

## SEEKING A COLLABORATIVE SECURITY ALLIANCE FRAMEWORK FOR PAKISTAN

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### **Abstract**

*Pakistan confronts enormous security challenges, most of which are owed to the ongoing global contestation between China and the US, with Pakistan as the former's strategic partner and India aligned with the latter and ready to counter China. These challenges have, over time, morphed into an enduring existential threat to Pakistan, which is way beyond its inherent capacity to manage. The enormity of the danger is primarily owed to the conspiracy of multiple regional and extra-regional hostile actors, the most significant of which is India, assisted by countries attempting to block China's rise as a global power. Notwithstanding its nuclear deterrence, Pakistan faces an asymmetric situation with India in a conventional military realm, which is further compounded by the readiness of the US-led West to assist India in its military up-gradation programme. Consequently, this phenomenon exacerbates Pakistan's security dilemma, threatening its survival, warranting disproportionate national resources for physical security at the cost of political, social and economic development and further adding to its national security vulnerabilities. A collaborative security alliance with China is needed to assuage Pakistan's security concerns fully.*

**Keywords:** Realism, Balance of Power, Security, Threat, Alliance, Armed Forces, Defence Budget, Collaborative Security Framework

### **Introduction**

**P**akistan faces humongous traditional and non-traditional security challenges that have morphed into existential threats. The threat is enormous and complex due to the colluding of multiple regional and global hostile actors. Consequently, in its quest to ensure its survival, Pakistan is constrained to construct its national security policy around the dictates of military security. Resultantly, its military apparatus receives exceptional emphasis on national priorities at the cost of other national security domains. There is no denying that military security is a crucial component of the list of public goods, constituting any state's primary rationale.<sup>1</sup> Particularly for a vulnerable state like Pakistan, the need for a strong security apparatus against external threats assumes great importance. However, extraordinary emphasis on military security in statecraft is antithetical to political, economic and social development, which lies at the core of a state's fundamental functions. Therefore, owing to the lopsided prioritisation of national resources and indifference to other national security domains, Pakistan remains a vulnerable state, with its security apparatus stressed beyond manageable limits. Hence, the situation calls for an

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objective review and adoption of a realistic approach to managing national security challenges.

This paper argues that the threat to Pakistan's national security is too complex to be handled single-handedly. It is way beyond Pakistan's capacity and warrants a collaborative strategic framework. The paper addresses four main questions about the issue: 1) what is the character and the source of the threat to Pakistan's security? 2) How adequate is Pakistan's capacity to counter the threat? 3) What strategic choices are available to Pakistan to counter the threat? 4) Explore the possibility of a collaborative security framework and suggest a way forward.

### **Theoretical Construct**

The theoretical framework of this study is meant to provide a rational argument for how Pakistan should ensure its security and survival in the anarchic international system.<sup>2</sup> The argument is primarily grounded in the theoretical construct of Realism, which has been the "dominant model" of international relations in the post-World War II order.<sup>3</sup> The theory of Realism postulates that to ensure their survival and security in the anarchic global order states as rational actors amass power on the principle of self-help. It needs to be clarified that in the case of big powers, the term 'security' implies 'hegemony', mainly when applied in the context of weaker states. According to the theory, the behaviour of states in international relations is governed by the consideration of "national interest", which typically connotes power, survival and security.<sup>4</sup> The significance of power is evident from the adage that Realism regards global politics as a tussle of states to gain maximum power.<sup>5</sup> Organski goes to the extent of saying that power is a "major determinant" of a state's role in global politics.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it can be justifiably concluded that invariably, all states strive, or should strive, for the accumulation of maximum power for their survival and security.

Another theory that this paper mainly draws upon is that of Balance of Power, which lies in the province of Structural Realism and has been a regular feature of global politics since antiquity.<sup>7</sup> The utility of this concept can be gauged from the fact that despite being associated basically with Realism and notwithstanding limitations and ambiguities, it has generated equally great interest in academics of non-Realist theoretical traditions.<sup>8</sup> Balance of Power refers to a state in international order where power is distributed so that states avoid aggression for fear of punitive solid reprisal.<sup>9</sup> Realists believe that the tendency of states to accumulate power creates insecurity among other states, which, in turn, attempts to counterbalance or offset the power of threatening adversaries by amassing more power and adopting different strategies for their survival.<sup>10</sup> According to

