

## **China's Role and the Potential of Pak-China Cooperation in Regional Organizations**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper attempts to analyze China's role in various regional organizations and potential cooperation between China and Pakistan within these forums. SAARC, SCO, OIC, Heart of Asia-Istanbul Peace Process, APEC, CICA and Boao Forum have been selected here for analysis. Pakistan is one of the founding members of SAARC and China has an observer status. Pakistan supports Chinese membership in SAARC to reduce Indian role and hegemony. China wants to have easy access to Indian Ocean, Middle East and influence in South Asia, for which India is the biggest hurdle. In SCO, China is the founding member while Pakistan joined it as observer in 2005 and as a member in 2015. Combating terrorism, extremism and separatism and to enhance the trade opportunities, stability in neighborhood and energy security are the common objectives of the two states in SCO. Pakistan, being a founding member in OIC, has always played an active and dynamic role for the cause of Muslims. Pakistan wants China to have greater role in OIC where the later showed interest for observer status in 2012. Chinese interest in Muslim states, particularly in Middle East and Central Asia, is triggered by the energy hunt and growing posture of these regions in contemporary world politics. Pakistan can play a bridge role, not only geographically, but also ideologically and culturally, to bring these states closer to China. China and Pakistan are increasing their cooperation in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process on Afghanistan, APEC, CICA and Boao Forum for Asia, as well. The paper concludes that both states share similar views on all bilateral and multilateral issues, support each other's position, and enhancing their cooperation in regional organizations and multilateral forums.*

**Keywords:** China, Pakistan, SAARC, SCO, OIC, Regional Organizations

### **Introduction**

The era of globalization and growing economy facilitated a rising China for more proactive role to play in the world politics. China has formulated a more comprehensive and multifaceted foreign policy in recent decades to cope with the changing dynamics of international relations. The wave of regional integration, inter and intra-regional cooperation and need for a friendly neighborhood has pushed Beijing for dynamic engagement with regional organizations and multilateral forums. So, China is enthusiastic to join SAAARC as a full-fledged member and increase its cooperation with South Asian states where Pakistan's role vis-a-vis China is crucial.

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Pakistan has endorsed the idea of Chinese membership in SAARC and has been striving hard to welcome it for further enhancement of bilateral relationship.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization is another important platform of regional cooperation. It is a fast growing regional organization with a leading Chinese role, being a founding member. China has always supported Pakistan's case within the SCO when it became an observer in 2005 and a member in 2015. In case of OIC, it is equally important both for Pakistan and China, where the former is its founding member and the latter is seeking for observer status, at least. Islamabad has always played its part with rigorous participation and raising voice for Muslims' cause, within the OIC. Beijing has also keen interest to be a part of OIC with full membership owing to its Muslim minority and growing relationship of interdependence with Muslim countries.

China and Pakistan share same views in Istanbul Peace Process regarding the Afghanistan conflict. As Afghanistan shares a common border with Pakistan and China, it is really pushing the two countries hard for an active role in this regard. Pakistan and China have hosted the Heart of Asia Conferences of the Istanbul Peace Process in their respective capitals for a regional 'Afghan-led and Afghan-own' solution.

An attempt has been made here to analyze China's role and its potential cooperation with Pakistan within SAARC, SCO, OIC and few other multilateral forums.

### **China and Pakistan in SAARC**

South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is an inter-governmental regional organization which was founded in 1985 in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It has eight member states, including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan. SAARC has an observer status in the UN and working relationship with the European Union as well. SAARC was established to promote regional integration, economic prosperity and people to people contact in the region of South Asia. It has nine observers, including the United States, European Union, China, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Iran, Myanmar and Mauritius. It is interesting to note that SAARC has more observers than its members. China is special in this case as it has fastest growing and second largest economy in the world. China is enthusiastic to join the SAARC.

