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Issue Brief

The Growing Pakistan-China Defense Cooperation

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Pakistan is proud of its relations with China. These relations include fraternal diplomatic ties, growing political understandings, and deepening defence cooperation over the past 66 years. Today, both countries are close strategic partners.

The geopolitics of the 1960s made Pakistan and China indispensable defence partners. Historically, both countries' cooperation was deepened after the Sino-Indian border clash of 1962 and the war between Pakistan and India in 1965.

There have been frequent military exchanges between the two armed forces since the 1970s. Both countries have signed a number of defence agreements to promote defence cooperation to take existing bilateral military cooperation to new heights between the Armed Forces of Pakistan and the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Defence Dialogues have been conducted on a regular basis since 2002. So far, six such dialogues have been conducted between the two armies. The Defence Dialogues cover military to military cooperation, collaboration between the defence industries, and global strategic issues.

Under the self-reliance military programme, China assisted Pakistan over a number of projects. These include: Taxila Heavy Industries, Heavy Forge and Foundry, Heavy Mechanical Complex, Heavy Re-build Factory at Taxila, ordnance factories, maritime industries, missile developments, and the Kamra Aeronautical Complex.

Under a joint defence production of weapons and equipment between Pakistan and China, Pakistan Air Force has developed JF-17 thunder jetfighter at the PAF Aeronautical Complex, and, which has given an edge to PAF at air superiority in the region. The aircraft is a monument to the all-weather iron friendship. Plans for the sale of the aircraft to other countries such as to Sri Lanka, Qatar, and Malaysia will help enhance Pakistan's economic strength as well. Chinese defence cooperation has introduced a new element in Pakistan's defence production capabilities that will help increase the country's national income.

China has also confirmed an agreement to sell eight submarines to Pakistan Navy early this year.¹ Half of these submarines will be built at the Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works, boosting Pakistan's shipbuilding capacity. Lately, China has also been assisting Pakistan to develop its indigenous drones.

The United States did not transfer this technology to Pakistan in the past fifteen years despite repeated requests by Pakistan.

Additionally, China has also assisted Pakistan in the provision of civil nuclear power plants and equipment, and built plants in Mianwali District which include Chasma-I and Chasma-II with 300 MW generation capacity for each plant.² China is also helping Pakistan to install three more nuclear power plants at the same site i.e., Chasma-III (340 MW), Chasma-IV (340 MW), and Chasma-V (1000 MW).³ China is building two more plants at Karachi i.e., K-Coastal-I and K-Coastal-II with an energy generating capacity of 1100 MW from each plant.⁴ When fully operational, the total energy generating capacity of these nuclear plants would reach 3,380 MW of electricity, which will help alleviate Pakistan's energy shortfall. All these plants have been, and will be built under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The menace of terrorism and separatism are also handled by both sides from security and military point of view to augment the existing military to military cooperation.

Under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) more military cooperation has been taking place to ensure the safety of Chinese workforce and Chinese assisted projects all over the country from Gwadar to Khujerab. With growing security threats in the region, Pakistan and China have strengthened security-related military cooperation with each other over the past couple of years.

Regionally, India's military build-up and its increasing cooperation with the United States, Japan, and Australia has been countered by the growing Pakistan-China defence cooperation over the years. In this context, China has proved to be an increasing source of stability and security of Pakistan. Both countries have developed closer maritime defence cooperation with each other in the Indian Ocean and in the South China Sea in recent years. In February this year, both countries held a dialogue on maritime security in Islamabad to enhance bilateral maritime cooperation, navigation security, coast guard exchanges, marine scientific research and rescue, fisheries, and enhanced connectivity.⁵

The admirable point is that China has greatly reduced the gap between use and purchase of weapons and equipment and their indigenous manufacturing in Pakistan over the years. This is a matter of satisfaction for Pakistan. The all-weather friendship greatly works in fostering mutual defence ties which are likely to be deepened in the years to come.

Notes and References:

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- ¹ Farhan Bokhari, "Closer Pakistan-China military ties irk West", *Financial Times* (London), 12 January 2016 & Angela Meng & Minnie Chan "Beijing eyes bigger arms exports after Pakistan deal, experts say", *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 26 April 2015.
 - ² World Energy Association, 'Nuclear power in Pakistan'. <www.world-nuclear.org/info/Country-Profiles/Countries-O-S/Pakistan/>
 - ³ Ibid.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ "China and Pakistan Hold Second Round of Dialogue on Maritime Cooperation", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's republic of China <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1338748.shtm.l>