

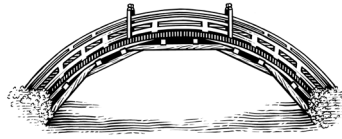
BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Andrew Small's

*The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*

New York: Oxford University Press, 2015

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*John W. Garver*

*Daniel Markey*

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## Keeping Pakistan as a Balancer While Courting Indian Friendship

*John W. Garver*

Andrew Small's analysis of recent developments in Sino-Pakistan relations in his book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* is insightful and persuasive. Small's central thesis, as I understand it, is that around 2013 China significantly shifted its policy for managing its vital relationship with Pakistan. Motivated both by the metastasis of Islamic extremism across the region and by deepening understanding of the impact that a possible India-Pakistan nuclear war would have on that spreading extremist cancer, China set aside its earlier policy of noninterference in Pakistan's "internal affairs." It began urging Pakistan's leaders to rein in extremist groups, not only those mucking around in China's Xinjiang region (which Beijing had long warned Islamabad against), but even within Pakistan and Afghanistan. Beijing recognized the diminishing utility of secret side deals worked out with extremist groups in years past. Such deals simply did not work as well with the new generation of extremist leaders—a conclusion attested to by the more frequent attacks in Xinjiang and on Chinese interests in Pakistan. Beijing also signaled to Islamabad that its support for Pakistan in a future confrontation with India would be conditioned by Pakistan's role in provoking that confrontation. This "shorter leash" was an attempt to dissuade elements in the fragmenting Pakistani state from again condoning terrorist attacks on India that threatened to trigger Indian retaliation and thence an India-Pakistan war that could further destabilize the entire region.

This new approach expanded diplomatic common ground with the United States in countering the spread of Islamic extremism and the disintegration of the Pakistani state. Derivatively, Beijing attempted to mediate a search for political accommodation in Afghanistan and adopted a more relaxed view toward the U.S. military presence there. "Lord, make them [the Americans] leave, but not yet," became the new Chinese mantra, Small suggests.

Scholars will need to test Small's thesis of a major shift in China's Pakistan policy through further primary research. But at a minimum, the book's clear, thoughtful, and empirically substantiated argument

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has advanced our knowledge of an important issue. Small posits two primary factors driving the shift in China's Pakistan policy: (1) greater fragmentation of the Pakistani state and use of Pakistani territory as a base for Islamist operations, and (2) a rethinking of the implications of a possible India-Pakistan nuclear war.

Regarding the first factor, the growing frequency of violent Uighur protests in both Xinjiang and major Chinese cities outside Xinjiang, combined with extremist attacks on Chinese citizens in Pakistan (e.g., construction crews refurbishing the Karakorum Highway, academics conducting research, or women operating massage parlors) indicated to Beijing that China's traditional reliance on Pakistan's military and political elites to minimize such incidents was simply no longer effective. The new generation of extreme Islamist leaders is more ideological and less pragmatic than the older generation, with whom a deal might stick. The collapse of states such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya, together with the looming U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the prospect of renewed civil war there, caused China to give much greater emphasis to internal security concerns arising out of its deeply rooted "Uighur problem." In short, these concerns increasingly influenced China's management of its "all-weather" relationship with Pakistan. The spread of terrorist movements in the post-Soviet countries of Central Asia also threatened to undermine the ambitious transport-building programs of the "new Silk Road" designed to draw those lands into China's economic sphere and foster stability through faster economic growth.

Regarding the nuclear factor, Small persuasively argues that, starting with the Kargil confrontation of 1999, Beijing recalculated the region-wide destabilizing effects of a nuclear exchange between India and Pakistan. Refugees could flood Central Asian countries abutting Xinjiang and into that region itself. Such a flood of refugees might total hundreds of millions, possibly including much of Pakistan's population. Anger and hatred would accompany displacement, further fostering extremism. The consequences of Chinese association with such a nuclear war could be immensely adverse for China—especially if the war arose out of another Pakistan-based terrorist attack against India that could be linked to the Inter-Services Intelligence. All these factors have resulted, Small persuasively demonstrates, in a considerable narrowing of China's toleration of destabilizing actions by Pakistan—even while Beijing continues to support Pakistan's comprehensive national power as a balance against India. In particular, Small's close examination of Chinese policy during the Kargil crisis is pathbreaking.

My quibbles with Small's book involve a call for broader perspective both at a lower domestic politics level of analysis and at a higher great-power system level of analysis. At the domestic level, if one looks beyond Sino-Pakistani relations, it becomes apparent that the early 2013 shifts in China's Pakistan policy that are discussed by Small were part of a broader package of more assertive policies, rooted in a Chinese recalculation circa 2008 that the global balance of power had shifted in China's favor as the West sank into deep economic crisis. When Xi Jinping came to power in late 2012, he mandated more proactive foreign policies befitting a more glorious and great China—an initiative sloganized as the "China dream." In the East China Sea, Chinese vessels increasingly challenged Japan's control over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy warships maneuvered nearby while Japanese and Chinese nonmilitary state vessels confronted each other within the islands' twelve and twenty nautical mile zones. In the South China Sea, China began large-scale efforts to construct artificial islands hosting military facilities. Along another quadrant, in the negotiations over Iran's nuclear program Beijing set aside its earlier low-profile and low-risk approach and instead undertook an active, public, and high-profile effort to mediate between Iran and the United States in an effort to reach a comprehensive solution to the stalemate. According to Beijing's explanation of this new policy, it wanted to avoid an Iran-U.S. war that would destabilize the Persian Gulf region.<sup>1</sup>

All these more proactive policies seem to have been rooted in an effort by Xi to foster a stronger spirit of Chinese nationalism—one befitting his own more authoritarian rule and thus legitimizing the regime. The shifts in China's Pakistan policy outlined by Small may well have been part of a package of more assertive foreign policies driven by Xi's "dream" of a more powerful and glorious China.

