

# The Sino-Indian Geo-Strategic Rivalry: A Comparative Study of Gwadar and Chabahar Ports

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## Abstract

*As “power” is the chief determinant of foreign policy of each state, so in the case of Sino-Indian relations, both the neighboring states seem exceedingly hectic in satisfying their strategic interests. States tend to gain more power either for survival, strategic/economic supremacy or for hegemonic purposes. China and India are neighboring states and strategic rivals as well. Both belong to ancient civilizations, breathed in an environment of peace and non-interference, before the emergence of China and India as Modern Nation States and after getting independence from imperialists. Both are big countries, having large populations and fast growing economies. The territorial disputes and later Sino-Indian border war of 1962 sowed the seeds of longstanding mistrust, mutual suspicion and strategic rivalry between these two neighboring states, which after the jumping up of their economies are now assuming the shape of geo-strategic and geo-economic competition, within the regional vis-à-vis global context. In this regard, China has shown yawning interest in developing the Gwadar Port of Pakistan, to boost up its strategic and economic benefits while India on the other hand is investing in the Chabahar Port of Iran, just to counter the China’s ambitions and to quench its own strategic thirst. This counterbalancing behavior of both the major regional powers is not only raising hackles for each other but are creating mess for the neighboring states of this particular region as well, especially for Pakistan. This instant paper is focusing the Sino-Indian geo-strategic competition, in terms of the Gwadar and Chabahar Ports and its implications for Pakistan.*

**Keywords:** China, India, Gwadar Port, Chabahar Port, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asian States.

## Introduction

China and India, being protracted rivals and growing economies are competing with each other for pursuing their respective national interests. Both the states have territorial disputes, blurred demarcated borders [contrasting narrations concerning their respective claims], different political setups and global ambitions. China is an authoritarian

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capitalist and India a liberal democracy. China is the second largest economic power after the US and India, the third in this domain. Both are big markets and are deeply concerned about their safe and cheap trade routes and energy security. China and India are the big trading collaborates too, having bilateral trade amounting approximately \$71.5 billion.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, their perpetual areas of conflicts [border disputes] and economic/strategic concerns compel these neighboring states to adopt a way of competition, instead of more cooperation.

After the emergence of China and India as Modern Nation States, both the neighboring states tried to normalize their relations. The *Panchsheel* Agreement [five principles of peaceful co-existence] of 1954 was a documented attempt between the two states, which was intended to ensure non-alignment during the Cold War era<sup>2</sup>, to develop friendship between the two<sup>3</sup>, and to live peacefully in neighborhood. Nevertheless, this attempt was soon turned into a house of cards, when China and India engaged in a thirty days border conflict in 1962. This war resulted in protracted rivalry between China and India, in terms of mistrust, mutual suspicion, concerns, conflicts, and competition. India claims the *Aksai Chin* area, which is occupied by China while China claims the *Arunachal Pradesh* area, which is occupied by India.<sup>4</sup>

Since the Sino-Indian War of 1962, both China and India behave more competitively and more hysterically towards each other. Despite the fact that limited cooperation between the two states is in action but their outstanding issues do not give space to their determined cooperation and instead of pooled collaboration, they tend to compete with each other, both strategically and economically. In the post 9/11 environment, China is speedily reinforcing its relations with Pakistan, in terms of developing the *Gwadar* Port for its energy security, for quick access to the global market and for ensuring its presence in the Indian Ocean Region. India on the other hand is further extending its relations to Iran, Afghanistan and USA, to countermove the Sino-Pak strategic partnership and to further its own strategic interest. India answers the Chinese ambition of the *Gwadar* Port [Pakistan] development by 1) developing the *Chabahar* Port of Iran and 2) by clubbing it with the Afghan territory for its further extension to the Central Asian States. These competitive and counterbalancing strategic dynamics are causing bitterness in the Pak-Iran and Pak-Afghan relations.<sup>5</sup> In May 2016, the Indian Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi and the Iranian President Mr. Hassan Rouhani documentarily signed the *Chabahar* Port agreement. Scholars believe that India wants to counter the China's infrastructure-building ambitious project the 'One Belt, One Road' [OBOR] initiative and its first materializing step, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor through

the *Chabahar* Port and its further extension to the Central Asian States.<sup>6</sup> Through this development, India wants to 1) counter and contain China and to 2) bypass and encircle Pakistan,<sup>7</sup> India also wants to cause diplomatic headache for Pakistan and to disturb its relations with neighboring states. Both the *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* Ports are situated near Baluchistan, sandwiching the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry between Pakistan and Iran, and highlighting the geo-strategic importance of Baluchistan [Pakistan & Iran].<sup>8</sup>