How China looks into South Asia? Five factors have shaped Chinese policy towards South Asia. First is the fact that South Asia is located in the center to connect the energy-rich Middle East with Southeast Asia where China has large stakes. Most of the SAARC countries have direct land borders with China which can give alternate option to have access to international sea lanes of the Indian Ocean. It would give

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China a strategic importance of having a safe trade. Second is, South Asia is rich in natural resources, such as, 'iron ore, coal and hydrocarbon derivatives' where some have yet to be explored. The region has growing economies and a huge population in millions which provides China enormous opportunity for trade and a market for its goods. Third factor is the growing Chinese imports and exports volume, especially in energy sector and its growing dependence on Indian Ocean. There are also serious security threats in the Indian Ocean region, ranging from terrorism, drugs and material trafficking to the weapons of mass destruction. For the Chinese security interests in Indian Ocean, a close coordination is facilitated by the South Asian states. Fourth is the ambitious Maritime Silk Road (MSR) initiative of China which will connect various regions and many countries of the world. It is in connection with the revival of the old Silk Road, connecting the Central Asia and Europe. The Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor is the extension of the same policy plan. It has a plan to connect various ports in the region for utilization of more trade, for which, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Maldives have already agreed to be a part of this initiative. Although, China's South Asia policy is not totally India-centric, but owing to India's growing role in the region by having nuclear weapons and missile capability; it is posing a strategic threat to China. India's strategic relationship with the US and growing ties with India has concerns for China as well (Kumar, 2015).

China became an observer in SAARC at Dhaka Summit of 2005 where Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh supported the move and India, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Maldives opposed it. China has significantly contributed to SAARC. China-South Asia Business Forum was established in 2004 with the purpose to strengthen "communication, cooperation, development and mutual benefits". China-South Asia Business Council has been established in 2006 to strengthen links between the Chinese companies and the Chambers of Commerce and Industries in South Asian countries. China has been attending the successive SAARC Summits since 2007 and inviting the diplomats from South Asian states to China for creating more understanding on various issues of mutual concern. China has also hosted a South Asian countries' commodity fair and China-SAARC senior officials meeting (*Ibid.*).

"In 2014, China even nominated an envoy for SAARC, indicating the significance it attaches to this grouping. Apart from this, the high level bilateral visit between China and SAARC countries has strengthened the political, economic and military ties and also allowed China to play a greater role in SAARC, thus to certain extent reducing India's role. Overall, China's role in SAARC is limited by its observer status, the slow progress of SAARC itself, and India's increased role and the increased presence of the US and Japan in the region, which act as counterweights to China. Nevertheless, this has not prevented China from aspiring to become a full member of SAARC" (*Ibid.*).

China has expressed its interest to join this regional forum in November 2014 during the SAARC Summit and Pakistan joined its hands in the move for full membership of

China (Hussain 2015). Pakistan has supported every effort to make China a full member of SAARC. Chinese entry into SAARC will make the organization as an efficient and stronger forum. The current position of SAARC is weak enough to settle the regional disputes and make a common future. The Indo-Pak bilateral rivalry, weak and stagnant economies of the most SAARC nations, the jobless youth in the region are few of the most important issues faced by the regional bloc. China's joining SAARC as a full member will help region to elevate its status in international politics by providing financial assistance and doing investment in various developmental projects of the region, as has been already engaged. China is also concerned about its neighborhood in South Asia that a stable environment is needed not only for its fast-growing economy but also to keep its own house in peaceful order.

China fears about the situation in Indian-held Kashmir, sharing a direct border and also a wave of terrorism in the region which may further worsen the troublesome Xinjiang region of China. Pakistan welcomes China in SAARC mainly to counter India (Shinde, 2015). As SAARC is India-dominated, due to its biggest population which is many folds of all the South Asian states', its biggest and growing economy, geography, democracy and central position in the region. China's membership will make the organization as a balanced one, with its huge population, fastest growing and world's second largest economy, rising posture across the globe, military might and geography. Owing to Indo-Pak rivalry and Sino-Indian border dispute and strategic competition, China's membership is favorable for Pak-China partnership.

Even some other SAARC members do support China but India will never want it to be achieved. As commenting on SAARC Summit at Nepal in 2014, Spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs Mr. Syed Akbaruddin expressed his government position on China's membership in SAARC. He rejected the Chinese possibility in organization and stressed a need for focusing on cooperation among the existing SAARC members, instead of moving horizontally. He argued that the observers are peripheral to the members in the organization and they can be approached at later stage in future. Now is a need for more cooperation among the SAARC members in a productive manner (Parashar, 2014).

### **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an inter-governmental organization which was founded on 26 April 1996 as "Shanghai Five" and then renamed as Shanghai Cooperation Organization on 15 June 2001. There are 6 founding members of SCO, including China, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It was decided on 10 July 2015 in Russian city Ufa to welcome India and Pakistan as new members in the regional bloc who will join it in 2016. There are some observer states, dialogue partners and guest attendances of the organization as well.