At a higher international level of analysis, the Sino-Pakistani axis needs to be situated in the rivalry between China and Japan, India, and the United States. Small sketches quite well Pakistan's traditional role as China's hedge or balancer against India. He discusses quite ably China's changing calculus in that triangular Pakistan-China-India equation. Japan, however, does not figure into Small's calculations. (Only three pages are listed in the index under "Japan.") In fact, Beijing is deeply concerned that India will move into alignment with Japan as Tokyo throws off its post-1945 military limitations under Article 9 of

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion, see my chapter "China and the Iran Nuclear Negotiations: China's Effort at Mediation of the Iran-United States Conflict" in the forthcoming book *China and the Middle East* (working title), edited by James Reardon-Anderson.

the Japanese constitution. A steadily intensifying maritime rivalry is already underway between China, on the one hand, and Japan, India, and the United States, on the other hand, over control of sea lines of communication (SLOC) between the Bal el-Mandeb and the Hormuz Strait in the west and the Malacca Strait in the east.<sup>2</sup> A chronic Chinese fear is that India will join the United States, Japan, and Australia to “pin” the PLA Navy into the western Pacific and out of the Indian Ocean, rendering vulnerable China’s SLOCs across that ocean. Chinese apprehensions became acute when Shinzo Abe began his second period as Japan’s prime minister in December 2012. In this context, “friendship” diplomacy toward New Delhi is a key Chinese trope to counter India’s drift toward participation in the Japan-U.S. “anti-China coalition” being peddled (or so Chinese analysts believe) by Washington and Tokyo. I suspect that if one looked, one would find strong linkages between this friendship policy, on the one hand, and Beijing’s new management of Pakistan, on the other.

What is needed is a book that situates the China-Pakistan-India triangle in the contemporary rivalry of global powers—that is, a sequel to Bhabani Sen Gupta’s masterpiece *The Fulcrum of Asia*, which analyzed this triangle in the context of the Cold War.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps such an update might be Small’s next undertaking.

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<sup>2</sup> Mohan Malik, ed., *Maritime Security in the Indo-Pacific: Perspectives from China, India, and the United States* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Fulcrum of Asia: Relations Among China, India, Pakistan, and the USSR* (New York: Pegasus, 1970).

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## The Strange Tale of Sino-Pakistani Friendship

*Daniel Markey*

Andrew Small’s *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics* delivers a comprehensive assessment of one of the world’s most consequential, peculiar, and poorly understood bilateral relationships.

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Small weaves together his own interviews and travel observations with extensive use of other histories and narratives that touch on various aspects of China-Pakistan relations but, as he rightly observes, have thus far failed to deliver a full and up-to-date version of the story.

Small's book took a half-dozen years to write, but its timing is nearly ideal. He concludes his history by observing that "the China-Pakistan axis is almost ready to step out of the shadows" (p. 181). It is now quite safe to remove the caveated "almost" from his phrase. China's new One Belt, One Road initiative—the grand scheme to extend and improve interconnectivity throughout China's western periphery through massive state-led investments—is finding its most important test case in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, where, according to Pakistan's probably inflated accounts, China has pledged \$46 billion in new investments over the coming years.

*The China-Pakistan Axis* is truly one of a handful of books that must be read by professionals seeking to understand Pakistan's past or hoping to catch a glimpse into its future. And as China's own fate becomes more intertwined with South, Central, and West Asia, the book will be an increasingly vital resource for serious China hands as well. As Small correctly notes, the study of relations between China and Pakistan is "something of an intellectual orphan, falling between a variety of regions and disciplines" and is complicated by the reality that it "encompasses some of the most sensitive areas of the two sides' national security policies" (p. 5). To put it bluntly, most China scholars have not bothered to give much thought to Pakistan, while most South Asianists are ill-equipped to contemplate Beijing's strategies, motives, or capabilities. Those who are interested must crack into the realm of tight-lipped security services, an especially tough task on the Chinese side.

Small ably bounces between strategic perspectives, having spent sufficient time in Beijing, Islamabad, and Washington to build networks of reliable expert sources. He avoids ideology and dogmatism, rendering different perspectives in a dispassionate effort to understand them rather than to mount moralizing critiques. He does, however, pause to debunk myths, such as the claim that 11,000 Chinese troops were deployed to Pakistan's north (p. 6), and punctures grand illusions like the notion that either Gwadar port or the Karakoram Highway has ever demonstrated any serious prospect of commercial success (p. 101, 106). Small also offers a steady flow of insider tidbits that demonstrate his grasp of the wider political processes at work, such as how Sino-Pakistani defense ties "ensure buy-in

from some of China's highest ranking party and military families" (p. 108), and wades into controversial and sensitive topics, including China's troubled policies in Xinjiang (p. 72).

The book's historical account of Sino-Pakistani ties is useful as a stage-setter for present circumstance, mainly because Small reminds the reader of the many twists and reversals in the region's geopolitics. The very closeness between Beijing and Islamabad has its roots in the 1959 Lhasa uprising that hastened the death of good relations between India and China (p. 21). With the spirit of "Hindi-Chini bhai bhai" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) buried, China and Pakistan teamed up to support a range of insurgencies within India, such as the Nagas and Mizo (p. 77). Later, Small recounts how Pakistan was the handmaiden for some of the most sensitive military and intelligence cooperation between China and the United States during the Cold War (p. 36) as well as the more widely recognized cooperation to fund the Afghan *mujahideen* (p. 123).

Small also delves into China's many—often dimly perceived—links with the Afghan Taliban before and after September 11. He describes, for instance, how China's ambassador to Pakistan was the first senior representative of a non-Muslim state to meet Mullah Omar in late 2000 (p. 129), how Donald Rumsfeld blindly rebuffed Chinese offers of intelligence assistance immediately after September 11 (p. 130–31), and how China then went on to supply arms to the Taliban for their insurgency against NATO and Afghan forces (p. 134).

Throughout this sometimes wild and counterintuitive tale, it is often difficult to escape the utter strangeness of the Sino-Pakistani relationship. China, the enormous, nominally Communist, and broadly secular state—with its modern origins in revolutionary guerilla warfare and its more recent experience of spectacular economic success—simply has almost nothing in common with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The latter is a historically ineptly managed state dominated by a Western-oriented class of feudal and military leaders who sit astride a vast, poor, and poorly educated nation that for many reasons has become increasingly alienated and violent. But Small cuts past the evident cultural and religious chasm to focus on the inner core of the Sino-Pakistani linkage: security. For whatever their differences, the fact remains that China delivered essential nuclear weapons and missile capabilities to Pakistan. Pakistan, at least for the first several decades of their relationship, usefully distracted neighboring India and helped insulate China from the western Islamist threat. Small usefully elaborates the details of all these dealings.

So China, the ultimate realist state, and Pakistan, the ultimate security rentier state, have found mutual benefit from their decades of loosely coupled cooperation. And that looseness seems an essential part of the story to date, for there is no formal alliance between Islamabad and Beijing. This has permitted less than perfect harmony in Sino-Pakistani policies at numerous important milestones in the relationship, such as in 1971, when China stood by as Pakistan lost half its country in war. Small questions whether China would be with Pakistan in its hour of need and finds a consistent answer from 1971 to the present: “only up to a point” (p. 16). Yet the looseness of the Sino-Pakistani coupling is a mutual one. Pakistan does not treat China as a true ally either. For example, in September 2001, when Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf received the “with us or against us” ultimatum from Washington, he did not even pause to call Beijing (p. 131). In short, Pakistan and China have delivered in important ways for each other, but not in every way, and their priorities and preferences have never been perfectly aligned.

