

**How Covid Changes the Relations between Nations: A Study of Pak-China Relations****Naheem Gul\*, Ikram Ali\*\***

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**Abstract:** People have been badly impacted by the epidemic coronavirus disease (COVID-19) all around the world. This pandemic had a significant influence on both individuals and national and international countries. This breakout originated and spread out from China, which may result in losing partners and friends faster. The two nations have sustained one another and moved forward despite recent turbulence and global upheavals, displaying an unbreakable bond. Pakistan has always been a top priority in China's regional affairs, and China regards its relations with Pakistan from a strategic and long-range approach. But at that time, Covid-19 put one of the oldest Pakistan and China friendships to the test. At that critical time, there were ups and downs, but Pakistan and China stood together and tried to support each other. This article is made up of four different sections. The historical background of the Pak-China relationship, elaborated in the first portion, examines relations before and during COVID-19. The second section elaborates on the impact of COVID-19 on the Pak-China relationship. The third segment highlights the Pak-China cooperation during this pandemic period and what makes this relation to be maintained. Finally, we will analyze and evaluate the effects of COVID-19 on the relationship between Pakistan and China.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Pandemic, Global Upheavals, Regional Affairs, Pak-China Relationship

**Introduction**

China and Pakistan have had a positive relationship since they opened foreign policy in 1951. In 1950, Pakistan was among the prior nations to recognize the PRC, and it remained a faithful friend during Beijing's diplomatic exclusion in the 1960s and the 1970s. Pakistan has historically received significant geopolitical, technological, and financial assistance from China, including the transfer of extremely sensitive nuclear breakouts and infrastructure. Some observers believe that if the US-Indian rivalry grows, Pakistan may eventually force even tighter ties with its longstanding security management associated with China. Analysts also claim that China's growing anxiety over terrorist groups based in Pakistan may prompt Beijing to approach the connection with much delicacy (Afridi & Bajoria, 2010).

Throughout 2000 and 2019, there were competency gaps in Pakistan-China relations as the countries' diplomatic relationships moved from the defensive to the economic sectors. By having significant changes and revolutions in South Asia's geopolitical environment, Pakistan-China relations have endured for centuries. Due to their shared values and mutual understanding, relations between Islamabad and Beijing have remained strategic and stable. Both nations expanded their cooperative relationship and came together on emerging concerns in the regional stability contexts and at international

levels as growth activities under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a centerpiece initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), got underway (Afzal, 2020).

But at the end of 2019, the wave of covid-19 caused rapid changes in the relationship between different countries worldwide. Like other nations, Pakistan and China were also in the same boat. The outbreak had run amuck on the economics of both the powerful nations and those with existing fragile economies. Since January 2020, the global toll of the coronavirus pandemic has been enormous. The pandemic had wreaked havoc and rendered catastrophe to the country's most industrialized economies. Both countries felt the severe effects of this pandemic most acutely. On February 26, this epidemic began in Pakistan, and since then, there have been a rising number of cases. There were 237,489 reported coronavirus cases in Pakistan as of July 8th, while there were 4,922 fatal cases (Worldometer; Karim & Mahmood, 2020).

According to Khan et al. (2020), most Pakistani cities and towns have experienced partial or total lockdowns of their marketplaces, academic institutions, workspaces, and federal buildings. This has immobilized economic growth and halted the advancement of the CPEC, which is worth \$ 50 billion by itself. The circumstances are damaging Chinese objectives in Pakistan since the CPEC is the cornerstone of the Belt and Road Strategy. Besides all of the losses, several factors contributed to

their mutual dependence. China is a crucial partner for Pakistan from a tactical standpoint. The performance of the national capital projects that China is funding is directly related to their interests. Comparable to Pakistan, China requires dependable partners prepared to promote China's evolving view of the virus. (Singh; Karim & Mahmood, 2020). In the next section, we will explore how various factors play a prominent role and influence Pak-China relations.

### **CPEC Project Abandonment**

In 2015, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a \$62 billion, 15-year investment in Pakistan that serves as the core of the two nations' strong alliance (Afzal, 2020). As the virus spread, Pakistan progressively halted all CPEC projects out of concern that Chinese citizens traveling to China for the Spring Festival may bring the sickness back to Pakistan. However, the CPEC plan was put on hold when the Pakistani government prohibited it. However, as the Pakistani government prohibited Chinese employees from traveling to Pakistan, the development of CPEC was put on hold, involving projects like the Lahore Orange Line Metro Train. Additionally, the Chinese troops who had remained in Pakistan had their employment terminated and were placed in quarantine. The Chinese Consulate-General in Lahore decided to postpone all conferences beginning in January 2020, which was the first restriction placed on the operations of Chinese officials (Pathak & Saraswat; Afzal, 2020). Pakistan gradually tightened its restrictions on Chinese employees' freedom of movement there. Even though the harbor is the central focus of the CPEC project, the Gwadar Harbor prohibited the entrance of arriving Chinese employees until the pandemic was over, which halted the port's development efforts. The administrations of both nations refuse to officially acknowledge that the CPEC projects have been suspended and will not be finished till the Chinese laborer's resume. Although the construction wouldn't be finished, the debt would need to be paid. Due to the 14-day isolation imposed on the initial group of Chinese workers who arrived in Pakistan on March 20, 2020, this economic impact would have been much less harsh if the laborers, vendors, and producers had been from Pakistan (Pathak & Saraswat; Karim & Mahmood, 2020)