The Sino-Indian territorial dispute is hatching an unending rivalry between these two big economies. Both tend to adopt a way of balancing and counterbalancing, containing and counter-containing, encircling and counter-encircling and competing and counterfeiting each other. Despite their limited but growing cooperation, China and India, instead of possible détente, are causing strategic, economic and diplomatic tensions for each other and the region. The *Gwadar* port of Pakistan and the *Chabahar* port of Iran are important, both for economic and strategic dynamics. Both are situated in close proximity of roundabout seventy kilometers in distance, on the coast of Arabian Sea and near the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>9</sup> The geo-strategic importance of both sites is compelling the regional factors [China & India]; to make these sites the area of their economic and strategic focus and to connect them through infrastructure based connectivity ambitions.<sup>10</sup> This strategic and economic importance is causing competition, concerns and counterbalancing calculations between China and India, being major economic powers of the region. India fears the China's Belt and Road initiative and considers it an economic and strategic encirclement design, under the logic that it will increase the China's influence in the close proximity of India. This Indian trepidation further advances the Indo-US, Indo-Iran and Indo-Afghan relations.

Since the 9/11 incident, international politics in general and the Asian international relations in particular has experienced various distinctive developments. One, this incident has transformed the world into a terrorism-dented entity, which not only affected the foreign policy of the US but of the whole international community as well. Two, this incident challenged the US dominance, disturbed the uni-polar structure of the global politics and morphed it into a multi-polar construction. Three, this incident once again brought a paradigm shift in the US foreign policy towards the Asian Continent. Four, this incident provided an opportunity for China and India, to fill the gap and to get economic and strategic benefits due to the US engagement in the war against terrorism. Five, this incident offered an opportunity to China and India, to speed up their geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics towards

Afghanistan and onward for their global ambitions. Six, this incident gave a unique characteristic to the International Relations, in terms of the term 'terrorism', which major powers in the regional vis-à-vis international context are using as a strategic, political and diplomatic weapon for furthering their respective agendas and national interests.

China and India, under the garb of the US engagement in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan, enjoyed the opportunity for furthering their geo-strategic and geo-economic interests. In 2013, China announced its mammoth connectivity infrastructure-based framework, which India replies with its own ambitious designs. For translating the China's ambition into reality, China is moving to the *Gwadar* port of Pakistan and to counter it, India is making arrangements with Iran and Afghanistan, through the *Chabahar* port of Iran.

In a brief comprehensive account, the Sino-Indian lingering territorial disputes, in terms of the Arunachal Pradesh, the Aksai Chin, and the Sikkim region. Moreover, their causes of diplomatic traumas, in terms of the Indian concerns about the Sino-Pak strategic/economic friendship, the China's apprehensions about the Indian role in the Tibetan politics and the Dalai Lama support are causing a strong geo-strategic and geo-economic competition between these two neighboring states.<sup>11</sup> China is nearing to the Pakistani side for quenching its strategic and economic thirst, while India is shifting its strategic and economic focus to Iran and Afghanistan, the western neighboring states of Pakistan, to counterbalance China and to cause strategic, political and diplomatic tensions for Pakistan.

### **Rationale**

First, China and India are the fast growing economies, emerging on the global stage concurrently and from very proximity. Both need safe and cheap trade route, energy security, quick and easy access to the global market, political and diplomatic influence in the region and strategic satisfaction. The Malacca dilemma is causing strategic headache for China, due to which China wants to divert its energy and trade route and to fulfill its needs through *Gwadar* [Pakistan]. On one hand, it will satisfy China, economically and on the other hand, it will strengthen the Chinese hold in the Indian Ocean Region, strategically. This causes strategic concerns for India, which in turn speeds up its relation with Iran, Afghanistan and USA, to answer the China's ambitions.