That said, Small leaves no doubt in his book’s tantalizing epilogue that China’s growing power and ambitions are leading the country to play an increasingly active, rather than passive, role in its western periphery, especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This shift has been partly driven by—and has further exposed—the limits of depending on Pakistan’s military and intelligence services as a guarantor of China’s security against Islamist militants (p. 91).

China’s far greater activism in and around Pakistan is already stirring a bit of discomfort among Pakistanis, who Small describes as missing the “free hand”—the loosely coupled relationship—they have long enjoyed (p. 162). In Afghanistan, for instance, Small sees that China does not share all of Pakistan’s priorities or perceptions. China cares more about stability and less about India. It is also less optimistic about prospects for engineering a deal with the Taliban (p. 162). These, I would suggest, are not minor differences.

In my own interviews with Pakistani military officers, I have more than once heard a clear reluctance to allow Pakistan to fall too far under China’s sway. Their preference, as I take it, is less to be the junior partner in a tighter Sino-Pakistani alliance than to enjoy the generous affections of both Beijing and Washington for as long as possible. As a totemic example, the new JF-17 Thunder combat aircraft jointly produced with China is considered a serviceable option, but not one that can hold a candle to the U.S. F-16. And that is unlikely to change anytime soon.

With this backdrop of potential Pakistani strategic disquiet and hedging comes Small’s observation of Islamabad’s striking leverage



over China's ability to realize its grand trans-Asian schemes like the One Belt, One Road initiative. He writes that "the politics rely on Pakistan" (p. 179), pointing to the need for a political settlement in Afghanistan, Indo-Pakistani stability, and security within Pakistan itself. But if this is the case, if Beijing is truly so vulnerable to Pakistan's vicissitudes, then we must ask whether China is in the process of trading a frustratingly inadequate but relatively cheap policy of passivity in its western periphery for a fabulously costly and spectacularly risky policy of overactivity, committing itself to an early down payment in Pakistan.

Can Pakistan, despite its faults, offer a friendship to China that will bear the stresses likely to be imposed by a far more demanding and ambitious partner in the years to come? Small writes, "Beijing would prefer to have a longer list of candidates, but when it evaluates whom it can consistently expect to find in its camp, there is a single name that recurs" (p. 181). He notes that while China has some misgivings with Pakistan, "friendship, the one commodity that Pakistan can offer China more convincingly than any other country, matters far more to Beijing than it used to" (p. 181). I suspect even this assessment of what Pakistan can offer China will seem too rosy in hindsight. No matter, *The China-Pakistan Axis* offers readers ample material to reach their own conclusions on this and many other important issues.

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## Sino-Pakistani Relations: Axis or Entente Cordiale?

*Feroz Hassan Khan*

**A**ndrew Small's book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* traces the perplexing relationship between Beijing and Islamabad. Small's geopolitical assessment is familiar, but his dubbing of relations between two important Asian states as an "axis" is somewhat mystifying. The notion of axis in international politics harkens back to World War II

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between the Allies and Axis powers. More recently, President George W. Bush famously described three countries—Iran, Iraq, and North Korea—as an “axis of evil.” Given the negative historical connotation of the term, the book’s title suggests a sinister intent behind Sino-Pakistani relations; in fact, the partnership is no more than a classic manifestation of neorealism in international relations. Small’s crisp and descriptive work follows the research of John Garver, whose seminal book *Protracted Conflict: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* accurately describes the Sino-Pakistani relationship as an “entente cordiale.”<sup>1</sup>

China’s friendship with Pakistan was not preordained at the time of India’s and Pakistan’s independence. India-China relations initially blossomed before the India-Pakistan regional rivalry and Cold War dynamics resulted in the current South Asian geopolitical alignment. Small describes the “all-weather friendship” between Beijing and Islamabad as if it were simply “forged by war” (with India) and later cemented through “nuclear fusion” (see chapters 1 and 2). However, the dependability of the partnership during times of isolation and need, more so than shared animosity toward India, is what deepened the relationship. As it became disillusioned by Western policies, Islamabad saw the fracturing of “brotherly relations” between China and India as an opportunity to mend its relationship with Beijing. The Sino-Indian crisis came after China had suffered humiliation at the hands of the United States in the Taiwan Strait in the mid-1950s and had been abandoned by the Soviet Union. By the mid-1960s, China could only depend on Pakistan during its worst moments of isolation. Pakistan’s China policy, spearheaded by the ambitious young leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, capitalized on the strategic opportunity presented by India’s faltering forward policy and the Sino-Indian border war in 1962. As a result, Beijing received vital access in Xinjiang through the Karakoram Highway, and Islamabad found a trustworthy ally.

China’s geopolitical fortunes changed with the great strategic somersault of the Cold War. Islamabad was the conduit to the Sino-U.S. détente in a time of acute tension between China and the Soviet Union and China’s internal crisis (the Lin Biao incident).<sup>2</sup> China could not support Pakistan in the 1971 war with India because it was concerned that the South Asian crisis could escalate into a broader conflict given the

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<sup>1</sup> John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> Qiu Jin, “Distorting History: Lessons from the Lin Biao Incident,” *Quest* 3, no. 2 (2002).

Soviet Union's support of India (especially after Washington fed Beijing details of Brezhnev's intentions to strike China with nuclear weapons at the height of the Sino-Soviet border crisis in 1969).<sup>3</sup> More poignantly, Small observes that despite President Richard Nixon's directive to "tilt" toward Pakistan, Washington still neglected to prevent the dismemberment of its formal ally (p. 11). Beijing took notice and used this opportunity to set the tone of its relations with Islamabad.

India's 1974 nuclear test again dramatically changed South Asia's geopolitical landscape. Pakistan, reeling from conventional defeat and India's primacy, feared nuclear coercion. Facing a Western arms embargo and emerging barriers in the nascent nonproliferation regime, the once-proud Muslim nation-state was struggling to survive in a system seemingly stacked against it. Beijing empathized with Islamabad's strategic anxieties, recalling its own "never again" moment two decades earlier, when the sudden cutoff of scientific cooperation with the Soviet Union forced China onto the path of self-reliance.<sup>4</sup> Small adroitly explains the "nuclear fusion," though the term is somewhat exaggerated. He draws substantially from my book *Eating Grass* but also provides insights from sources that were beyond my reach during my research.<sup>5</sup> However, as I maintain, and as Small notes, China only supplemented Pakistan's scientific prowess in nuclear weapons development. Pakistani scientists were determined to develop a nuclear capability, and Chinese assistance helped Pakistan reach its force goals much earlier than if it were working alone (p. 39). Small is also spot on in observing that China's greatest contribution was in helping Islamabad with delivery methods (p. 39–40). He rightly notes that Pakistan's nuclear capability "remains considerably less vital to Chinese interests than it is to Pakistan's, whose autonomy and even survival as a state have been preserved" (p. 44). Absent, however, are details—both in my own book and in *The China-Pakistan Axis*—on China's agreement with Pakistan on civil nuclear energy cooperation in 1986. This agreement grandfathers China's ongoing civil nuclear cooperation, which has wider implications after the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal.