Morgenthau, this process is performed “either by diminishing the weight of the heavier scale or increasing the weight of the lighter one.”<sup>11</sup> Going by this concept, practitioners of international relations have traditionally used different strategies to balance power, such as manipulating territorial possessions, which in the contemporary era is no longer feasible, instituting arms control and disarmament regimes, reinforcing their power by indulging in an “arms race”, and forming “alliances”.<sup>12</sup>

Of all the strategies used to balance power among competing states, alliances and collective defence mechanisms have historically been employed to deter and fight military threats, particularly in asymmetric situations. In the contemporary global order, this practice has experienced a dramatic increase. According to research, the number of individual alliances, 8 in 1900, rose to 1115 in 2000.<sup>13</sup> A military alliance is a treaty that expresses the intent or promise of the signatory parties to support each other militarily to counter threats and bolster one another’s security.<sup>14</sup> According to classic deterrence theory, the intent of signatory parties to intervene militarily dissuades potential aggressor from initiating conflicts due to the heightened cost of fighting. However, there are conflicting opinions on the usefulness of security alliances to deter interstate wars. According to Michael Kenwick and John Vasquez, military alliances are not an assured arrangement to prevent military threats. They believe that alliances instead have the potential “to incite conflicts” by creating uncertainties.<sup>15</sup>

It needs to be clarified that the term ‘security’ is being used in this discourse in the context of its contemporary understanding and not its classical version, which was understood solely in the framework of violence and warfare. According to Dr. Mahbub Ul Haq, the concept of security means “security of people, and not just territory”, an interpretation from which human security has been derived.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, security embraces a state’s crucial political, social, economic and other political functions. Accordingly, it deals with, *among other things*, defence, economy, energy, health, food, education, information, cyberspace, safety, environment, artificial and natural disasters, and other issues that give rise to vulnerabilities from within and without.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, states must develop new competencies and processes to deal with national security challenges. Before initiating a discussion on the issue under question, it is essential to first survey the strategic landscape that will likely shape the world’s geopolitics in general and South Asia in particular.

## Strategic Landscape

China’s rise is the most significant contemporary development in the global order, which has started challenging the status quo in international affairs. It has

given rise to strategic contestation between the US, the status quo power and China, the revisionist power, both vying to expand their influence. One of the most noteworthy manifestations of China's growing influence is its global trade and connectivity project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with its flagship project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has evoked strong resistance from the US as part of its policy of containment of China.<sup>18</sup> Another noteworthy development is the emergence of India as a contender for a leading position in global affairs and an aspirant for the role of "quasi-regional policeman".<sup>19</sup> Its quest for a more significant role in world politics is driven by its extraordinary diplomatic clout accrued by impressive economic growth, substantial military potential and an expanding highly skilled population.<sup>20</sup> Intriguingly, it views Pakistan's strategic partnership with China as a "collusive" threat.<sup>21</sup>

The environment created by the US-China contestation is marked by shifting geopolitical alignments. The US, in pursuit of its objective to contain China, has erected a network of strategic partnerships and alliances with regional and extra-regional countries that have stakes in the Indo-Pacific Region, which is the main venue of the contestation. Some critical manifestations of this policy are "QUAD, Build Back Better World, AUKUS, Coalition of Democracies and foundational agreements with India".<sup>22</sup> The US is also busy constructing new cooperative arrangements against China. With its vast power potential and readiness to counter China, India has already aligned itself with the US. It has formally joined the US initiative as part of QUAD alongside Australia and Japan, which is receiving assistance to become an "exporter of security" in the Indo-Pacific Region.<sup>23</sup> Other countries already aligned with the US or are being considered for new arrangements include the United Kingdom, South Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, France, etc. The central feature of this contentious landscape is Pakistan's geo-strategic location, which remains in the eye of the storm.

It is well-known that the US has diverged interests with Pakistan on two principal issues. One issue is Pakistan's nuclear capability, which for Pakistan is the ultimate guarantor of security against conventionally superior India but is unacceptable to the US. The second issue is Pakistan's participation in BRI and CPEC. In that context, the US is believably using all possible means of coercion to wean Pakistan away from China.<sup>24</sup> It is a fair assessment that the US may be willing to live with Pakistan's nuclear capability and may even look the other way if the latter were prepared to exit from BRI. These developments are, of course, threatening Pakistan's security concerns, warranting an effort to explore strategic alternatives for its security.

