's military capabilities to suppress the Baloch national movement was certainly encouraging Baloch militants as well as political leaders to continue their struggle. However, the current massive moral, diplomatic and material support by the Chinese for the Pakistan army will not help to convince Islamabad to look for a political solution thus will motivate it to continue the repressive tactics of the past in Balochistan (cf. Wirsing, 2008). In contrast, it will further enhance the unwillingness of the national elite to implement policies in accordance with the 'Aghaz-Huqooq-i-Balochistan' (the Beginning of Rights of Balochistan). This so called 'Balochistan Package' was supposed to reduce

the sense of deprivation and alienation and to ensure political, economic, and cultural rights for the Balochi (cf. Grare, 2013, 12).

Besides these dramatic impacts on the political sphere, China's role in Pakistan is responsible for far-reaching socio-economic distortions in the country too. Here too again Gwadar serves as an extraordinary example. Basically there is a general consensus that Gwadar is a non-starter until today. Islamabad has put the blame of Gwadar's disappointing performance on the Balochi insurgents along with the former port authority, PSA International from Singapore. However, one major cause of commercial failure, namely lacking road and rail connections and the omission to establish a special economic zone, can hardly be blamed upon the Singaporeans. In fact, the acquisition of land that is necessary for the construction of such vital infrastructure was blocked by civilian and/or military authorities.

Hence, the accusation from Islamabad that the local political opposition and militant insurgencies are largely responsible for Gwadar's economic difficulties lacks substance and is a distortion of facts, causes and consequences. If the establishment would grant the Baloch their legitimate political rights, introduce an appropriate mechanism of sharing the revenues of resources exploited in Balochistan, and enhancing local ownership in development projects, there would be most likely much fewer objections against Gwadar. But Islamabad appears not to have used any of these options in its policy approach towards Balochistan and other regions (cf. Baloch, 2013). In contrast, the federal government worsened the situation by issuing work permits and licenses for the Chinese. As a result, Gwadar and other Chinese projects in the country are not creating a noteworthy amount of jobs for the unemployed Pakistani youth (cf. ICG, 2006). Additionally, instead of pushing joint ventures with local entrepreneurs foreign companies get favoured significantly. Consequently, the Baloch get no fair access to business and job opportunities in their own province. And as if this were not already enough, the Baloch are getting more afraid to be confronted with enhanced 'guided migration'. In other words, Islamabad is encouraging workers from Punjab and Sindh to

settle down in Balochistan, and especially in Gwadar, to take over the jobs that are left for Pakistanis. With the Chinese takeover, this process will most likely be enhanced (cf. Recknagel/Siddique, 2013).

### **International Dimension – The Case of Gwadar**

“Gwadar is now a potential hub for trade and commerce in the region” (cf. Raza, 2013). With these words, the then President Asif Ali Zardari expressed Pakistan’s hopes to turn the Sino-Pak project into a national and regional gateway, hoping that it will boost the country’s feeble economy. Given the fact that Beijing is the principal financial sponsor of the port and that -since January 2013- it is managed by a Chinese company, Islamabad expects that Gwadar will give new impetus to China-Pakistan relations. Furthermore, Gwadar must be seen as an indication that India is not the central concern or theme in the bilateral ties between Islamabad and Beijing (cf. Jacob, 2010, 217-218, 222; Garver, 2001, 24).

The fact that Gwadar is located outside the Strait of Hormuz, near some of the world’s busiest shipping routes, supports Zardari’s statement. However, this is only a fractional part of the whole story.

First of all, when taking into consideration the numerous unfavourable determinants for the Gwadar port project, many analysts remain sceptical towards the future of the project. For example factors such as the endemic poverty prevalent in the province of Balochistan, increasing opposition by large sections of the Baloch people, political instability, deteriorating security situation, and lack of infrastructure and connectivity with the hinterland cast a dark shadow on the fortunes of Gwadar. Hence, there is an imminent threat that this expensive mega project will have little, or no, economic value. In brief, from an economic point of view, Gwadar looks like a ‘white elephant’ which just came out of the blue in, quite literally, the middle of nowhere (cf. Mills, 2006). Having this in mind, one should raise the legitimate question: what are the real intentions of Pakistan and China behind the Gwadar project? Are they motivated solely by economic interests or by military interests as well? Is it part of a long term strategy of

Chinese preparation for a potential new Cold War-scenario between Beijing and Washington in the Asia-Pacific region? To tackle this puzzle, observers are emphasizing that one should draw the attention more towards the strategic and security aspects of Gwadar.