Like most Western authors, Small dismisses Pakistan's anxieties over India's Cold Start doctrine. For over fifteen years, India's military has flaunted its doctrine of "limited war." Authorizing punitive strikes in

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<sup>3</sup> Jian Chen, *Mao's China and the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 240.

<sup>4</sup> John Wilson Lewis and Litai Xue, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

<sup>5</sup> Feroz Hassan Khan, *Eating Grass: The Making of the Pakistani Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012).

response to purported Pakistani-sponsored terrorist attacks in India, the concept entails rapid mobilization and shallow, cross-border maneuvers to inflict maximum possible damage to Pakistan's forces, infrastructure, and economy in a short war that is limited in scope, geography, and time. This concept dangerously flirts with crossing Pakistan's declared nuclear red lines.<sup>6</sup> In response, Pakistan has introduced short-range, low-yield nuclear weapons (tactical nuclear weapons), dubbing this strategy as "full-spectrum deterrence."<sup>7</sup> Small recounts a famous assertion from the former longtime director of Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division that the introduction of tactical weapons has "pour[ed] cold water on Cold Start" (p. 46). My own conclusion—having spearheaded several studies and tabletop simulation exercises involving regional experts—is that India's limited war would not remain limited nor would Pakistan's tactical nuclear weapons deter India from attacking. Small quite aptly concludes that "China is uncomfortable" with the game of chicken that India and Pakistan are playing (p. 46). The implications for strategic stability in South Asia are disturbing. More disconcerting, neither China nor the United States appears to have fully grasped its role in a subcontinental nuclear crisis.

Small goes beyond the familiar stories and explains the shifting nature of the relationship from the 20th into the 21st century. Beneath the veneer of common assertions of Pakistan being "China's Israel" and Pakistani rhetoric of the country's relations with China being "higher than the Himalayas" are some mythologized stories that Small succinctly exposes thanks to the access and interviews he obtained over the years. Beijing dismisses India's fear of a China threat and is equally unresponsive to fears of Sino-Pakistani collaboration to prevent the rise of a democratic and supposedly secular India as a great power. India's worst-case hypothesis is a two-front war in which China intervenes militarily in an Indian war with Pakistan. This may well be Pakistan's pipe dream, but, as many historians point out, China's sophisticated realpolitik would preclude involvement in the amateurish statecraft that at times hijacks South Asian diplomacy. China has no interest in embroiling itself in South Asian crises, much less in opening a second front against India.

According to Small's analysis, China's investment in Pakistan is motivated by both mutual security interests and shared economic interests

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Krepon and Julia Thompson, eds., *Deterrence Stability and Escalation Control in South Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

that include, but also go beyond, common animosity toward India. The Karakorum Highway constructed in the 1960s has turned out to be visionary. China's landlocked Xinjiang region is now provided with seaward access to its far-flung areas and is critical to China's "look west" policy. As Beijing invests up to \$46 billion to link China to Pakistan's coastline, it benefits from heightened energy security and access to a strategic South Asian corridor. In return, Pakistan gains infrastructure development at a time when it faces tremendous internal security threats, including the separatist insurgency that persists in the province of Baluchistan.<sup>8</sup> With China's investment assured, Pakistan is preparing ten thousand troops to secure the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Currently, the Baluch insurgency is subsiding, partly due to this promised investment.

From China's perspective, investment in Pakistan and Xinjiang promises stability; from Pakistan's perspective, this initiative makes best use of its geostrategic significance. Pakistan has a long history of being utilized by outside powers to wage wars—for example, during the Cold War in the 1980s and the war against terrorism from 2001 onward. Islamabad has suffered the blowback of these policies. China's One Belt, One Road initiative could dramatically change Pakistan's economic significance, but this outcome is contingent on the country's stability and security. For regional stakeholders, this policy is a manifestation of the three core objectives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation—combatting terrorism, extremism, and separatism—to which both India and Pakistan are in the process of acceding.<sup>9</sup>

Given these and other developments, the canard of a China-Pakistan axis as a nefarious plot against India is dated. Beijing hopes that Pakistan's possession of a robust nuclear deterrent will make India cautious while ensuring Pakistan's security enough to prioritize investment in economic interests.<sup>10</sup> In fairness to Small, some of the developments described in this essay occurred after the publication of *The China-Pakistan Axis*. Despite these concerns, however, Small's very well-researched book is a distinct contribution on this important subject.

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<sup>8</sup> Ziad Haider, "Sino-Pakistan Relations and Xinjiang's Uighurs: Politics, Trade, and Islam along the Karakorum Highway," *Asian Survey* 45, no. 4 (2005): 522–45.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Clover and Lucy Hornby, "China's Great Game: Road to a New Empire," *Financial Times*, October 12, 2015 ~ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/6e098274-587a-11e5-a28b-50226830d644.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See Andrew Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

## Where Is the China-Pakistan Relationship Heading— Strategic Partnership or Conditional Engagement?

Meena Singh Roy

Andrew Small's book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* provides a fascinating account of the Sino-Pakistani "all-weather friendship," covering various facets of this relationship. This is a substantial contribution to the existing debate on the subject. Small very eloquently explains both countries' perceptions and understandings of each other and reveals the complexities and conditionality of the bilateral relationship. An additional strength of the book lies in the author's use of primary sources to substantiate his various arguments. Yet while the book covers various aspects of China-Pakistan relations, in my view this relationship can at best be characterized as strategic and instrumental in nature.