## Typology of the Threat

The threat to Pakistan's national security is existential, with both external and internal dimensions and kinetic and non-kinetic manifestations. The primary source of external threat is India, which is uneasy with the very existence of Pakistan for being the cause of the "vivisection" of the Indian subcontinent in 1947.<sup>25</sup> The aggressive psyche produced by this unease among its strategic community is accompanied by India's realist quest to assert its hegemony in South Asia and to play a meaningful role at the global level in which Pakistan is perceived as an irritant.<sup>26</sup> The contemplated role entails an "expansive sphere of influence"<sup>27</sup> and "active protection of overseas interests"<sup>28</sup> with profound security implications for Pakistan. A recent manifestation of an aggressive mindset was experienced in 2019 when, in its attempt to establish a "New Normal", India tried to demolish the "edifice of nuclear deterrence" of South Asia and undertook an aerial strike on a target in Balakot inside Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> It goes to say that the incident sparked grave fear of escalation between the two neighbouring nuclear-armed rivals. Interestingly, the Balakot incident proved catastrophic for India itself, whereby its design was frustrated, resulting in the shooting down of its aircraft by Pakistan with its pilot captured.<sup>30</sup> As discussed earlier, the external threat has implicit linkages with certain extra-regional actors, which are displeased with Pakistan's alignment with China. However, though colossal, the external threat is single-sourced and easily interpretable.

The internal threat mosaic, on the other hand, is more complex and enormous than the external threat. Its complexity lies in the fact that it is intricately linked with several regional and extra-regional countries, which seem to have partnered with India, erecting a web of proxies for the internal destabilisation of Pakistan. Evidence of this fact came to the limelight with the arrest of Kulbhushan Yadav, a serving naval officer of the Indian intelligence agency Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) from Balochistan in March 2016, who carried an Iranian passport and confessed that he was running a network to destabilise Balochistan.<sup>31</sup> Coincidentally, Pakistan, with its structural and socio-political fault lines, provides a fertile ground for these proxies. The enormity of the internal threat is due to the conspiracy of several state- and non-state actors with far greater resources than Pakistan's capacity to manage effectively.

Pakistan, ever since its inception, has unceasingly remained engaged with India militarily. Both have fought numerous wars, including a limited war in Kashmir (1948), two all-out wars (1965 and 1971), the last of which ended in Pakistan's dismemberment and a limited armed conflict under the nuclear overhang in Kargil (1999).<sup>32</sup> Added to this count are numerous military crises with the

potential to escalate to full-scale war and atomic conflagration. The contentious relationship between the two countries is rooted in their complex territorial disputes, such as the Kashmir Dispute, which defies easy resolution and unbridgeable ideological differences. So intense is their hatred that even the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides has not proved prohibitive for armed confrontations between the two countries.<sup>33</sup>

The threat from India is an enduring and all-encompassing phenomenon which impacts the complete spectrum of Pakistan's national security and severely strains its security apparatus, both military and non-military. In the Jammu and Kashmir region, the land forces of the two countries are perpetually engaged in an eye-ball-to-eye-ball situation where, except for the current ceasefire implemented since February 2021, exchange of firing and resultant attrition on both sides is a standard feature. Likewise, Pakistan's inner front has, for decades, been facing a foreign-sponsored insurgency-like situation with miscreants getting covert support mainly from India and partly from some other players.<sup>34</sup> Simply put, it is India which has caused the dismemberment of Pakistan in the past and continues to pose an existential threat to Pakistan.

The conventional external threat on Pakistan's eastern border with India has unique features. Firstly, the armed confrontations and military crises have generally been two-sided, with no visible direct involvement of extra-regional players. Despite India's bonhomie with the US-led West, which promises substantial contribution toward its military capability, the foreign signature in the conventional threat is restricted to providing niche technologies and intelligence sharing only. Secondly, except for the Jammu and Kashmir regions, the traditional wars, conflicts, and crises have been episodic, allowing periodic respite to Pakistan.