Second, economic development causes both cooperation and competition, depends on understanding and concerns respectively. The Asian century is causing competition among the regional and extra-regional powers. China and India, despite the members of the BRICS

(Brazil, Russia, India, China & South Africa) having bilateral trade, amounting USD 70.8 billion are also strategic rivals. India fears the China's OBOR [One Belt, One Road] initiative and in turn counters it by its own ambitious programs like the *Mausam* project, the *Bharat Mala* Project and the *Sagar Mala* Project.

Thirdly, states being the powerful actors in international anarchy, behave according to their own choices, depending on their own rationales and ambitions. States behave in self-help department, to achieve their own national interests and to establish their own policies. The potentiality of threat perception compels states, either to counter it or to bandwagon with. India considers the China's ambition of developing the *Gwadar* port as a potential threat to its strategic supremacy in the Indian Ocean region. To counterbalance the China's geo-economic and geo-strategic dynamics, India is developing the *Chabahar* port in order to protect and further fulfill its strategic concerns and objectives.

#### **The Geo-Strategic and Geo-Economic Importance of *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* Ports**

21<sup>st</sup> century is the century of economic development, economic power struggle and economic competition, which actually creates a perfect situation of complex interdependence. Both the economic calculations and strategic dynamics are interdependent, as the former strengthen the later and vice versa. Economic activities demand quick transportation, in terms of energy and trade purposes. Sea routes are the cheapest and easy source of transportation, which in turn furthers the importance of ports politics. Economic powers tend to strengthen their hold over seas and ports. The *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* ports present a phenomenal picture of both the economic and strategic importance. Both are important, not only for regional countries but for extra-regional actors as well. The *Gwadar* port is situated roundabout 624 nautical kilometers near the Strait of Hormuz, which witnesses 70% of world oil transportation and annual trade of approximately 100,000 shipments. It has the capacity to receive about 200,000 tons of big tanker ships. The *Chabahar* port has also both the economic and strategic importance. It provides a quick access to the Persian Gulf, Oman Sea and the Indian Ocean. It has the capacity to receive roundabout 20,000 tons of supertankers.<sup>12</sup> The *Gwadar* port outstrips the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of the *Chabahar* port. It is located in that position, where trading ships have immediate access, even without entering into the Strait of Hormuz. As mentioned above, both the ports are located in close propinquity; however, the *Chabahar* port comes second, in terms of transportation and trafficking. Although Iran is ambitious to make both the *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* ports complementary for each other. Iran

has also shown interest in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, nevertheless, India is developing the *Chabahar* port solely to counter the *Gwadar* port project and to connect it to the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Russia.<sup>13</sup> India is also interested to use the *Chabahar* port for linking the oil rich Central Asian States through road connectivity by using the *Milak* [Iran] and *Zaranj-Dilaram* [Afghanistan] roads. It is also working on oil pipelines from Turkmenistan to Afghanistan and Iran and then to India through the Arabian Sea.<sup>14</sup>

The *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* ports, important chokepoints near the Strait of Hormuz and Baluchistan enhancing the strategic and economic significance of this particular area. Great Powers, in terms of regional as well as extra-regional actors are speedily concentrating their strategic and economic focus over this important area. China, India and the US are revisiting their interest in Baluchistan. These new geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics among the great powers are letting the cat out of the bag, in terms of a 'New Great Game', tantamount to the 'Great Game' between the Great Britain and Russia in the nineteenth century. Like the retrospective competition, the propensity of the 'New Great Game' is also towards the power and balance of power estimation, securing the energy resources, extending the areas of influence and chasing the national interest of the respective actors.<sup>15</sup> In this competitive scenario, both the *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* ports are referred to as the game changers.