The China-Pakistan partnership is one of the long-standing relationships in the region, one that continues to grow stronger in an era that is witnessing significant changes at the regional and international levels. However, Beijing's approach and strategy to engagement with Islamabad has changed over the years as China's economic and military influence continues to grow. Recently, ties have been further deepened by China's huge financial commitment to infrastructure development projects in Pakistan as part of the new China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is connected to Beijing's ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative. China views Pakistan as an important neighbor with a geostrategic location, having land-route access to the Persian Gulf and occupying an important position in the Islamic world. Pakistan's key role in facilitating normalization of relations has also been acknowledged by the Chinese leadership. Former Chinese president Hu Jintao's statement that "China can give up gold but not its friendship with Pakistan"<sup>1</sup> and President Xi Jinping's statement that "China and Pakistan are good neighbors, good friends, partners and brothers" and that "the friendship between the two countries is deeply rooted and

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<sup>1</sup> Syed Hasan Javed, *Chinese Soft Power Code* (Karachi: Paramount Books, 2014), 33.

unbreakable”<sup>2</sup> are indicative of China’s long-term commitment to Pakistan. This aspect of the relationship is well captured in *The China-Pakistan Axis*.

The first chapter of the book looks at India as a key factor in the formation of the China-Pakistan friendship during the early years. Here, Small provides a comprehensive account of how the relationship developed between the two countries over three crucial wars (the 1962 Sino-Indian War, the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, and the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War). The book rightly argues that

China and Pakistan have never been treaty allies and their armies come from such radically different traditions that the two sides have often talked past each other on matters of strategy. But after Pakistan’s devastating defeat (in 1971), China helped the country to develop a set of military capabilities to ensure that it would never face the same fate again. (p. 3)

To enhance Pakistan’s military capabilities, China fully backed and supported Pakistan’s nuclear ambitions through close cooperation, making Pakistan the only nuclear weapons country in the Islamic world. The central motive was to neutralize India’s nuclear weapons.

The second chapter presents a fascinating narrative account of this nuclear cooperation. Small depicts China’s role in helping Pakistan obtain nuclear weapons and nuclear-capable missiles by supplying not only technology but also the necessary expertise and materials, including highly enriched uranium. Small correctly notes that “if the military relationship lies at the heart of China-Pakistan ties, nuclear weapons lie at the heart of the military relationship” (p. 29). But the most interesting dimension explained in the book is what this relationship actually has meant both for the Pakistani military and for its Chinese counterpart. When Pakistani foreign minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto traveled to China in 1965 to tell leaders there that India had built a plutonium plant and ask them to help Pakistan build a similar one, China suggested that Pakistan get assistance from Canada. The Karachi Nuclear Power Plant subsequently became operational in 1973, one year before India’s nuclear test. When Pakistan’s clandestine program was discovered by the International Atomic Energy Agency, Bhutto instead turned to A.Q. Khan for help with enrichment, using the latest European design from Urenco. And then China saw the advantage of cooperation with Pakistan to improve its own enrichment capabilities.

The third chapter of the book provides an in-depth analysis of China’s dilemma on how to deal with Pakistan’s military adventurism against India,

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<sup>2</sup> Javed, *Chinese Soft Power Code*, 33.

very aptly capturing the real essence of Sino-Pakistani relations. As Small notes, “even as the Sino-Indian relationship has improved, India’s rise as a potential competitor to Beijing has further reinforced the original rationale for its partnership with Pakistan” (p. 4). In the past, China often did not provide the kind of support that Pakistan wanted during conflicts with India and instead tried to defuse crises in cooperation with the United States. A case in point is China’s refusal to provide military or diplomatic support during the Kargil conflict. Small explains China’s conditional support for its supposedly all-weather friend by noting that “the most significant backing that China provides does not come in the midst of the latest crisis, but from the steady, long-term commitment to ensure that Pakistan has the capabilities it needs to play the role China wants it to” (p. 61). India thus will remain the central pillar of the Sino-Pakistani relationship despite the changing geopolitics of Sino-Indian, U.S.-Indian, and Sino-U.S. relations. Even with Beijing’s improving ties with New Delhi, India continues to bind China and Pakistan. Small very aptly describes this aspect of the relationship when he writes that for China “whatever the ebbs and flows in its bilateral ties with New Delhi, Pakistan’s utility as a balanced, potential spoiler, and standing counterpoint to India’s ambitions has never gone away” (p. 65). He goes on to note that China would like to see the India-Pakistan relationship exist in a state of managed mistrust” (p. 54).

There are many anecdotes in *The China-Pakistan Axis* that help explain the complex yet strong bond between the two countries. One of the book’s most interesting passages is its discussion of how the Islamicization of the Pakistan Army reveals an often overlooked ambivalence in China’s approach toward Pakistan. It is here, in chapter four, that the limitations of Sino-Pakistani ties are most visible. China has always relied on Pakistan to manage the threat of jihadi forces affecting its own territory. Pakistan’s relevance for China in this regard is twofold: first, Pakistan is China’s conduit to the Islamic world; and second, Islamabad is useful for countering the East Turkestan Islamic Movement in Xinjiang, a Muslim-majority region where Beijing is struggling to fight the Uighurs and their linkages to the extremist forces present in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Central Asia, and (now with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, or ISIS) in West Asia. The importance of Xinjiang for China’s internal security is immense: it is one of the world’s top unexplored oil basins and also has coal reserves crucial for China’s energy security. Moreover, China has a large arsenal of nuclear ballistic missiles located in the region, along with twelve army divisions and six air force bases. In addition, Xinjiang functions as a buffer between



China and Central Asia. These factors will continue to enhance Pakistan's relevance for China and make "a strong, capable Pakistan...an asset to China in its own right" (p. 3). China's adventures and misadventures in dealing with Islamist forces are well documented by Small.

Readers, however, are left with some unanswered questions. First, are economic relations between China and Pakistan win-win? The fifth chapter argues that the strategic dimension of their cooperation in grand economic projects continues to provide momentum, but it does not explain the commercial rationale of the relationship. Though Small refers to economic relations between the two sides as being traditionally weak—that is, a problem to fix rather than a source of strength—this issue needs more attention. In fact, China's argument that its huge economic package for infrastructure development could bring about change in Pakistan's social and economic makeup does not sound very convincing, given the past failures of large-scale U.S. and Western financial and military aid to the country.

A second question that merits attention is whether Sino-Pakistani relations will have any positive impact on relations between India and Pakistan. Third, and more important, the role of Russia, Saudi Arabia, and North Korea in building Sino-Pakistani relations is worthy of attention. Analysis of Chinese concerns about Pakistan's relations with both Saudi Arabia and North Korea would be of great value because these ties could significantly influence future trends in Asian geopolitics. In addition, China has now decoupled India from Russia and is facilitating Russian arms sales to Pakistan. Growing ties between Russia, Pakistan, and China are likely to establish a new front of cooperation in Asian geopolitics. Finally, the concept of a potential trilateral U.S.-India-China relationship could have been examined further.