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Pakistan became an observer in SCO in 2005 and now will join it formally as a full member. All the six members of the grouping has supported India and Pakistan entry. Spokesman of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Hong Lei remarked about his government support for the entry of India and Pakistan in SCO, that China is ready to cooperate and work with all members to complete the process of membership (The Indian Express, 2016).

It is expected for a more positive and healthy relationship between India and Pakistan through the platform of SCO. "India and Pakistan have difficult bilateral relations—particularly when it comes to discussing terrorism. Chinese leaders are optimistic their membership in the SCO will help build bridges, but the fact that the two are nearly always at loggerheads over security issues—a major piece of what the SCO tackles—makes it seem a fantasy. Indian and Pakistani troops, for example, participating together in a joint SCO military exercise would be quite a landmark event" (Putz, 2016). Such kind of joint military exercises have already been conducted by China and Pakistan together.

SCO leaders are committed to promote the very essence of the organization, as China's state-run news agency "Xinhua" commented. "The SCO leaders signed the Ufa Declaration and an agreement on border defense cooperation at the annual summit. They also approved the organization's development strategy until 2025, a 2016-2018 cooperation program on combating terrorism, separatism and extremism, and the drafting of a treaty on anti-extremism" (Xinglei, 2015). Since Pakistan is a victim of terrorism and extremism, and has been actively involved in the War on Terror; a joint action plan with SCO members will help it to overcome the menace. Pakistan and SCO states may learn from each other the strategies and expertise of combatting terrorism and extremism. But this is not the only objective of SCO states to welcome Pakistan for membership. Some other interests are also there to get advantage of the membership.

At the occasion of SCO Prime Ministers' meeting in Zhengzhou China in December 2015, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif highlighted Pakistan's geostrategic location and the CPEC connectivity project. "Mr. Sharif also unambiguously backed China's 'Belt and Road' connectivity initiative. He added that Pakistan remained committed to making China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project — a joint undertaking of the two countries under the 'Belt and Road' framework — a resounding success. Mr. Sharif pointed out that Pakistan's unique geo-strategic location at the confluence of South, West and Central Asia would allow Islamabad, as a full-member of the SCO, to fully develop these linkages" (Aneja, 2015).

The worrisome situation in Afghanistan is also a common concern for China and Pakistan. Any political and economic change in Afghanistan will have impact on SCO, as Afghanistan enjoys observer status in organization. China desires for

strengthening strategic and political cooperation with Afghanistan under SCO and want the grouping to play its greater part for bringing stability in Afghanistan. Even China has hosted the 4<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan in Tianjin in 2014, for solving the Afghanistan's problem through regional cooperation. China is looking towards its neighbors to work with for bringing peace in Afghanistan, where Pakistan holds a special position (Khan, 2015).

The SCO members' interest is increasing in Afghanistan, particularly after the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces. "The organization has UN observer status and also has arranged an international conference on Afghanistan which shows its interest in the economic development and enhancing the fragile security situation in the country. With international recognition and having a positive role in regional stability it will be easy for the organization to interact and cooperate with Afghanistan for its stability and economic development" (Sartaj and Afridi, 2015).

Stability in the region and neighborhood is crucial for Beijing's policy of long-term relationships with the regional states. China-Pakistan strategic partnership and the billion dollars' CPEC project can proved to be instrumental for Chinese objectives in the region. "China also has geopolitical and economic interests in Central Asia like other competitors have in the region. China wants to protect her state integrity; it is the foremost concern of Beijing, as the Chinese government does not wish for "crosspollination of influence" between its country and Central Asian states. China's initial concern regarding Central Asia was to improve the security of its Western border with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Secondly, Chinese share the interest to make sure regional stability for her economic market; therefore they want to uphold a "zone of stability and peace" around China. While China also wants to minimize the Islamic movements' spreading influence and their political infrastructure, because China wishes to raise its economic and political control over the region" (Afridi et al. 2015).

### **Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)**

The Organization of Islamic Conference is an intergovernmental organization, established on 25<sup>th</sup> September 1969 in Rabat Morocco to make a unified voice of the Muslim states and promote cooperation among them. OIC name changed from "Conference" to "Cooperation" in 2011. There are 57 member states in OIC. Pakistan is one of the founding members of OIC and has been playing an active role for the cause of Muslims across the world. Pakistan has always strived for China's role in OIC. As China is rising economically and politically, the Muslim states look towards Beijing for strong partnership. The same desire is expressed by the Chinese authorities. "China's meteoric economic rise and the burgeoning ascendancy of OIC nations in the international landscape are altering global economic power dynamics, and players from both markets are eager to tap the lucrative opportunities arising from

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stronger bilateral ties. With a more inclusive foreign policy, including a renewed stance on the Middle East and Africa, Chinese president Xi Jinping has set the motion for greater China-OIC relations – with the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative a central pillar to China’s grand strategy” (Global News Wire, 2016).