Due to the geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of *Gwadar* port, China wants to make it the part of its OBOR initiative. The China's ambition of developing the *Gwadar* port will fulfill its four-fold objective. 1) It will further strengthen the Sino-Pak strategic and economic friendship. 2) It will ensure energy and trade safety for China. 3) It will give a strategic advantage to China over the Indo-US strategic clubbing in the Indian Ocean. 4) It will connect China with the resource-rich countries and will make China an economic hub.<sup>16</sup> India on the other hand, considers the Sino-Pak strategic and economic rapprochement and the China's presence in the Indian Ocean Region as a possible strategic threat to the Indian strategic dynamics. To counterbalance the Sino-Pak strategic and economic entente, India struggles to develop ties with the western neighbouring states of Pakistan i.e. with Iran and Afghanistan<sup>17</sup> and in this regard in May 2016, India documentarily signed the *Chabahar* port agreement with Iran.<sup>18</sup> Through this port, India wants to answer the China's strategic and economic ambitions, to sidestep Pakistan, to connect India with Afghanistan and the Central Asian States and to disturb the Pak-Iran and Pak-Afghan relations.<sup>19</sup>

The Sino-Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic competition is developing two opposite strategic magnetic fields, which respectively attracts both the regional and extra-regional states and which in turns transform the regional political order into two opposite poles. This bipolar political order in the Asian political climate is causing diplomatic, strategic and economic rivalries among the regional and extra-regional actors. Regional actors like Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan and extra-regional actor like the US are moving to the pole of their immediate intimacy, for pursuing their respective strategic and economic interests and for counterbalancing their strategic rivals. In the surrounding of the Strait of Malacca, India, the US and Japan are causing strategic tensions for the China's economic and strategic interests, whereas in the Indian Ocean Region, China is causing strategic concerns for India. To ease the Malacca headache, China is diverting its mode of transportation for trading shipments and energy needs towards the Indian Ocean, through the Gwadar port of Pakistan. This paradigm shift is in turn causing strategic fear for India. To counter the new strategy of China, India is also hurriedly moving to the epicenter of energy resources and the passage of trade transportation. This strategic race between China and India is further intensifying the Sino-Indian strategic rivalry.

#### **The Malacca Dilemma and the China's Ambitious Initiative**

As it is a well-known fact that China is the fast growing economy in the World. Since the former Chinese President Deng Xiaoping's economic reforms (1978), the China's economy is witnessing an unprecedented upturn. In 2013, it surpassed the Japanese economic posture and became the second largest economy in the world. The China's economic development is largely based on industrialization, manufacturing products, energy consumption and transportation of goods and energy requirements. China imports roundabout 54.8% oil needs from abroad and its 80% of oil need is transported through the Strait of Malacca. Through the strategic importance lens, the Strait of Malacca is the second most important strategic Chokepoint especially for China, after the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>20</sup> The Indo-US strategic presence near the Strait of Malacca and the Indian strategic dynamic in the Andaman Sea is causing strategic concerns for China. China terms this strategic headache as the "Malacca Dilemma".<sup>21</sup> India, the United States and their strategic allies are adding more to this "Dilemma". India and the United States are making strong arrangements in the Asia-Pacific, to counter the China's ambitious designs and to construct more strategic headache for China. Both India and the United States tend to attract regional actors for their counterbalancing calculations. Theoretically, the United States under the Trump administration renames the "Asia-Pacific" as the "Indo-Pacific",

to support India strategically and to provide a constructed conceptual phenomenon for the Indian strategic designs and strategic legitimacy, in terms of its territorial sovereignty and economic/strategic dynamics. Practically, to substantiate the United States' constructed phenomenon of Indo-Pacific [renaming the Asia-Pacific], the United States, India, Australia and Japan develop a quadrilateral understanding, to achieve their shared objectives and to tackle their shared strategic headache [China].<sup>22</sup> The Times of India<sup>23</sup> mentions, "The move is seen as counter to China's aggressive behavior". The Times further mentions the China's concerns about the quadrilateral development, in terms of its omission from the group and "hope that the new concept of Indo-Pacific is not directed against it". In November 2017, India and Singapore signed a naval agreement having aim to boost up the India-Singapore maritime strategic relations by allowing each other's bases for strategic dynamics, to counterweigh the China's maritime expansion, to strengthen maritime security, and to allow the Indian warships to the Singapore port near the Strait of Malacca for refilling motives.<sup>24</sup> These counterpoising strategic designs of India, the United States and their allies are causing headache for China. To ensure its strategic and economic satisfaction, through a short, easy and safe route, China wants to divert its route of commercial transportation towards the Gwadar port of Pakistan. Pakistan is a best option for China; hence, it provides a quick access to the Sea Lines of Communication [SLOC] and acts a doorway to the Strait of Hormuz and the Persian Gulf for its risk-free oil transportation.<sup>25</sup> To materialize its economic and strategic objectives, China formally announced its 'Road & Belt' initiative in 2013, an umbrella project having two wings Silk Route Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21<sup>st</sup> century Maritime Silk Route (MSR).<sup>26</sup>