However, unlike the situation on the eastern border, the threat on Pakistan's western border with Afghanistan differs on multiple counts. Firstly, except for the era of the previous Taliban rule in Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, cross-border terrorist attacks by non-state actors against Pakistan's inner front have been a persistent phenomenon, with regular military forces seldom confronting each other directly. In 2021, out of 14 cross-border terrorist acts, 12 were reported to have been committed by non-state actors.<sup>35</sup> Secondly, with the prolonged presence of US-led coalition forces in Afghanistan since 2001, the threat has transformed with visible signs of active involvement of non-Afghan intelligence agencies pursuing Pakistan-centric objectives. The participation of Indian agencies in this scheme is aimed at the strategic encirclement of Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> So profound is this transformation that despite the exit of the US-led military coalition from Afghanistan two years ago, the foreign

signature has not ended. Pakistan's relations have traditionally been lukewarm with Iran, far from adversarial, with conventional military threats virtually non-existent. It is well within the capability of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies to manage it effectively without the large-scale and prolonged deployment of regular military forces.

It can be concluded from the above that the central repository of the threat to Pakistan is India, which enjoys a considerable advantage over Pakistan in the conventional domain. It has a massive military capability backed by over six times bigger population and over nine times bigger economy, which stands at US \$ 3,385 Billion, ranking 5th in the world.<sup>37</sup> Its armed forces have approximately 1,458,000 active duty personnel (Army 1,237,000, Navy 69,000, Air Force 139,800, backed up by a paramilitary force of 1,585,900).<sup>38</sup> Indian Army (IA) is "the world's second-largest army (when measured in personnel on active duty), which is complemented by arguably the world's largest paramilitary forces."<sup>39</sup> Indian Navy (IN) is "the seventh largest navy", capable of establishing "sea control" in the Indian Ocean against neighbouring countries and performing "blue-water operations".<sup>40</sup> Likewise, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is "the fourth largest air force" capable of undertaking strategic air campaigns.<sup>41</sup> It invests heavily in space, cyberspace and electronic spectrum and plans to become an "aerospace power".<sup>42</sup> As a whole, India's armed forces can project power in its immediate neighbourhood with the ambition to project power in its "extended neighbourhood".<sup>43</sup> Its military up-gradation programme focusing on "out-of-area contingency expeditionary operations"<sup>44</sup> and niche technologies exacerbates Pakistan's security dilemma.

It may be recalled that India's defence budget, which 2021 stood at "US \$ 76.6 Billion", is well over six times that of Pakistan. Therefore, with relatively more resources available for capital investment, the situation will likely differ in years to come. The combat potential of IA may not improve substantially in the short term because its revenue expenditure eats up 83 per cent of its annual budget. However, IN and IAF are expected to become impressive forces, with 57 and 51 per cent of their budgets available for capital investment.<sup>45</sup>

Realistically speaking, India's conventional military potential is good enough to deal with the security challenges in Pakistan alone, but it may be somewhat inadequate against China or in supporting its global agenda. Therefore, in a quest to develop military power with assistance from the West, it projects the scenario of a two-front war with China and Pakistan, which somehow finds ready acceptance. Therefore, the US and its allies are prepared to help India with "technology transfer and coproduction of cutting-edge platforms",<sup>46</sup> as discussed earlier. Likewise, in a conventional Indian military venture against Pakistan, the US

and its allies may be unwilling to join India physically except for rendering covert assistance, including logistics support and intelligence-sharing. However, their inability to wean Pakistan away from China in the long run may reverse the situation. Likewise, their posture in a so-called collaborative or collusive China-Pakistan scenario will further tilt the situation in India's favour.

### **Efficacy of Pakistan's Military Capacity**

Pakistan, ever since its independence in 1947, has been suffering from a perpetual "sense of existential threat and insecurity" at the hands of India.<sup>47</sup> It was forced to tread the nuclear path when it lost its eastern wing to Indian aggression in 1971 and faced nuclear intimidation after India's so-called peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974. The decision by Pakistan to demonstrate atomic weapon capability and bring about strategic parity in South Asia resulted from its desire "to deter future conventional wars," which could threaten its survival.<sup>48</sup> Even though, except for 1971, in which half of the country was lost to Indian military aggression, Pakistan, in conjunction with its nuclear deterrent, has been able to manage Indian existential threat, it continues to face acute asymmetry with India in the conventional military realm.