From a Pakistani perspective, the objective behind Gwadar is ostensibly beyond the economic argument. Being a brainchild of the Pakistani Armed Forces, naturally the port should serve more than commercial purposes only. Gwadar is envisioned as the regional transshipment hub for energy, services and cargo between Afghanistan, the Central Asian Republics (CARs), China and the Gulf. However, given the fact that Afghanistan and the CARs are increasingly linked with Iran's Chabahar port (through the support of India) the importance of Gwadar as a regional transshipment hub is significantly reduced. But in security, military and strategic terms, the port remains of tremendous significance (cf. Haider, 2005).

First, it can serve as a listening post to monitor –and, if necessary, to disturb- one of the most important sea lanes for globally traded oil. The potential threat of energy security has severe political and strategic implications especially for Asian economies like India, Japan, Vietnam or Philippines among others which are in conflict with China over resources and territories. In other words, some strategists in Pakistan might be intrigued by using Gwadar as a political asset to improve its bargaining power in the context of other regional conflicts, namely Kashmir or water disputes.

Second, in case of an armed confrontation with India, Gwadar is in a much better geostrategic location than Karachi's Port. Therefore, Gwadar would reduce the dependence of Pakistan's Navy on the much more vulnerable ports in Karachi (cf. ICG, 2006, 14; Wirsing 2008, 16). There are indications that the Navy has its very own interests regarding Gwadar, especially in upgrading the port with naval facilities. By failing to hand over the piece of land (which belongs to the Navy) that was necessary for the establishment of a special economic zone at the port, the venture was significantly hampered. Consequently, Singapore's PSA International, the company which was

responsible for managing the Gwadar port project before the authority was handed over to China, was forced to give up by the Pakistani authorities. Without a doubt, the Chinese were more appealing for Pakistan as a partner than the Singaporeans which, unlike their Chinese counterparts, were interested in the port from a purely economic perspective.

Third, it seems that Gwadar is intended to be the cornerstone of an attempt to forge a new strategic triangle between of Pakistan, China and Iran. Islamabad's trilateral ambitions are driven by Tehran's intentions to build a refinery and the recently signed Iran-Pakistan pipeline- which would subsequently serve China's energy requirements (cf. ICG, 2006, 25-26). Besides the economic interests, the bottom line for Iran, Beijing and Pakistan is that all three states share ambiguous relations, to say the least, with the US and Indian and aim to limit the influence of New Delhi and Washington as much as possible in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. And last but not least, all three have a keen interest to suppress the Baloch national movement which is challenging their interests.

In order to understand the complexity of the Gwadar issue, one should also shed some light on Chinese interests in this project. Regarding official statements by Beijing, Gwadar is of utmost importance for energy security and trade. But unlike Pakistan – which publicly expresses its desire for a naval base operated by the Chinese- Beijing remains relatively quiet regarding the 'non-commercial' dimensions of the strategically well-located deep-seaport.

Consequently, analysts are wondering about Beijing's intentions in Gwadar. Several assessments indicate that the Chinese takeover of the port is not only part of a long-run strategy to secure its energy routes but also a tool to expand control over maritime straits in the Indian Ocean, especially the eminent chokepoint in the Strait of Hormuz (cf. Masood,2004). Around 20 per cent of the world's oil and 60 per cent of Chinese energy requirements coming from the Middle East have to transit this bottleneck. Therefore Gwadar -connected with Western China via the Karakorum Highway- offers

China an alternative route via Gwadar. Basically China is facing what has been called 'the Malacca dilemma' meaning it is highly dependent on the congested and narrow Strait of Malacca between Malaysia and Indonesia for its imports of natural gas and oil shipments (cf. Kardon, 2011, 11-12). In case of a conflict, this gateway could easily be blocked. In this context, one should mention that the Malacca Strait is under virtual control of Washington. USA has permanently stationed several fast Littoral Combat Ships in Singapore and the port of Singapore has facilities specially designed for US aircraft carriers (cf. Axe, 2011).

Therefore, Gwadar for China is much more than a backup option for the Malacca route. It's an ideal staging ground for all kinds of maritime activities. Nevertheless, China has demonstrated restraint regarding any further engagement in Gwadar, besides providing most of the necessary funds (cf. Wirsing, 2003). However, this policy seems to have changed since the latest agreement in January, allowing Beijing to take over control of the port this year. The 'rediscovery' of China's enthusiasm regarding the commercial build-up is generally understood in the context of military and strategic considerations. Taking the growing influence of China in Pakistan and the 'new strategic depth' in the relation between both countries into account (cf. PTI, 2013b), it will be absolutely certain that Islamabad will grant basing rights for the Chinese Navy if Beijing were interested. This would grant China for the first time the possibility to use a port in the Indian Ocean for its ships and submarines. Furthermore, the option for regular refuelling, refurbishment and repair and other services available, would allow China to exercise extensive sea control in the area. This does not only serve the purpose of protecting the increasing volume of Chinese nautical mileage in the region but should also be interpreted as a response to India's blue-water navy build-up and the presence of US maritime forces. Having this in mind, one must clearly state that Pakistan serves the Chinese interests to "counterbalance India's pre-eminence in South Asia" (Jetly, 2012, 2).