Overall, however, *The China-Pakistan Axis* is a very useful contribution for helping unravel the complexity of Sino-Pakistani relations. This strategic partnership, despite its conditional engagement, is likely to grow in the future.

## Friends in Need...

*Andrew Scobell*

China's rise to prominence in Asia has been both dramatic and seemingly inexorable. The country has significantly expanded its economic and diplomatic involvement and considerably extended its military reach. However, despite growing hard power and greater global presence, Beijing feels vulnerable and has very few reliable partners. Within this context China's close and enduring friendship with Pakistan stands out. Indeed, as Andrew Small astutely observes in the opening sentence of *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics*, Beijing's ties with Islamabad have "run closer than most formal alliances" (p. 1). In this impressive book, Small outlines in considerable detail the main contours of this fascinating and secretive relationship.

While all states are dysfunctional to some degree, China and Pakistan appear to be defined by the extreme nature of their respective dysfunctions. In addition, judging from Small's analysis, their relationship is itself highly dysfunctional. In psychology, codependency is defined as a pathological relationship where two parties are dependent on each other to an unhealthy degree. Each party has feelings of extreme insecurity and fears being alone. This condition appears to have defined the China-Pakistan relationship since the 1960s. Both Beijing and Islamabad suffer from high anxiety and believe they have a dearth of trustworthy friends in other capitals. Accordingly, each side views this partnership as essential to maintaining its own national security. Implicit in *The China-Pakistan Axis* is the idea that codependency is an apt diagnosis of the partnership's dysfunctionality, or at least that significant elements of this condition apply. Whether the author concurs with this characterization, it does seem consistent with his reference to Chinese and Pakistani "pathologies" in their foreign relationships (p. 7).

China has enjoyed a warm relationship with Pakistan since the 1960s, with the leaders of both countries often referring to the bilateral relationship as an "all-weather friendship." It considers Pakistan a pivotal state that will decisively influence the course of events in surrounding countries, notably Afghanistan. Moreover, Beijing also thinks of Islamabad as a longtime but deeply troubled ally on a geostrategic fault line between

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South and Central Asia—a region where China has had few friends. Yet Beijing’s support has become more restrained than in the past as Pakistan has gradually declined in overall geopolitical significance. Although Pakistan is still an important partner and a major arms market for Chinese defense firms, its value as a conduit to the Islamic world or facilitator on the global stage has been greatly reduced. In the 21st century, China has robust relationships with every country in the Middle East and globally has full diplomatic ties with all but 22 microstates. In particular, India looms ever larger as a major economic partner for China. As a result, China’s interests in Pakistan are increasingly regional and aimed at restraining Islamabad. And yet despite these developments, Islamabad continues to be Beijing’s key capital in South Asia precisely because it is a counterweight to New Delhi.

Labeling the China-Pakistan relationship an “axis” is controversial. Yet Small’s meticulous research suggests the term is appropriate to characterize this rather unique partnership. At least in terms of cooperative relationships, China has maintained few enduring friendships. After all, the country has tended to not play well with others. Formal alliances, such as with the Soviet Union, ended badly, and China’s relationship with its sole remaining official treaty ally—North Korea—has been extremely tumultuous across the decades. Beijing’s ties to another erstwhile Communist comrade in arms—Vietnam—have also been characterized by considerable turmoil, leading to extended border unpleasanties and outright war in 1979. By contrast, Beijing’s ties with Islamabad have been remarkably steady, with high levels of security cooperation in the conventional and nuclear spheres. Pakistan would not likely have become a nuclear state without China’s assistance, and today its armed forces rely very heavily on conventional armaments supplied by China. The People’s Liberation Army (which includes all of China’s military services) has almost certainly conducted more field exercises in the post-Mao Zedong era with Pakistan’s armed forces than with those of any other country.

Early in the book, Small poses a key question: “What does Pakistan actually do for China?” The answer he provides—that China has “rarely needed Pakistan to do anything vastly different from what it intends to do anyway”—seems underwhelming (p. 3). So why has China elected to stand by Pakistan? The reason is essentially that it has few friends of long standing, especially ones that Chinese leaders feel able to trust. Beijing has invested a lot of time and effort into its relationship with Islamabad, and the two sides have built up an “unusual level of mutual trust” (p. 44). And trust is an extremely scarce resource both within China and in its relationships with other states.

Over the past two decades, Pakistan has become a key partner in China's struggle with terrorism at home and in the unstable areas to the west. China appears to have a chronic problem within its own borders. The Uighurs, a restive Turkic ethnic minority concentrated in the autonomous region of Xinjiang, have been radicalized as a result of harsh repression and discrimination by Beijing combined with moral and material support from sympathetic Turkic and Muslim brethren in Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Pakistan has become a training ground for radicalized Uighurs, and Beijing has sought to enlist better cooperation with Islamabad on counterterrorism. China has also pressed Pakistan to do a better job of protecting Chinese citizens from Islamic radicals inside Pakistan. Beijing, like Washington, is well aware that Islamabad is beset with intricate and chronic "doubling-dealing with militant groups" (p. 156) but sees little alternative but to remain engaged. Although the results of counterterrorism efforts have been far from ideal, Beijing may have benefited more from its relationship with Islamabad than Washington has. The swift and dramatic cooperation China received from Pakistan following the Red Mosque incident in 2007 (which Small outlines in the preface), contrasts sharply with the limited and tortuous cooperation the United States received in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. It took almost a decade for the United States to "bring justice" to Osama bin Laden, and this was achieved despite the collusion and ineptitude of Pakistan's military and intelligence services (pp. 155–56).

China's burgeoning economic ties with India have far surpassed those with Pakistan, but Beijing has not distanced itself from Islamabad. Pakistan figures prominently in the ambitious One Belt, One Road initiative officially launched by President Xi Jinping in late 2013. Indeed, China has doubled down on its South Asian ally: during an April 2015 visit to Islamabad, Xi declared that Beijing was prepared to invest \$46 billion in Pakistan toward upgrading and expanding infrastructure. Pakistan is a risky place to do business. The security environment in sizeable areas of the country is poor, and Chinese citizens have repeatedly found themselves in danger. However, China is no stranger to operating in unstable countries in the developing world, so perhaps its Pakistan gambit should come as no surprise.

What does come as a surprise is the unanswered question posed by the book's subtitle. It may be that Small is referring to a new Asia where China is the economic, diplomatic, and military center of gravity and has emerged as the dominant power in the region. In this scenario, China may begin to step out of its traditional comfort zone to form *de facto* alliances

and establish spheres of influence. Perhaps it is in this broader geopolitical context that Small perceives a “China-Pakistan Axis...almost ready to slip out of the shadows” (p. 181).