This China's ambitious infrastructure-based framework fulfills six-fold objectives of China. First, it will address the 'Malacca Dilemma', in terms of shortening its transportation route [energy & goods] through the *Gwadar* port of Pakistan. Second, it will strategically strengthen the Chinese hold in the Indian Ocean Region [to counter India & the United States]. Third, it will economically connect China with the rest of the world. Fourth, it will fulfill the China's global ambitions. Fifth, it will satisfy China, both economically and strategically. Sixth, it will increase the China's area of influence in the regional and international context, in terms of its diplomatic, political and economic clout.





Source: [www.pwc.com](http://www.pwc.com)

### Indian Reply to the China's Belt and Road Initiative

India largely fears the Sino-Pak strategic and economic friendship. Through the Gwadar Port [Pakistan], China is materializing its belt and road framework. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the most important step of the China's connectivity ambition and a most crucial and contentious economic/strategic challenge for India. This development bears to boost up the Sino-Pak economic and strategic friendship and to turn the tide in favor of China and Pakistan against the Indian strategic and economic dynamics. India being apprehensive about this logic is the only state in the region, which questions the China's OBOR initiative and counters it with its own ambitious strategic and economic intentions. To counter the China's connectivity ambitions, India adopted a three-pronged strategy. First, it started its own multiple projects, in terms of the *Mausam* project, the *Sagarmala* Project, the *Bharatmala* project and the Spice route Project. The *Mausam* and Spice projects are based on historical trade routes, which were adopted by traders and merchants during seasonal winds i.e. *Mausam* (weather) through the Indian Ocean to India. Through this project, 1) India wants to counter the China's Maritime Silk Road and 2) to connect India with ancient trading collaborates.<sup>27</sup> The *Sagarmala* and *Bharatmala* projects represent ports consolidation and road connectivity ambitions respectively.<sup>28</sup> Through these projects, India wants to reply the China's mammoth connectivity framework. In May 2017, India boycotted the first OBOR international forum, held in Beijing, due to its strong reservations about the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and financial and environmental concerns.<sup>29</sup>

Second, India speedily neared to the US lap for strengthening the Indo-US strategic entente, to counterbalance the Sino-Pak strategic friendship and to counter the China's ambitions forcefully. In 2016, India and United States signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA). Under this bilateral agreement, both the states entered into an agreement, to enjoy each other's bases for strategic purposes [supplies and repairs].<sup>30</sup> In August 2017, Donald Trump announced his new strategy for South Asia and Afghanistan. In his speech, the US president while ignoring China and blaming Pakistan, openly invited India for her role to play in Afghanistan. This brazenly flouted assertion moved both Pakistan and China. Pakistan strongly mentioned, "The US president of shifting blame for its failures in the war against the Taliban and other armed groups in Afghanistan".<sup>31</sup> . Both India and the US facilitate each other's national interest. India jumps on the American bandwagon for counterbalancing the Sino-Pak rapprochement and for countering the China's economic and strategic dynamics. United States, on the other hand uses India as a tool to counter and contain China and to ensure its hegemonic position in Asia. The Trump's 'First America' strategy as an election slogan was a slight deviation from the US Asian policy tradition. Scholars believe.<sup>32</sup> To strengthen the Indo-US strategic rapprochement against the China's miraculous and quick rise, Trump administration renames Asia-Pacific as the Indo-Pacific, which is intended to change the whole concept in favor of India. Rex Tillerson, the US Secretary of State mentions this development, as an approach to boost up the Indo-US strategic relations, which share a common concern of the China's strategic and economic emergence. Tillerson further highlights the clubbing of Japan and Australia as well.<sup>33</sup> These counterproductive strategic and economic dynamics are developing an environment of competition and antagonistic activities in the Asia-Pacific, which in turn is causing strategic problems for the regional countries. New studies suggest that albeit no existential threat is perceived between China and India, nevertheless their territorial disputes, self-narration of great power calculations and the balance of power structure are pushing their nuclear facilities to the maritime spectrum, which in turn speeds up the nuclearization of this region and can dash the established prevailed optimism.<sup>34</sup>

