
BRI – A CASE STUDY OF CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR AND LESSON FOR UZBEKISTAN



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Introduction:

Pakistan and Uzbekistan, two nations nestled in the heart of Asia, share a rich tapestry of historical, cultural, and religious ties that have endured for centuries. While these ties have experienced ebbs and flows, the prospects for a stronger and more dynamic partnership between the two countries appear brighter than ever before. This article explores the multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, highlighting their shared heritage, commonalities, and potential avenues for future collaboration.

Historical Ties:

The historical connections between Pakistan and Uzbekistan are deeply rooted in the ancient Silk Road trade routes, which facilitated cultural exchanges and commerce between their regions for centuries. The cities of Samarkand and Lahore were once prominent stops on this historic trade network, showcasing the vibrant exchanges of goods, ideas, and culture. These connections laid the foundation for the enduring bonds that continue to shape their relations today.

Cultural and Heritage Links:

Both Pakistan and Uzbekistan boast rich and diverse cultural heritages, marked by a blend of various influences. The vibrant tapestries of art, music, and cuisine in both nations bear witness to their shared cultural heritage. The influence of Persian, Turkic, and Islamic traditions is evident in their architecture, literature, and artistic expressions.

Traditional and Religious Ties:

Pakistan and Uzbekistan share a deep appreciation for their Islamic heritage. This common religious bond has not only fostered mutual respect but has also contributed to increased people-to-people contact, as religious tourism and cultural exchanges between the two countries have flourished. The historical importance of Sufism in both regions further strengthens their spiritual connections.

Similarities:

Geopolitical Location: Both Pakistan and Uzbekistan find themselves strategically positioned in the heart of Asia, with the potential to serve as regional economic hubs.

Economic Synergy: Both nations possess valuable resources and industries, and their economies complement each other. Collaborative efforts in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and textiles could yield significant benefits.

Security Cooperation: Both countries share an interest in combating terrorism and extremism. Enhanced security cooperation could lead to greater stability in the region.

Transport and Connectivity: Pakistan's Gwadar Port and Uzbekistan's Termez are strategically located for trade and connectivity between Central and South Asia, making them integral to the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Uzbekistan's transport corridors.

Common Challenges:

Regional Instability: The shared challenge of regional instability necessitates cooperation to promote peace and security.

Economic Development: Both nations face the task of fostering economic development and reducing poverty. Collaboration in areas like infrastructure and technology can help achieve these goals.

A Case Study – China Pakistan Economic Corridor

Pakistan and China are linked with each other by shared mountains, water, and land. The history of interaction between the two nations goes back centuries when traders from China traveled to Europe, Africa, and the Middle East passing through the areas in Pakistan. Well-known monks like Fa Xian and Xuan Zang traveled to Pakistan around two thousand years ago and learned Buddhism.

The first official contact with the People's Republic of China was established, when a high-level delegation visited Beijing on the 4th of January 1950 (just three months after the liberation of China), and formal diplomatic relations were established on 21 May 1951.

Since establishing diplomatic relations, China-Pakistan enjoys excellent diplomatic and political relations. The high-level mutual visits have strengthened the friendship, almost all top leaders of Pakistan and China had very cordial relations and visited each other's country.

The boost in economic relations was visible since the Launch of BRI. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of BRI and one of the most advanced stage projects. The fruits of CPEC are very well enjoyed by both countries.

With the rapidly growing interaction between China and Pakistan, the demand for sinologists increased sharply. Thanks to the Chinese Government for establishing 5 Confucius Institutes in various big cities of Pakistan, which are promoting Chinese language and culture primarily. There are 22 Pakistan Universities, which has established China Study Centers, focusing on creating awareness of China and promoting the Chinese language, culture, traditions, etc. There are many Think Tanks dedicated to conducting research on China and playing an important role in

strengthening ties with China. In the private sector, there are many institutes teaching the Chinese language too. Around 30000 Pakistan youths have graduated from China in the last four decades and serving in various positions in Pakistan and simultaneously promoting China knowledge in Pakistan. There are around 30000 students from Pakistan studying in Chinese Universities in various fields of study and at various levels of degree programs like Undergraduate, Post Graduate, Ph. D, Post Docs, etc. China graduates are the backbone of China Pakistan understanding and harmonizing the two civilizations.