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**Author’s Response:  
Beyond India-Centricity—China and Pakistan Look West**

*Andrew Small*

The year since my book *The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics* was published has been an unusually dramatic one in the Sino-Pakistani relationship. The launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Xi Jinping’s landmark visit to Pakistan, and China’s increasingly public role in the Afghan peace process all imply—as Daniel Markey notes in his essay—a partnership that has finally stepped out of the shadows. Yet despite its heightened profile, there is still much that remains opaque, from the details of the vast array of new infrastructure deals to the contours of Chinese policymakers’ thinking about strategy in the country’s western periphery. This comes through in the reviewers’ strikingly divergent assessments of the state of the relationship, its geopolitical context, and its likely trajectory. The disagreements are partly a reflection of the fact that we are each putting our limited pieces of the puzzle together in ways that imply quite different overall pictures.

Nonetheless, I would posit that a few clear trends are emerging, all of which have accelerated over the last year. First, there has been a consolidation of the shift traced over the course of the book from a relationship that was essentially India-centric to one in which Pakistan now plays a weightier role in China’s pursuit of a series of westward-facing policy goals. Second, after a decade in which Pakistan was in danger of being left behind, the country is finally proving to be a beneficiary of the new, China-driven geopolitical and geoeconomic context in which it finds itself. Third, this dynamic now encompasses opportunities and pressures that are likely to see the

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relationship both deepen and normalize, moving from a mythically elevated status—“higher than the highest mountain”—to somewhere closer to earth.

This puts me in a somewhat more optimistic position than the reviewers, who place greater emphasis on the emerging tensions in the relationship and the risks inherent in this new phase of Chinese engagement with the wider region. Those lines of analysis are also laid out in the book itself, which provides ample grounds for skepticism about the two sides’ economic projects and discusses many of the private disputes and frustrations that the Chinese side, in particular, has expressed. But I would contend that events in the last eighteen months have tended to reinforce the case set out in the epilogue: a convergence of different factors that include Xi’s assumption of power, the election of the Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N) government, shifts in the structure of the Chinese economy, and the drawdown of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has put the relationship on a very different course from the one we saw during the era of Hu Jintao, Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, and Asif Ali Zardari. Although components of CPEC and other associated new initiatives may well fail, there are good grounds for thinking that they will at least fail better.

The central question to address is related to the book’s subtitle: what is the geopolitical context in which the relationship is now playing out? This is the issue on which the reviewers are perhaps most at odds. If the partnership is considered over a period of several decades, Andrew Scobell is clearly right to state that for China Pakistan has “declined in overall geopolitical significance” in contrast with the days when it was a “conduit to the Islamic world” and a “facilitator on the global stage.” As China has developed diplomatic ties with all but a small subset of states around the world, Islamabad’s brokering role has evidently faded. Equally, the normalization of China’s relationship with India and the subsequent expansion in economic relations between the two Asian giants have long threatened to place Pakistan in an even more modest role—a legacy friendship rather than one with real utility. John Garver goes much further, suggesting that as a result of fears that India will align with Japan, the United States, and Australia, Beijing has since 2013 adopted a “new management” of Pakistan, placing it on a “shorter leash” and urging the Pakistani army to rein in extremist groups. While Garver sees China as motivated partly by factors such as the rising terrorist threat in Xinjiang and concerns that militants might precipitate an India-Pakistan war, he also identifies a strong linkage between China’s handling of Pakistan and what he describes as a

“friendship policy” toward India, as well as the more generally assertive turn that Chinese foreign policy has taken under Xi.

I would disagree modestly with Scobell and more substantially with Garver. While a contrast between the current relationship and that of the 1960s or 1970s sees Pakistan’s role in Chinese foreign policy diminishing, if the comparison is instead made with the relationship in the 1990s, or even that of a few years ago, there is a strong argument to be made that it is on the rise again. The temptation for China to trade off aspects of the relationship with Pakistan for the sake of better ties with India was at its zenith during the late Jiang Zemin era, when trade-centric economic diplomacy was closer to the heart of Chinese policy and a lasting friendship with India was a more plausible diplomatic prize. Some of these proclivities on China’s part—at least a level of caution about how India would react to certain initiatives with Pakistan—endured until the late stages of the Hu era, when the U.S.-India partnership was being consolidated. Hu’s second term in office was also the period in which tensions over Pakistan’s handling of extremist groups were at their peak. Killings and kidnappings of Chinese workers spiked, Uighur militants found safe haven in Pakistan’s tribal areas, and concerns about Islamist sympathies in Pakistan’s security services and the broader stability of the country started to rise. Even then, there was never a broad-based push by China to encourage Pakistan to pull back its relations with militant groups across the board, as Garver suggests. Hu’s administration was still monomaniacally focused on the Uighurs. The shift under Xi has not been a greater level of assertiveness over Pakistan’s domestic affairs; instead, it has been the provision of a substantial package of positive economic incentives in the shape of CPEC, which is entirely a Xi-era initiative.

There are some bilateral factors that have played into this development. The last eighteen months have seen Pakistan deliver enough to at least moderate Chinese concerns that the country was on a relentless downward slide. General security levels have improved, the Zarb-e-Azb operation has largely pushed Uighur militants out of their bases in North Waziristan, and the economy has seen a modest but tangible uptick. The Chinese government is also demonstrably more comfortable dealing with the PML-N government than with its predecessor, despite strenuous efforts made by the Pakistan People’s Party to push many of the same projects forward. But the really consequential shift during Xi’s tenure has been the greater seriousness with which China is taking its westward strategy. A number of the objectives of the multifaceted One Belt, One Road scheme converge in Pakistan, including the outsourcing of industrial capacity, the

search for growth drivers in the Chinese interior, the push to build up new markets for Chinese exports, efforts to stabilize China's western periphery and comprehensively address the threat of rising militancy, and plans for alternative transportation routes that diversify the usual maritime conduits. Markey rightly notes Islamabad's "striking leverage over China's ability to realize its grand trans-Asian schemes." Pakistan is one of the few countries with shovel-ready projects on the scale envisaged, the political comfort level with China to attempt to absorb and push forward such an ambitious plan, ports that Beijing can expect to rely on, and an army that is both the historical source of much of the region's militancy and an essential part of any solution to this problem. As a result, CPEC has become the flagship project of Xi's flagship initiative.