Therefore, Gwadar under Chinese control has the potential to function as a 'game changer'. Until now, besides some periodic naval visits, brief exercises, and some military-maritime cooperation with the Seychelles, China had no opportunity to operate with warships into the Indian Ocean on a permanent basis. In order to bridge this gap of insufficient capabilities regarding the manoeuvrability and reach of its vessels, China supports several port constructions not only in Pakistan but also in Sri Lanka (Hambantota port), Chittagong and Sonadiya, near Cox's Bazar (cf. Ali, 2013). Additionally, China is also wooing the Maldives to gain more leverage. Of course, officially all these projects are supposed to push economic development and cooperation. However, since Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have an interest in maintaining cordial relations with India, it is highly unlikely that China will receive similar offers regarding strategic-military cooperation like the one from Islamabad. With Gwadar as a potential naval base, China will have an effective bridgehead in one of the most sensitive and important areas for global energy security (cf. Recknagel/Siddique, 2013). With regards to the massive build-up of China's naval capabilities, it is unlikely that the future of Gwadar will be only a port reserved for commercial ventures. As such Gwadar will serve as a key node and game changer when it comes to reshaping the traditional power structure in Southern Asian regarding the control over the access to energy and other natural resources. Hence, it is important to point out that while there is ample reason to cooperate, China is primarily doing so to push its own strategic agenda.

First, China has more than once acted 'half-heartedly' when Islamabad reached out for support from its so called 'all-weather' friend (cf. Jetly, 2012,7). Taking the persistent talk about the 'thrust factor' in China-Pakistan relations into account, it seems that Pakistan's political decision-makers have a very selective memory when it comes to incidences in which China abandoned Pakistan. Just to recall, China did not back up Pakistan militarily in its 1965 and 1971 wars with India. It even turned its back diplomatically on Pakistan during the Kargil crisis of 1999 by supporting Washington's call for Islamabad to withdraw its troops from the Indian side of the Line of Control in

Kashmir. The Chinese position during this conflict helped to improve its relations with India which had turned sour over a couple of issues, including the 1962 border war, several territorial disputes, and issues concerning Tibet and the Dalai Lama. Furthermore, by adhering to strict neutrality in the 2002 crisis between India and Pakistan, Beijing also failed to live up to Islamabad's expectations. The statement that China is a 'friend of both countries', must have come as a major disappointment to the Pakistani security establishment at that time.

Second, the above mentioned decisions can also be partly seen as fortunate for South Asia and beyond because it helped to limit the conflicts to its regional sphere. Nevertheless, the Chinese did not do much to prevent the region from these wars - initiated by Pakistan- in using its growing influence on its 'ally'. In contrast, by offering military hardware and technical supplies it sent out the wrong signals towards Islamabad contributing to enthusiasm about a potential success of upcoming war efforts. In contrast, both the 1965 and 1971 wars ended in national disasters for Pakistan and increased international isolation. Furthermore, it led to a systematic genocide and countless war atrocities in Bangladesh (cf. Casaca, 2013). The role of Pakistani security forces during the killing of three million Bangladeshis, along with mass rapes, still remains to be adequately clarified and legally addressed. Obviously, Beijing's strategic thinkers at that time were using China's relations with Pakistan as a proxy for maintaining the high level of conflict in South Asia in order to extend its own influence at the expense of the US and India(cf. Curtis/Scissors, 2012).

Third, besides the India-Pakistan conflict, also in Afghanistan, China is following its own strategy by doing business through outbidding non-Chinese private companies which can't compete with largely funded Chinese state enterprises. This will seriously hamper the development of a healthy Afghan economy in a long term perspective. This is gaining more momentum, since China is not willing to get involved in a sustainable reconstruction and reconciliation process in the country, which would not only serve Afghanistan, along with the whole region, but particularly Pakistan.



Fourth, the fact that Pakistan's military is at war with the Taliban and in the light of worsening US-Pakistan relations, leading to a reduction of US aid, the economy of Pakistan can experience a severe strain making it more dependent on China. Therefore, the fact that Pakistan political leaders immediately played up their ties with Beijing after the US raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Pakistan in May 2011 can be seen as a proof (cf. Curtis/Scissors, 2012). In this context, it is significant to note that the Chinese were willing to maintain a 'normalized' relationship with the Taliban government in Afghanistan between 1996 and 2001. In order to protect its economic interests in the Afghanistan-Pakistani region, Beijing might be allured to continue this strategy in dealing with Taliban and associated extremist forces. In other words, when it comes to Chinese support for combating militant fundamentalism, there is potential threat of another disappointment for Pakistan's elites.