### **Economical Crisis**

As of April 4, 2020, Pakistan had logged 2708 positive cases of COVID-19. Besides the health risks, the business may face a massive loss in GDP of 4.64 percent due to delays in exports and imports following the Covid-19 epidemic. In the direst circumstance of the Covid-19 outbreak, the Asian Development Bank projects a loss of \$5 billion. Pakistan exports textiles at a rate of over 60% (Pathak & Saraswat, 2020). Because of the quarantine, there will probably be a shortage of labor, which will potentially cause ports to operate less frequently, resulting in an accumulation of goods there. The Pakistani economy will

continue to be destroyed by a lack of fabric from nations fighting the transmission of the virus. Therefore, Pakistan's economic unrest was brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic greatly in need of support that can be possible in the face of China's collaboration.

### **Political Exploitation**

Pakistan wanted to leave its civilians before the unique coronavirus expanded from China to other nations to please Beijing. Up to 800 Pakistani students in Wuhan, the epicenter, were left stranded by Pakistan. At the same time, most countries evacuated their students and decided not to leave in support of China, according to the Foreign Office of Pakistan. The Pakistani students used social media to express their distress, which led to harsh criticism of this action. This irresponsible action by Pakistan, which ignored the value of its residents' lives, finally affected China's internal politics. (Pathak & Saraswat; Hussain & Hussain, 2020). It appears to have been primarily influenced by Pakistan's desire to avoid embarrassing its important member, China, as well as its weak healthcare infrastructure and unwillingness to deal with domestic coronavirus outbreaks.

### **The Privacy Concerns**

Through the Khunjerab pass, the CPEC links Gwadar in the unstable western Pakistan Balochistan region to Kashgar in the problematic western Chinese Xinjiang state. Balochistan-based organizations frequently criticize Pakistani and Chinese officials for plundering the region's natural resources, which poses a significant danger to the growth of Gwadar, the hub of CPEC. Assault on foreigners has long been a practice of violent extremist organizations like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and the Afghan Taliban (Pathak & Saraswat, 2020). Terrorist organizations may misappropriate Covid-19's effect on China's global reputation to target Chinese employees and businesses that they already consider to be oppressors and lone wolves. To exact revenge on China for how it treated the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang, Islamists from Pakistan may potentially target China in the post-Covid-19 world. The Uyghur struggle opposing China has not yet received substantial help from Pakistan insurgent organizations. However, the Islamist has declared that God will divinely punish China in the wake of the Covid-19 epidemic while also expressing antipathy toward China.

### **The Trading Hazard**

Trading is the cross-border or cross-territorial exchange of money, products, and activities in response to a demand or wants for that merchandise. The two nations' links are established in part through many other factors. Substantial exchanges exist between China and Pakistan (Khan et al., 2019). China is Pakistan's top exporter, accounting for 14.54 billion dollars in commerce in both countries during the 2018–19 fiscal year (Singh; Hussain & Hussain, 2020). However, there has been a decline in commerce between these nations due to

the tight conditions of the pandemic. Not only this, but it also decreased economic growth and stopped business activity. As a result, trade relations between the two nations have decreased by 25% thus far. It is evident that although China's \$14 trillion economy may not consider this decline to be a significant problem, Pakistan's economy, which is already battling to exist, has been severely harmed. Analysts predicted that if the economic ventures did not start immediately, the volume of business would decrease in Pakistan and China (Pathak & Saraswat; Hussain & Hussain, 2020).

### **The Medical Assistance**

China and Pakistan are always strong allies. During this COVID pandemic, Pakistani infection experts highlight the importance of a virus transportation medium. These mediums included those apparatus that are ideal for the selection, transportation, upkeep, and long-term freezing of medical samples harboring viruses. This was a situation where China could support Pakistan by providing the required medical resources to address COVID-19 (Ebrahim, 2020). China made a special effort to show that it was prepared to help the Pakistanis to boost its global influence. China announced it would send \$4 million, 10,000 hazmat suits, and 30,000 face masks to Islamabad to combat the illness. Pakistan serves as merely one illustration of the sort of international ties that China desires with nations that are both economically and politically dominated by China.