China is ready to accommodate the energy-rich Muslim countries into its dynamic diplomacy. An MOU was signed between the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector (ICD), the private sector arm of Islamic Development Bank (IDB) Group and China-Africa Development Fund (CADFund), which is a private firm based in Beijing and focusing on Africa. The landmark event happened at the occasion of China-OIC Forum 2016 in China’s capital city. The MOU supports increase in trade and investment opportunities in 19 African countries, to co-finance and co-invest various projects. It has also to develop and strengthen research collaboration and small and medium enterprises in African states (Ibid.).

The Belt and Road Initiative of China will play an important role in this regard to bring the Muslim and African states closer to each other for economic well-being. “Shi Jiyang, CEO and president of China-Africa Development Fund (CADFund), said CADFund, as the first fund in China focusing on investment in Africa, encourages and supports Chinese enterprises to invest in Africa to promote the development of Sino-African commercial ties. The two countries are likely to conduct cooperation in the fields of oil and gas resources, infrastructure, capacity, and agriculture. Fang Qiuchen, chairman of the China International Contractor Association (CHINCA), noted that China's newly-signed overseas contracted projects exceeded 200 billion U.S. dollars in 2015, of which those signed with the countries along the route of Belt and Road Initiative took up a large share” (Xinhua Finance, 2016).

China is also active on political front with OIC to support various Muslim World issues. The Palestinian issue is a long-standing dispute for which China seeks for a peaceful and durable solution. Vice President of China Li Yuanchao insisted on the just cause of the Palestinians while having meeting with an OIC delegation under the Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shukri, in February 2015. He expressed that “[We] hope Palestine and Israel will continue working toward a resolution through peace talks,” said the vice president. China will continue to enhance communication with the Middle East and work with the countries involved toward an inclusive and just resolution to the Palestine issue”. Shukri appreciated the China’s support for Palestinians and hoped for a greater role (Chinese Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 2015).

On January 19, 2016, President Xi Jinping met with Secretary-General Iyad Ameen Madani of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Riyadh. Xi appreciated the growing OIC role and stressed for more cooperation between China and Muslim countries. He expressed about the friendly exchanges, cooperation and engagement

between China and OIC for more than 40 years and also thanked OIC for publically denouncing the terrorist and violent incidents in China.(Chinese Embassy in Saudi Arabia, 2016).

### **China and Pakistan in the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process**

The forum was established in November 2011 to discuss the burning issues of terrorism, security, anti-narcotics, poverty and economic linkages to help Afghanistan with the regional solution. The regional countries of Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, China and Central Asian states are among the stakeholders for the said purpose. The United States and more than 20 other states and organizations are also involved in the process to support the cause.

Beijing is ready to bring stability and peace in its neighborhood where Afghanistan holds a special position. Now China not only interested to secure its economic interests in Afghanistan but also seeks its political role for peaceful solution of Afghan imbroglio. Beijing supports negotiations between Afghan Taliban and the Kabul regime. “After the first round of Afghan-Taliban peace talks crumbled, China tried again at the Heart of Asia conference” (Tiezzi, 2015).

At the 2016’s fifth foreign ministers’ meeting of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA), Chinese President Xi Jinping assured his country’s support and pro-active role for Afghan issue to have “*Afghan-led and Afghan-owned*” process and also to seek support of the international community for the said purpose. China values the Istanbul Peace Process on Afghanistan with much hope to work with other countries and Pakistan for the regional peace and stability. Pakistan’s Advisor to Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz also assured Pakistan’s role for settling the regional disputes through peaceful means and bilateral negotiations. He argued for Pakistan’s efforts to bring peace in Afghanistan and appreciated China’s leadership role in promoting peace and development in the region (Pakistan Observer, 2016).

On another occasion, Pakistan and China appreciated each other’s role and contribution in Afghanistan’s peace. “Chinese Special Envoy for Afghanistan Ambassador Deng Xijun has lauded Pakistan’s efforts in facilitating peace and reconciliation efforts in Afghanistan” (Khan, 2015).