Both Governments are jointly working hard to overcome the challenges like:

The lack of Chinese Language teaching material, modern techniques of teaching, a Conducive Environment for practicing the Chinese Language, job opportunities for Sinologists, and career developments, etc.

It is strongly recommended to enhance the education opportunities, quality of education, and employability for sinologists. Special training may be extended for improving the quality of sinologists, enhance interaction with Chinese counterparts, and up-lift their level.

Media is the best effective tool to project Sinologists and promote China awareness and must be fully utilized.

It is believed that China is passing through a tough time and facing huge challenges posed by the West. The US is openly following a policy of containing China, countering China, and Resisting China's rise. We the sinologists, need to protect the Chinese interest and point of view. It is strongly desired that not only we enhance our interaction with Chinese, but, also among us (Sinologist community from all over the world). Jointly, we may succeed in improving global peace, stability, and development. Our collaboration may result in poverty alleviation, and serve humankind in a better manner.

The Belt and Road Initiative: A Game Changer

The BRI, often referred to as the "New Silk Road," is an ambitious infrastructure and economic development project that spans Asia, Europe, and Africa. It comprises a network of roads, railways, ports, and pipelines designed to connect countries, promote trade, and facilitate economic cooperation. Pakistan and Uzbekistan are both integral parts of this initiative, with potential benefits that can be harnessed to foster their mutual interests.

Geographical Advantage: Pakistan's Gateway to China

Pakistan occupies a strategically vital position in the BRI as it serves as a crucial link between China's western regions and the Arabian Sea. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the BRI, is a network of roads, railways, and energy infrastructure that connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan to China's western region. This corridor not only shortens China's trade routes but also provides Uzbekistan with an efficient gateway to access Chinese markets, reducing transportation costs and time.

Enhancing Trade and Economic Ties

One of the primary goals of the BRI is to boost trade among participating nations. Pakistan and Uzbekistan can collaborate to create a conducive environment for trade by simplifying customs procedures, reducing trade barriers, and enhancing logistics infrastructure. Additionally, they can explore opportunities for joint ventures and industrial cooperation, thereby fostering economic integration.

According to data from the State Bank of Pakistan, trade between Pakistan and Uzbekistan stood at around \$90 million in 2020, a figure that pales in comparison to their potential. Both countries should strive to increase bilateral trade by diversifying their trade portfolios, promoting local products, and identifying sectors with complementary strengths.

Investment and Economic Diversification

The BRI offers a platform for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) and stimulating economic growth. Uzbekistan, with its economic reforms and opening up to foreign investors, can benefit from Pakistani expertise in various sectors such as agriculture, textiles, and pharmaceuticals. Meanwhile, Pakistan can explore opportunities in Uzbekistan's rich energy and mineral resources.

Furthermore, both nations can collaborate on infrastructure development projects that create jobs, stimulate economic activity, and improve living standards for their citizens. The BRI's focus on sustainable development aligns with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, providing a framework for inclusive and environmentally friendly growth.

Connectivity and Regional Integration

The BRI encourages connectivity not only within participating nations but also with neighboring countries. Pakistan and Uzbekistan, along with other Central Asian states, can collaborate to establish transportation corridors that connect South Asia to Central Asia and beyond. Improved transportation links will not only enhance economic cooperation but also promote people-to-people exchanges, tourism, and cultural ties.