Third, India moved to the western neighboring states of Pakistan, one, for countering the Sino-Pak economic rapprochement, two, for counterbalancing the China's Gwadar port project and three, for containing the OBOR framework. The Indo-Iran and Indo-Afghan entente are causing political, strategic and diplomatic problems for Pakistan at its western front. Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan not only

share their borders but they belong to the same culture, tradition, history, and religion as well. In May 2016, India and Iran signed 12 pacts, including the *Chabahar* port agreement. During the signing ceremony of the aforementioned agreements, the India Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and the Afghan President Ashraf Ghani also signed a trilateral agreement for transit trade through the Afghan territory and for facilitating India to get access to Afghanistan and onward, through the *Chabahar* port. The agreement bounded India, to invest approximately \$500 million for the *Chabahar* port development, in terms of expansion and to make it more functional. The agreements further stipulated that India would more invest approximately \$20 billion for energy requirement of port.<sup>35</sup> In October 2017, an Indian wheat cargo as a grant was transported from *Kandla* Port of India to Kabul (Afghanistan), through the *Chabahar* port of Iran., An Indian newspaper<sup>36</sup> commented on this development, “The shipment of wheat is a land mark moment as it will pave the way for operationalisation of the *Chabahar* port an alternative, reliable and robust connectivity for Afghanistan”. In December 2017, the Iranian President Hassan Rouhani inaugurated the first phase of *Chabahar* port development. This development has strategic and economic importance for India. This port development ensures the Indian strategic reply to the China’s *Gwadar* port development. It also fulfills the Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics, in terms of bypassing and strategically pressurizing Pakistan. India considers the *Chabahar* port initiative as a possible answer to the China’s connectivity ambitions and a crucial step towards the Central Asian States, both for energy and trade accounts.<sup>37</sup>

India is using both Iran and Afghanistan, the western neighboring states of Pakistan as tools, for furthering its two objectives. One, through these states, India wants to counter and counterbalance China and its geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics. Two, both Iran and Afghanistan share their borders with Baluchistan, an important western province of Pakistan having strategic and economic significance. Through the western front, India wants to disrupt the Pak-Iran and Pak-Afghan relations, both politically and diplomatically. Pakistan has shown deep concerns about the Indian role in Afghanistan and Iran and its impacts on the law and order situation of Pakistan in general and Baluchistan in particular.

### **India, Iran and Afghanistan Entente and Its Implications for Pakistan**

As discussed above, through Iran and Afghanistan, India wants to give a strategic and economic response to China and to cause

disruption in their relations with Pakistan. The Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic interests in Iran (Chabahar) and Afghanistan are primarily focused on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Through the Belt & Road initiative in general and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in particular, China can easily counter the US, Indian and Japanese strategic dynamics and can shorten its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC). Through this infrastructure-based connectivity mammoth framework, China can also counterweigh the Indo-Japanese based Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. All these geo-strategic and geo-economic activities are centered near the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the Strait of Hormuz, in the close proximity of Pakistan and Iran, with further extension to Afghanistan and the Central Asian States.<sup>38</sup> These diverging strategic interests are plunging the whole region in general and Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan in particular into strategic, diplomatic and political stiffness.

Both Iran and Afghanistan have cultural, historical and religious relations with Pakistan. Apart from 'Track One' Diplomacy [government-to-government contacts], all the three states have strong 'Track Two' diplomatic channels [people-to-people contacts] as well. The unbreakable bond of [Religion & Cultural legacy] among these states cannot be affected by any calculation; nevertheless, their political, diplomatic and strategic dynamics can be construed and hijacked by different actors differently. In 21<sup>st</sup> century, national interest plays a crucial role in determining friends and foes of a state. Iran and Afghanistan, despite their geographical and cultural proximity with Pakistan, tend to translate their respective national interests and to follow their strategic, economic and diplomatic lines, according to the dictation and "*modus operandi*" of a detached regional actor India, instead of a geographically and culturally close neighbor [Pakistan]. India wants to break the century long historical, cultural and religious bonds of Pakistan with its western neighboring states Iran and Afghanistan, through her diplomatic and strategic channels. Pakistan has repeatedly shown its security concerns about the Indian involvement in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa through Iran and Afghanistan. The Indian speedily growing strategic and economic concentration in Iran and Afghanistan is bitterly affecting the Pak-Iran and Pak-Afghan political and diplomatic relations.