### **What Keeps Pak-China Relation Going?**

When Covid-19 predominantly affected China and a handful of East Asian countries in early February, Hunza district in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan, provided 7,000 facemasks to China. This was just one of the numerous expressions of sympathy from Pakistan to China, in addition to a Senate Resolution backing China's initiatives and a conversation between the Pakistani PM and the Chinese President. After a couple of months, the Pakistani President visited China, expressing an even greater gesture of friendship. No doubt, both nations unintentionally highlighted different priorities during this pandemic period (Sareen, 2020). By using the terms related to collaborative declarations among "all-weather" mates, and the need to reinforce the "long-standing" link that brings the regions united, the Chinese government representative underlined the divergent agendas that prompted the meeting (Boni, 2020). The Chinese President emphasized the above two interacting issues to enhance the process of connecting the control and preventive measures of Covid-19 and both social and economic prosperity. For China, domestic safety and worldwide prestige were at the top of the priority. These goals can be identified by various statements given by the Chinese President in meetings. China indicates the prior importance of an individual's health and well-being. China quickly enacted the most extensive, severe, and complete tactics to control the viruses. Regarding Pakistan, it was planned to reinforce the country's solidarity with China

during an hour of need, focusing on Kashmir and CPEC. Both present nations' perspectives on the condition in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan briefly explained the Chinese side of the new updates and its considerations, placement, and necessary problems. After reasserting the solidity of China-Pakistani interactions, China, for its part, has stated that it will not tolerate "any reckless acts that exacerbate the issue." Considering China's intention to enhance its worldwide reputation and depict itself as the state dominating the worldwide battle against the coronavirus, they agreed to sign a series of cooperation proposals connected to providing human rights and crisis outbreak prevention supplies.

Pak-China relations have improved immensely than ever over the last ten years. Both of these countries have benefited greatly from one another's geopolitical, technological, educational, political, and economic, transfer of very sensitive nuclear breakouts, infrastructural, and financial aid. This is not to argue that there aren't difficulties in friendship. Different factors include Chinese individuals working in Pakistan who have been the victims of terrorist attacks, the rare resistance to CPEC projects in Pakistan, and China's concerns regarding the corona pandemic source of concern for both China and Pakistan. The seriousness of these problems can also severely impact Pak-China relations.

### **Conclusion**

Pak-China relationship always serves as a golden example of friendship for all nations. In recent times, relationships between Pakistan and China have changed. Different changes are impacting the direction of diplomatic cooperation. The connections between Pakistan and China have been used in international geopolitics concerns, most prominently in the Afghan peace process. China pledged to play a more outstanding contribution to the war in Afghanistan, bringing with it more geostrategic heft and financial means to motivate local players. For the sake of advancing their own individual interests, Islamabad and Kabul welcomed Beijing's engagement. The Pakistan-China relationship has evolved from a concentration on military and diplomacy to focusing primarily on trade and development. Collaboration today is far more extensive and varied than in the past. However, it also carries with it a fresh series of difficulties. In addition to justifying assumptions on both sides, this will offer the partnership an additional dimension.

Covid-19 is placing the entire world at risk, as well as Pakistan and China's relationship. As world politics show significant shifts due to the virus, China is attempting to strengthen its prestige among counties by assisting and supplying assistance. China's ties with its neighbors are also changing as the outbreak takes a toll on the economies of the richest and weakest countries, such as Pakistan. In this situation, China could aid Pakistan and emerge as an ever-trusted friend in this situation.

China's sincere efforts to help Pakistan would bring many other economic and geopolitical interests for China in Pakistan. China and Pakistan have successfully controlled the pandemic, but some regions of Pakistan are still fighting against Covid-19. There will only be more losses for China if Pakistan is unable to control the pandemic effectively. The pandemic demands that Pak-China relations involve the welfare of each other's citizens; otherwise, if these relations are not handled properly, Covid-19 will further exploit the already present weak links in the relations between these countries. This virus has damaged the friendship between China-Pakistan, including Pakistan's imminent economic meltdown and the prospect of becoming the worst-affected nation in South Asia by Covid-19. In this position, Pakistan is obliged to concentrate more on China, this is all companion, but the connection will have to face the Covid test. The study analyzes and tries to discover the Pak-China relations during the Covid-19 plague.

Without any doubt, it was a challenging time for both Pakistan and China. The pandemic has severely affected the economic interests of China in Pakistan. But it has helped China with its image in Pakistan because it has been considered an iron brother by Pakistan. Likewise, Pakistan has also shown solidarity with China during this time of trial. Pakistani citizens did not express negative feelings towards the Chinese present in Pakistan even though the source of the pandemic was China. It can be seen when Pakistan's decision not to evacuate its students and the President of Pakistan's visit to China to show solidarity was a diplomatic victory for China. Even Pakistan is struggling to contain the outbreak due to a lack of resources and its flawed and broken government system.

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