“Highlighting Pakistan’s role in facilitating Afghan-led and Afghan-owned reconciliation process, Fatemi underscored that “peace in Afghanistan is vital for the peace and stability of the entire region.” While emphasizing on Pakistan’s and China’s convergent interests and shared goals vis-à-vis Afghanistan, Fatemi welcomed China’s growing engagement with Afghanistan and also lauded its efforts for peace and development in the war-torn country” (Ibid.).



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Similarly Pakistan took an initiative to restart Afghan peace talks before the Haer of Asia – Istanbul Peace Process on Afghanistan, in Islamabad in 2015. Pakistan's Prime Minister Mr. Nawaz Sharif had discussed the idea with Afghan President Mr. Ashraf Ghani in Paris, on the sideline of the international climate summit to hold a meeting among Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and the United States for resolution of the Afghan conflict. The Chinese Ambassador in Kabul was ready to cooperate with Pakistan to take forward a "quadrilateral initiative". Pakistan had already arranged the first-ever direct talks between the Afghan government and Afghan Taliban in Murree in the month of July 2015 (Kakar, 2015).

The Pakistan's initiative turned into a quadrilateral meeting. "Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Antony Blinken attend a 2+2 meeting on the sidelines of the ongoing fifth foreign ministers' conference of the Istanbul Process on Afghanistan in Islamabad, capital of Pakistan, on Dec. 9, 2015. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said here Wednesday that China is willing to see the United States play a "positive and constructive" role in Afghanistan's peace process" (Xinhua, 2015).

Earlier, after becoming President, Mr. Ashraf Ghani was on same page with Chinese Prime Minister for meaningful talks with Afghan Taliban. He was calling Taliban for reconciliation process and negotiations, as was also desired by China (RFE/RL, 2014). China's interest and active role in the future of Afghanistan is evident from the fact that it has allocated 244 million dollars for Afghan people to seek jobs and to provide 500 scholarships for Afghan students to peruse studies in China. It was announced in 2014 that China would grant 330 million US dollars to Afghan people for professional training and 3500 scholarships by 2019. China is a major investor in Afghanistan, mainly in oil and copper mining (Ibid.).

The looming security concerns are also hitting the policy makers hard in Beijing, as it "is particularly worried about the potential for contact between militant groups in Afghanistan and Uyghur separatist groups in China's western Xinjiang region. The Uyghurs are a Turkic Muslim people and some members of the community have been captured or killed in Afghanistan and Pakistan's tribal areas during the last 13 years" (Ibid.).

## **China and Pakistan in APEC, CICA, and Boao Forum for Asia**

### **APEC**

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation is a forum which was established in 1989 to foster free trade and enhance economic cooperation among the Pacific Rim countries. Currently it has 21 member states, including China while Pakistan is a potential

candidate for membership in future. China's role in APEC is profoundly significant. According to Panda (2014), "[I]n 2001, China hosted the first APEC meeting in Shanghai. Over the years, China's perspective and approach towards APEC has evolved to a great extent. Beijing has now emerged as a stronger and confident power in Asia-Pacific. China may continue to remain a conservative power when it comes to issues of national sovereignty or land and maritime territorial security issues. However, Beijing is a different power when it comes to economic issues or foreign economic relations strategy. Compared to the USA, China is still the most influential economic power both within and outside APEC".

China is leading the APEC agenda with cooperation and coordination of other states. Pakistan participated for the first time in APEC forum in November 2014 when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended it in Beijing. Pakistan is hopeful for full membership of APEC which will boost its economy by bringing foreign investment (Haroon, 2014). China and Pakistan share similar views regarding regional economic development and other bilateral issues at the APEC platform.

### **CICA**

The Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) is an intergovernmental forum to strengthen and enhance security, peace and stability in Asia. It was the idea of Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbayev who presented it to the 47<sup>th</sup> session of the UN General Assembly on 5 October, 1992. There are 26 member states (including China and Pakistan), 7 observer states and 4 observer organizations in CICA.

China and Pakistan have strong bond in CICA. It was expressed by the Chinese President Xi Jinping in a meeting with Pakistan's President Mamnoon Hussain in 2014 that both countries should strengthen cooperation to eradicate terrorism, and China supports Pakistan in counter-terrorism strategy as it suits to its national condition. The two countries should cooperate more for regional security. Pakistani counterpart reiterated that East Turkistan forces are a common enemy of both countries and Pakistan would jointly combat the terrorist, with China. Pakistan would take best steps to ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and projects (Dan, 2014).