#### **Pak-Iran Relations and India Factor**

Both Iran and Pakistan have friendly relations since beginning. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, Iran was the first country, which not only functionalized its diplomatic relations with Pakistan but supported it internationally as well. Muhammad Raza Shah Pehlavi, the

then king of Iran was the first head of a foreign state, who visited Pakistan. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 made two developments. First, it morphed the secular West-supportive nature of Iran into a staunch *Shia* dented state. Second, it drifted both Iran and Pakistan, in terms of ideological differences between the Sunni and Shia school of thoughts. Due to these differences and the Indian factor, both Iran and Pakistan are not possible to cooperate in accordance to the historical outlines of their brotherly relations.<sup>39</sup>

Some scholars split the history of the Pak-Iran relations, in terms of before the Iranian Revolution and in the post-revolution scenario. Vatanka (as cited in Rana, 2016), rightly bifurcates the Pak-Iran relations into two parts i.e. relations before the Iranian Revolution [during Pehlavi era] and relations in the post-revolution era [Post-Pehlavi era]. The author asserts that the Pak-Iran relations before the Iranian Revolution were strong and robust. Nevertheless, after the Iranian revolution, relations between Pakistan and Iran faced multiple factors, which caused vicissitude in these relations. Since the Iranian revolution, the Pak-Iran relations, in terms of thoroughgoing cooperation did not meet the historical legacy.<sup>40</sup>

Both Iran and Pakistan have geo-strategic and geo-economic importance. India, the strategic rival of Pakistan is moving to the Iranian side, 1) to quench its strategic and economic thirst and 2) to cause disarray in the Pak-Iran relations. India is developing its relations with Iran, in terms of the *Chabahar* port development, to cause strategic tension for both China and Pakistan, to counter the China's connectivity calculations and to spoil the Pak-Iran relations. Blame game and constructed sectarian issues largely overshadow the Pak-Iran relations. India brazenly avails this "opportunity to exploit the situation as per its own regional objectives. The good relations between Iran and Pakistan do not serve the Indian interests and India has ensured that the relations remain cold by adding fuel to the fire in the form of instigating sectarian violence as per its capacity to do so".<sup>41</sup> The Indian factor is causing security and strategic headache between Pakistan and Iran. Iran shares its border with the Baluchistan province of Pakistan and Baluchistan is at the heart of the Indian strategic dynamics. On one hand, India, through its RAW personnel is sabotaging the peace of Pakistan in general and Baluchistan in particular and on the other hand, it is causing distrust between Iran and Pakistan. India is using the *Chabahar* port of Iran for its dual objectives, one, to equalize the *Gwadar* port and two, to make it a base for its RAW personnel, to cause security headache for Pakistan in its Baluchistan province, which is the epicenter of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Kulbhushan Yadav, an Indian spy operative,

arrested by Pakistan is the glaring example of the Indian flouted attempt of aggression through Iran. Yadav has confessed his involvement in the sabotaging activities in Baluchistan. He has also “admitted that he was based in the Iranian city of *Chabahar* and had run his network from there”.<sup>42</sup>

Despite religious, cultural, traditional and historical homogeneity, the Pak-Afghan relations are not up to the mark, since beginning. After the independence of Pakistan, Afghanistan was the only Muslim country, which internationally went against it. In September 1947, Afghanistan was the only state in the international community, which did not recognize the newly born Pakistan at the United Nations platform. Since beginning, the Durand Line [now Pak-Afghan border] and the issue of *Pakhtoonistan* remained the immediate causes of tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Since inception, Afghanistan positioned its stance against Pakistan as a hostile, instead of a good neighbor or friend. Bilateral relations from 1947 to 1963 remained outshined by the Afghanistan misunderstanding of the shared border. In 1963, relations between the two brotherly neighbors were normalized due to the Tehran agreement, when both Pakistan and Afghanistan unanimously agreed to revisit their diplomatic relations.<sup>43</sup> In 1979, the former USSR invasion of Afghanistan completely morphed the Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistan opened its doors for the Afghan refugees and went to support the US against the Soviet troops. During the Taliban era, Pakistan made good diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and since the 9/11 incident; relations between the two neighboring states are oscillating like a pendulum.