China is actively seeking to decouple this westward-facing agenda from the competitive strategic environment elsewhere in East Asia and South Asia. Its aim has been to ensure that intensifying competition in one region does not spill over into areas where there are common interests. So far, Beijing's heightened diplomatic activism and new infrastructure investment schemes have largely been embraced by the United States, which has long urged China to take on a greater level of responsibility in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the broader region. India is a trickier case, but here, too, Beijing's view is that New Delhi should at least acquiesce to many of these new initiatives, and potentially even see some advantages accruing from them. Although it was impossible to portray Chinese support to Pakistan's military capabilities as anything other than a threat to India, if Beijing is able to encourage Pakistan to pursue a more dedicated focus on economic objectives and regional trade linkages rather than a security-centric agenda, India is potentially the greatest beneficiary other than Pakistan itself. In this context, Chinese officials saw the postponement of Xi's trip to Islamabad in 2014 as advantageous: when the visit finally went ahead in April 2015, it was the first in decades by a senior Chinese leader to occur without a stopover in India. Evidently Pakistan's utility to China as a balancer in the region persists, but Beijing can credibly claim that the relationship now occupies a qualitatively different position in the grand scheme of Chinese foreign policy.

As Markey highlights, this new framework does pose some challenges for the "all-weather friendship." Stated or unstated, India was the common focus for decades and provided the precondition for other forms of cooperation. Feroz Hassan Khan suggests that it was the "dependability of the partnership during times of isolation and need" that mattered more,



but the partnership would neither have existed nor have been as trusted without India providing that shared strategic framework. With this backdrop, the fact that China and Pakistan did not always see eye to eye on tactics and strategy did not wholly matter. Scobell argues that my suggestion that China has rarely needed Pakistan to do anything vastly different from what it intends to do anyway is underwhelming, but this is the main reason that the friendship has endured so long. Pakistan's most important function was to act as a counterweight, and it was only during episodes of excessive risk-taking, such as the Kargil War, that China felt obliged to push back hard. As China's activism in its western periphery grows, and the relationship focuses on a new set of issues that include Afghanistan, infrastructure linkages in the region, and even domestic militancy in Pakistan itself, this shared strategic framework is absent. Some of the differences in outlook between the two sides, as Markey notes, are not minor, and there is no doubt that Beijing is already proving to be a "far more demanding and ambitious partner." This has been evident on issues ranging from Chinese encouragement for Pakistan to conduct operations against Uighur militants in North Waziristan to Beijing's push for Pakistan to get the Taliban to the table for peace talks with the Afghan government. Will these stresses place a level of strain on the friendship that it can no longer bear? And is Chinese policy now "fabulously costly and spectacularly risky," as Markey suggests?


I think we at least have preliminary answers, some of which also touch on the critique raised by Meena Singh Roy that "China's argument that its huge economic package for infrastructure development could bring about change in Pakistan's social and economic makeup does not sound very convincing, given the past failures of large-scale U.S. and Western financial and military aid to the country." Such comparisons between the levels of Western and Chinese economic support seem misplaced. Direct financial support, the bulk of which was provided to the Pakistani army, coupled with smaller volumes of aid focused on social development, is not the same as infrastructure investment. If the latter fails, it will fail for different reasons than the West's efforts. The same is true politically. Chinese demands have been limited, and are likely to remain so. Beijing will press for a peace settlement in Afghanistan, which many in Pakistan and in the Taliban itself favor, rather than pushing Pakistan to rein in the Haqqani network or change its education system. The tendency is still to go with the grain rather than make demands that are liable to elicit a backlash. This is at times disappointing for the powers that would like to see China

doing more, but keeping the relationship with Pakistan in decent working order is a higher-order objective for Beijing than any of these individual goals. In addition, even when there are aspects of discomfort, Pakistan gains far more from having its closest partner as the rising heavyweight power in the region than from any plausible alternative. The presence of a \$46 billion carrot helps too. China is laying out—all at once—the package of benefits that can accrue to Pakistan if it is able to ensure a domestic and international situation that is sufficiently stable to make the investments possible. There is some degree of political consensus in Pakistan that this opportunity should be seized, despite concerns about whether the country has the capacity to do so quite as quickly as China would like. But if there are problems with specific projects, or the conditions for the investment do not obtain, the initiative will simply be scaled down. Either way, many of the principal beneficiaries of the supposed largesse will be Chinese companies. As risks go, CPEC is not especially egregious.

The greater challenge may actually be if a substantial proportion of the project moves forward. China's standing in Pakistan, which includes persistently stratospheric ratings in opinion polls, has partly reflected its remove from everyday politics. Now Beijing is embroiled in battles over corridor routes, debates about the social impact of its investments, and criticism over the entrenchment of Punjabi economic privilege—all of this even before a new wave of Chinese workers arrives in Pakistan. The fact that economic ties had been limited to a weak set of trade links and a few grand projects meant that the more quotidian aspects of the relationship were kept to a minimum. My bet is that a great deal more will come out of CPEC than the most skeptical views suggest, which will make for a more balanced relationship but also one that is increasingly demythologized.

The final question is how to define the relationship. Khan understandably reacts against the connotations of the term “axis” in the title, but his analysis demonstrates the challenge of finding a more appropriate term for a partnership that is palpably more than just a “friendship” or “entente cordiale,” yet lacks the obligations of a formal alliance. Scobell describes the use of axis as “controversial” but “appropriate,” and Bruce Riedel's elegant formulation in a review elsewhere—that, alongside the U.S.-India relationship, this will be one of the “dual axes...central to the global order in our times”—frames the term in the neutral sense in which

it was intended.<sup>1</sup> This debate about terminology is not an idle one. While Pakistan is a unique case in Chinese foreign policy, the coming years are likely to see China developing more relationships that resist ready classification: partnerships with a heavy security component and attendant political expectations but without mutual defense obligations. I have been struck in the last year by references in Chinese sources to the China-Pakistan relationship being a “model to follow.”<sup>2</sup> That will be difficult. But this view is another indication that this oddly resilient friendship, whose descent into acrimony or irrelevance has been consistently predicted, remains in surprisingly good health.

I will conclude by adding that I am very grateful to the reviewers for their kind comments and thoughtful analysis. For all the growing interest in the China-Pakistan relationship, material on it remains relatively thin, and their essays are an important contribution to correcting that deficit. 

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Riedel, “‘The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia’s New Geopolitics,’ by Andrew Small,” *Lawfare*, February 25, 2015 ~ <https://www.lawfareblog.com/china-pakistan-axis-asias-new-geopolitics-andrew-small>.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Liu Zongyi, “China Remains Faithful Partner of Pakistan,” *Global Times*, December 28, 2015 ~ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/960904.shtml>; and Yan Xuetong, “China-U.S. Competition for Strategic Partners,” *China-U.S. Focus*, October 29, 2015 ~ <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/china-u-s-competition-for-strategic-partners>.