Both the leaders also discussed the economic aspect of their bilateral relationship. Chinese President stressed for joint efforts to promote the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the successful operation of the Gwadar Port and Lahore Metro. Pakistan's President appreciated China's role in CICA and endorsed the Chinese view regarding bilateral projects (Ibid.).

In an interview the Chinese President expressed "that Pakistan fully shares the goal of CICA. He said Pakistan expects that the member countries would further strengthen

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this forum and find ways to implement its ideals and guiding principles into political and economic realities for the benefit of the entire region” (Xinhua, 2014).

Pakistan shares its concern with China on the South China Sea dispute. During the fifth meeting of the Foreign Affairs Ministers of the CICA on 28 April, 2016, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Adviser to the Prime Minister on National Security and Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz of Pakistan reached on a consensus that;

“I. Both sides agree that relevant disputes over the South China Sea should be peacefully resolved through consultations and negotiations in accordance with bilateral agreements and the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) by parties directly concerned. Both sides oppose any imposition of unilateral will on others.

II. Both sides agree that countries outside the region should fully respect efforts made by China and the ASEAN countries to safeguard peace and stability in the South China Sea, and play a constructive role to this end.

III. Pakistan respects China's statement of optional exception in light of Article 298 of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)” (MFA China, 2016).

Mr. Sartaj Aziz lauded the role of CICA in Asian affairs while in an interview with Radio China and expressed Pakistan's resolve to play its part for the Asian development by cooperating with China (The NEWS, 2016).

### **Boao Forum for Asia**

The Boao Forum for Asia is a non-profit organization which holds high-level forums for governments' leaders, business community and academia to discuss and solve the crucial issues concerning Asia and the world. It is annually held in Boao, Hainan province of China and was started back in 1998. China is the leading country while Pakistan plays an important role as well.

At the Boao Forum in 2012, Pakistan's former Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani shared his views with the then Executive Vice Premier of China Li Keqiang that Pakistan values Chinese help in various sectors of Pakistan's economy, agriculture and energy etc. Pakistan views China's enemy as its own enemy and China's friend as its own friend. Pakistan sees its friendship with China as a corner stone of its foreign policy and supports China's position on Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang. Both countries agree to uphold each other's sovereignty. Pakistan is also seeking for Chinese support in Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline project (Chan, 2012).

In about similar words, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang commented on China-Pakistan relations in a meeting with Pakistani Prime Minister Nawz Sharif on the sideline of the Boao Forum 2014 that their bilateral relations were getting new heights. Both the leaders expressed their commitments about the completion of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the related projects. Chinese leadership vowed for cooperation in counter-terrorism with Pakistan (MFA China, 2014).

Both the leaders agreed to expand their bilateral trade and speed up the development. Chinese Premier thanked Pakistan for its consistent and strong support on issues relating to China's core interests including the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism" (APP, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Working through regional organizations and multilateral forums enabled states to enhance their mutual trust for cooperative arrangements to solve common problems. This trend motivated China to play its greater role on different levels and to cooperate with Pakistan on such platforms. The exemplary China-Pakistan relationship is evolving into the 'politics of interdependence', as the two states are now not only focusing on their defense ties but also cooperating in various other fields through mutual dependence. They share similar views in almost all regional organizations and forums without any conflict and support each other's' position on various issues. The SCO is of prime importance for both China and Pakistan. China's political, security, economic and energy interests are concerned there while Pakistan is looking for the same. Pakistan's membership in SCO will help China to coordinate efforts in combating terrorism, extremism and separatism. It will also facilitate the peace process for Afghanistan which will have positive impact on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

China wants to have full membership in SAARC and Pakistan is supporting the case. China's membership will reduce and balance Indian role and its hegemony. Pakistan's support in SAARC is a kind of China's support for Pakistan's membership in SCO. Chinese interests can best be served by membership to have more influence in Indian Ocean, South Asia and Middle East. In case of OIC, Beijing's policy is mainly revolving around trade and energy. As the OIC members of Middle East and Central Asia are energy rich and big markets, China seeks to engage them to support the 'One Belt-One Road' initiative. Owing to Pakistan's position in OIC, Pakistan can play a crucial bridge role to bring China and Muslim states together. In other forums of Istanbul Process, APEC, CICA and Boao forum, China is playing a leading role and Pakistan's support is always there. A general recommendation for both states is to work together for weak areas in these organizations and forums, and to diversify their strong bilateral relationship into a more multilateral arrangement of secure neighborhood.

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