Fifth, in relation to the aforementioned point, is the fact that China is indirectly enhancing Islamic fundamentalism and militancy in Pakistan. Facing subnational movements, militancy and terrorism in territories under its own control, Beijing should be a 'natural ally' against terrorism in Pakistan and Afghanistan. However, it appears that the Chinese prefer to benefit from the US-led 'war against terror' by taking a 'free-ride'. In other words, where Washington does not receive much 'bang for their bucks' from Pakistan, Beijing is able, with the help of Islamabad, to reap the benefits of Washington's stabilization efforts by concentrating on the economic exploitation of the 'AfPak' region. This undoubtedly emboldens the Taliban and associated groups since it indicates that there is a powerful neighbour who is willing to stay more or less neutral which might offer some potential room to manoeuvre in the future. This view gains more significance in the light of India-Pakistani relations. In order to contain India's influence and hegemonic aspirations in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region, China is fuelling tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi -a modus operandi that plays straight into the hand of religious extremists in Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

China's activities in Pakistan have an extraordinary influence on the country's domestic development, both in political as well as socio-economic terms. But most important is the high leverage into the decision-making process dominated by the country's establishment, represented by the civilians in Islamabad and the military top brass in Rawalpindi (that hosts the Military General Head Quarters, the GHQ). Keep this in perspective, an extremely worrying factor for the people in the regions is that China, a country not categorized as a free democracy by Freedom House (2013)<sup>6</sup>, has an increasing influence over affairs in Pakistan, a country which is struggling and trying to establish democratic structures in midst of various crises. This Chinese influence should be monitored with significance at a time when the people, at large, are demanding for establishment of democracy in the country. But taking into account the deplorable state of human rights and the authoritarian style of Chinese governments, there is no doubt that China is not interested in supporting any improvements in this direction in its neighborhood, especially Pakistan. Being able to establish cordial working relationships with Pakistan's various military regimes (or military backed and controlled civilian governments) and benefitting from their respective options to enforce major development projects such as sidelining regions in decision-making, use of force in suppression of oppositional movements, there might not be much of interest by China for enhancing any democratic transition. In consequence, the phenomenon of hampering democracy through outside powers, which started with the military-to-military-contact based US-Pakistan relations would merely be continued by an autocracy-influenced development policy pushed by China's economic interests. In sum, the Chinese activity in Pakistan makes it more difficult to restore peace and stability in the country

Finally, regarding the international context one must state that if China decides to turn Gwadar into a naval base, this will have severe implications on the security structure of the Indian Ocean. At the moment, there are indications that this could happen. Hence,

this step definitely redefines the rules and conditions of a 'new great game' over influence in the whole region. Nevertheless, Islamabad's decision-makers have to be aware of several conditions in the gamble for regional hegemony which will be played out: first, its asymmetric power relations with Beijing; second, that China is not always on the same political and strategic page as Pakistan; third, Pakistan is a significant but not one of the major players involved in China's grand strategy; and fourth Pakistan's people and regions like Baluchistan and Gilgit-Baltistan have to pay the price due to the Gwadar project. Islamabad has to realize -even if it might be the most important Chinese ally in South Asia- that it is only one of many 'junior partners' of China in Asia. Therefore, it is most important that -in the words of South Asian expert RizwanZeb- "Islamabad needs to invest a lot more in understanding the Chinese mindset and the compulsions and limitations of the relationship" (Zeb, 2012). However, at the end of the day, China's aspired strategic footprint might be too big for Pakistani boots.

**Notes :**

1. Karakoram Highway links China's Sinkiang (Tsiensing) province to Pakistan's northwest, construction that was completed in the 1980s (Masood, 2004).
2. See also Joint Statement Between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 26 November 2006, Islamabad:  
<http://pk2.mofcom.gov.cn/sys/print.shtml?/bilateralcooperation/bilateralagreement/200706/20070604805667>
3. See Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, Press Release:  
<http://www.mofa.gov.pk/pr-details.php?prID=806>.
4. For the full text of the document, please see: Xinhua 6 July 2013,  
[http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-07/06/content\\_29343538.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2013-07/06/content_29343538.htm).
5. See also for General Kayani's last visit: <http://www.nation.com.pk/national/29-Oct-2013/kayani-meets-top-chinese-leadership>.

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