Conclusion: A Bright Future Ahead

The Belt and Road Initiative presents Pakistan and Uzbekistan with an unprecedented opportunity to strengthen their bilateral relations, promote trade and investment, and contribute to regional and global economic prosperity. By leveraging their geographical advantage, enhancing trade ties, attracting investment, and fostering connectivity, both nations can unlock their full potential within this transformative initiative.

As Pakistan and Uzbekistan embark on this journey of collaboration and economic growth, they should remain committed to transparency, sustainability, and

inclusivity. By doing so, they can build a brighter, more prosperous future for their citizens and contribute to the shared goals of the Belt and Road Initiative.

In the coming years, we can anticipate a stronger, more interconnected Pakistan-Uzbekistan partnership that not only benefits the two nations but also contributes to the broader vision of a connected world through the Belt and Road Initiative. The possibilities are vast, and the potential for success is limitless.

Pakistan’s Experience of BRI – China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a valuable experience for Uzbekistan too. Both Countries can learn from each other and strengthen the cooperation in all dimensions.

Pakistan and Uzbekistan have a remarkable opportunity to build upon their historical, cultural, and religious ties to forge a more robust and dynamic partnership. By harnessing their shared values and interests, both nations can work together to address common challenges, boost economic development, and contribute to regional stability. The future of Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations is a bright one, with immense potential for growth and prosperity that will benefit not only these two nations but the entire region. With mutual respect, optimism, and a commitment to cooperation, the bonds between Pakistan and Uzbekistan can only strengthen with time.

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Profile of the Author:

Born on 01 March 1962, got higher education from China (1980-1987). Rich in diversified experiences, starting career from Saudi Arabia (1988-1999), working with Caterpillar, hardcore engineering field, to Ministry of Science and Technology, in Pakistan, in policy formulations on S&T and R&D (2002-2006). Served in National University of Science and Technology (NUST), in R&D directorate, caring over-all R&D of the University (2006-2010). Posted to a diplomatic assignment to Pakistan Embassy, Beijing, China, served as a Counsellor, responsible for promotion of Cooperation and Collaboration in the field of S&T, and Higher Education, between China and Pakistan (2010-2016). Established Chinese Studies Center of Excellence in NUST, aimed to promote Sinology, Chinese studies, and understanding of China among the youth of Pakistan (2016-2022). Since March 2022, Established “Global Silk Route Research Alliance (GSRRA) – a Think Tank.

Although, I got my higher education in engineering (mechanical Engineer). Yet, have developed a special interest in China and gained expertise through my personal efforts and struggle. I studied in China, for more than seven years, although my major was mechanical engineering, but, due to the medium of education being in the Chinese language, I gained a strong grip on the language too. Living in China as a

student for so long, I have intensive interaction with locals and have deep penetration into Chinese society, culture, traditions, political and governance system, etc.

From 2010-2016, I also served as a diplomate in the Embassy of Pakistan, Beijing as a Counsellor, and enjoyed high-level interaction with Chinese officials. Having a language edge, I was known as an expert in public diplomacy and saw China from a different angle (different from a student's point of view).

Since 2016, after completing my tenure as a diplomate, I have been practicing as Sinologist, teaching Chinese studies, promoting China awareness, advising the Government of Pakistan on China Affairs, etc.

I have a unique experience, as a student, I spent more than Seven years in China in the 1980s, during the early days of the opening up and introducing of reforms in China. I have seen, China as a backward and poor country. As a diplomat, I spent around six years, and witnessed modernly advanced, and developed China. I am in a position to compare the old China and the China of today.

Retired from Pakistan's premium University, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), in March 2022, has established a think tank “Global Silk Route Research Alliance” (GSRRA), and became the Founding Chairman of it.

Published around 4000, newspaper articles, opinion, research papers, lectures, Interviews, Videos, and talks. Good popularity in Chinese mainstream media, think tanks, Universities and intellectual circles. In the capacity of China expert, has projected China's image globally, Pakistan's positive image, promoted China-Pakistan friendship, and known as Friendship Ambassador.