India considers Afghanistan as a strategic pinpoint for its calculation against the Sino-Pak strategic and economic dynamics. Through the Afghan soil, India is fulfilling the following objectives:-

- To contain the China’s OBOR initiative in general and CPEC in particular.
- To equalize the China’s geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics with its own initiatives.
- To disrupt the Pak-Afghan relations.
- To counterbalance the Sino-Pak rapprochement with the Indo-US strategic closeness.
- To use the Afghan soil for its sabotage activities against Pakistan.

The Indian infrastructure-based designs, in both Afghanistan and Iran have bitter implications for Pakistan. “In the garb of such rebuilding efforts, the Indian RAW is making tremendous ingress in Afghanistan”.<sup>44</sup>). It is causing security implications for Pakistan,

especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) and Baluchistan. Through these counterproductive strategic and economic dynamics, India wants to disrupt the Pak-Afghan relations as well. In November 2017, after the Indian wheat shipment from India through the *Chabahar* port of Iran to Kabul, the Afghan government openly commented that Afghanistan is no more dependent on the Pakistani ports for its trade purposes with India. Indian officials also supported the Afghan government's assertiveness by commenting, "The reason for cooperation between India and Iran to help Afghanistan was to find an alternate route for trade between the three countries".<sup>45</sup> These counterproductive statements of the Afghan and Indian officials are adding more tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### **Conclusion**

The year of 1962 morphed two constructions in the Sino-Indian relations. It caused longstanding territorial disputes, in terms of ill-demarcated border and a protracted rivalry between China and India. The Sino-Indian rivalry, which emerged due to their territorial disputes is transforming into a larger geo-strategic and geo-economic competition, both on land and in water. China is the fastest growing economy in the world. This China's economic ascendancy needs energy security and a safe and cheap trade route, to ensure its sustainable economic development, to satisfy its strategic and economic needs and to connect China with the rest of the world. India being the strategic rival of China is considering the China's strategic and economic dynamics as a threat to the Indian strategic and economic designs in the region. Both China and Pakistan, being close friend and the strategic rivals of India are clubbing together, to ensure the China's ambitions through the *Gwadar* port of Pakistan and to strategically and economically strengthen their respective interests. India on the other hand is speedily moving to the US camp and is making strategic and economic relations with Iran and Afghanistan through the *Chabahar* port, for counterbalancing the Sino-Pak strategic and economic friendship and for disrupting the Pak-Iran and Pak-Afghan relations. To analyze the Sino-Indian relations succinctly, there exists limited cooperation between China and India. Nevertheless, their aspects of conflict, concerns and competition are far larger than the areas of their cooperation. The Sino-Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic competition, in terms of the *Gwadar* and *Chabahar* ports are causing strategic, economic, political and diplomatic repercussion for Pakistan. Economic development, energy security and an easy and cheap source of transportation are the needs of a viable economic power. These needs signify the importance of seas and ports politics. The Sino-Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic dynamics, in terms of the seas and ports are

causing complications and implications for the regional actors. On one hand, the Sino-Indian geo-strategic and geo-economic interests are causing bifurcation in regional states and on the other hand, it is causing intensification in the confrontational strategic and economic competition among the neighboring states. Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan are the three Muslim neighboring states. Apart from their geographical proximity and attachment, their gluing sources are historical, cultural and religious legacy as well. To cause competition, instead of brotherly relations and growing cooperation among these states is detrimental for both their relations [political & diplomatic] and unity. Their diverging geopolitical concentrations and competitive behaviors towards each other are against the larger interest of the Muslim World in general and their brotherly relations in particular.



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