Today, Pakistan maintains a conventional force of approximately 651,800 active duty personnel (560,000 Army, 21,800 Navy and 70,000 Air Force) backed up by a paramilitary force of about 291,000 personnel, including 185,000 national guards.<sup>49</sup> This capability is designed to counter external threats primarily emanating from India. Compared with India's, this capability looks promising from a quantitative perspective. However, the ability must be improved in qualitative terms, requiring massive up-gradation. The capability also needs to be improved from another perspective. Pakistan's armed forces are configured to assist the government in ordinary internal security situations requiring occasional deployment and not as experienced recently in which the bulk of the force has been involved in operations for two decades with severe adverse effects on its combat worthiness and with no end in sight.

It is conjectured by some scholars that in a war with India, Pakistan, owing to its conventional asymmetry, may be constrained to invoke its nuclear capability.<sup>50</sup> This is a dangerous scenario for the region and the world in general. In any case, in a combined regional and extra-regional threat scenario, as alluded to earlier, Pakistan's capability is likely to be grossly inadequate. In such a scenario, the effectiveness of nuclear deterrence may also become questionable. Therefore, Pakistan genuinely needs an arrangement to assure security against a combined threat.



The gap is bridged by Pakistan and India's massive differential in national power potentials. As discussed earlier, India has a large economy with unhindered access to niche technologies. On the contrary, Pakistan's choices are severely curtailed. It has neither access to niche technologies nor requisite financial capacity. Its defence budget in 2021 stood at US \$ 11.76 billion, which was 3.8 per cent of India's GDP, against India's 2.7 per cent in the same year.<sup>51</sup> Likewise, Pakistan's defence budget in 2021 accounted for 17.8 per cent of the total government expenditure as against India's 8.3 per cent, which is a stark reflection of Pakistan's stress on account of defence capability.<sup>52</sup> Its alarmingly high volume of public debt with a debt-to-GDP ratio of over 89 per cent at the end of the financial year 2022 virtually means that the possibility of further large-scale external borrowing for military purposes or a significant increase in the defence budget is a tricky proposition warranting alternative solution.

### **Strategic Choices**

Two major strategic choices can be considered to mitigate the challenges faced by Pakistan. The first choice is the 'internal balancing' approach, which implies up-gradation of military capacity. However, this option seems unfeasible for many reasons. Firstly, it requires massive resources which are unlikely to be available in a situation of fragile economic health. It has been established that any increase in the defence budget will aggravate Pakistan's stress and harm other national security domains. Therefore, military upgrades would require external financial and technological assistance, which may be available only from China and Turkey. Secondly, even if external assistance is forthcoming, this approach will take a long time to become effective, whereas the threat is immediate and requires an immediate response. Thirdly, in any case, enhancement of military capability is synonymous with "arms race", which, according to Morgenthau, is costly and destabilising. Another option Morgenthau advocates is to weaken or limit the adversary's military capability through an arms control and disarmament arrangement, which is impracticable for a country like Pakistan against a more potent adversary and is challenging to enforce.<sup>53</sup> So, the internal balancing approach deserves a lower priority.

It may be clarified that the internal balancing option, essentially a Realist paradigm, does not preclude a Liberalist approach to developing enhanced economic interdependence with India. Economic interdependence can help build mutual trust and reduce tension between the parties concerned. It entails a security architecture constructed on a model different from nuclear deterrence, fraught with risks.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, academically speaking, the Liberalist approach can be attempted.

However, realistically speaking, the history of the India-Pakistan relationship suggests that this option offers little promise. Instead, the historical evidence is discouraging.

The second option is 'external balancing', which entails a collaborative security framework in the form of an alliance with a suitable partner. The usefulness of this option comes to the fore when viewed in the backdrop of the complex regional environment, which is highly prone to instability and uncertainties, rendering other balance-of-power strategies unworkable. It may be noted that India links its security with China and Pakistan while China, in turn, links its security with its main rival, i.e. the US. These dynamics give rise to a "quadrangular" strategic environment in the region consisting of India, China, Pakistan and the US in which a change in status quo by one affects all other regional players, particularly Pakistan.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, China, with its striking credentials, is the most suitable option. Firstly, China is in Pakistan's immediate neighbourhood and shares common security interests. Their common interests extend beyond the traditional notions of promoting peace, preserving regional stability, respecting each other's national security concerns or enjoying shared geopolitical considerations. With China becoming a party to the Kashmir Dispute owing to the disputed territory of Aksai Chin controlled by China and claimed by India, the alignment of CPEC passing through the disputed territory of Gilgit-Baltistan being challenged by India and the vulnerability of CPEC due to its proximity to Indian military bases in the north, it has become imperative for China and Pakistan to work together. Secondly, historically, China has been Pakistan's natural ally and dependable partner.<sup>56</sup> Thirdly, China's diplomatic influence can support Pakistan's foreign policy challenges and interests. Fourthly, having attained a "leading position in terms of economic and technological strength, defence capabilities, and comprehensive national strength",<sup>57</sup> it can assist Pakistan by giving it access to investments, infrastructure development projects, technology transfers, and increased trade opportunities. This partnership can help Pakistan address its economic woes, boost industrialisation, create employment and improve its regional connectivity. Therefore, China promises more tangible benefits to Pakistan than those possibly available from another alternative, such as the US.

There is no denying that, at the moment, China cannot prevail over the US military might. However, it is a military power to reckon with. Its expanding influence is evident from its forays into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), including establishing an army port facility in Djibouti with plans to create more similar facilities.<sup>58</sup> By aligning with China, Pakistan can gain a sense of assured security, enhance its relative strength vis-à-vis India, deter India's military adventures and prevent India from gaining a dominant position in the region.

China is also the right choice for another reason. Admittedly, it is one of the primary sources, if not the only, from which most strategic uncertainties and security challenges for Pakistan arise. It may be argued that CPEC is a game changer for Pakistan's economic outlook, so its risks must be accepted. Regrettably, there is little realisation of the fact that Pakistan is the "front line state for China"<sup>59</sup> in the context of BRI and that. In contrast, China is the more significant beneficiary of CPEC. The impact of the shenanigans of the 'anti-BRI coalition' on Pakistan far outweighs the benefits it is likely to accrue from the project. Therefore, China must share Pakistan's burden.

However, it is argued by Liberalists in Pakistan that a security alliance with China would mean Pakistani exports losing a considerable market in the US. In 2022, the volume of Pakistan's exports to the US was worth US \$ 6.7 Billion, constituting 21% of the total exports.<sup>60</sup> This argument is only half-truth. The proponents of this argument fail to realise that China's domestic market has ample potential to absorb Pakistani exports. The volume of total trade between China and Pakistan in 2021-2022 was US \$ 24.1 Billion, of which Pakistan's exports to China accounted for US \$ 3.18 Billion, a mere 0.134% of China's total imports (US \$ 2,377.4 Billion in 2021).<sup>61</sup> Today, China dominates the global supply chain with a share of 15.1% in exports and 11.9% in imports against the US share of 7.9% and 13.0%, respectively, in 2021.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, a strategic arrangement with China promises more significant economic dividends than the US can offer. In any case, China is more than a perfect substitute for low-end products, which constitute the mainstay of Pakistani exports. Therefore, this argument has no merit.

It is important to note that the proposed alliance is not designed as an open-ended alliance, which may be misconstrued as camp politics of the Cold War era. It addresses direct threats to both countries' vital and critical security interests, such as CPEC. This caveat is important because Pakistan lacks the requisite power projection capability to support China's other extra-regional security interests and objectives.

## **Way Forward**

For the reasons given in the preceding paragraphs, it is suggested that to assuage Pakistan's security concerns, a collaborative security alliance, preferably a joint defence pact, be negotiated with China to counter direct threats to the vital and critical interests of Pakistan and China. The key features suggested for this arrangement include security assistance, economic dividends, diplomatic support and technological cooperation. The decision for the alliance, of course, would

require domestic political consensus after careful debate on potential implications for regional dynamics and international relationships.

## Conclusion

The preceding discourse highlights that amidst the evolving environment of global contestation, the challenges confronting Pakistan's national security and threatening its survival in the international order are much beyond its capacity. In any case, some of those challenges occur for reasons beyond Pakistan's control. Therefore, there is a need to negotiate a collaborative security alliance with China. Failure to align with China implies either going down by trying to combat the challenges singlehandedly and failing or becoming a part of an arrangement hostile to China in our immediate neighbourhood. It also must be remembered that Pakistan has little freedom to remain indifferent to China's regional interests. Logically speaking, China is expected to protect its interests even if it requires an extension of its "security footprint" abroad.<sup>63</sup> Can Pakistan afford to earn China's disfavour by not aligning with its regional interests? The answer is NO.

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