

CREATING SHARED FUTURES, PAKISTAN-CHINA: A JOURNEY OF TRUST AND FRIENDSHIP

*Review by: Muhammad Zohaib Babar**

Author: Dr Talat Shabbir

In the predominant regional geopolitical environment, China is one of the key players in Asia. Globally, China is viewed as a leading power, which is likely to determine the future direction of the international system and regional politics. In this context, the deeply rooted Pakistan and China relations are important in the global and regional milieu, capturing the attention of policy analysts, experts, and leaders. This book is a valuable and befitting contribution to the literature available on Pakistan-China relations.

The book traces the journey of strategic convergence, trust, and friendship between China and Pakistan for seven decades, covering the historical background of Pakistan-China relations and a comprehensive description of geopolitical advances between the two countries. The author used the historical approach to trace the reasons and logic that resulted in rock-solid friendship and strategic cooperation. In the past seven decades, due to international relations considerations, both Pakistan and China found themselves in challenging political and diplomatic situations. During the long journey of bumpy roads, both countries stood by and helped each other. But the trust between the two did not shake. By and large, leaders of both countries remained steadfast and continued to play a positive role in strengthening this relationship. Thus, began the tale of trust and romance.

The book discusses Pak-China relations from 1949 to 1990 in three phases. The first phase was of reluctance and aversion (1949-1961) as there was reluctance and aversion between China and Pakistan during this phase because China came into being based on communism and the ideology of Pakistan was Islam, and both were part of the opposite ideological block as well. The second phase (1962-1978)

*Muhammad Zohaib Babar has served as an intern at Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad.

was reconciliation and empathy as some events like the Sino-India war (1962) and China's rapprochement towards the US brought Pakistan and China closer. The third phase (1979-1990) was friendship and goodwill, marked by four significant domestic and regional developments that helped Pak-China relations enter a new phase of friendship and cooperation. These major developments of this phase were China's reforms and opening, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Tiananmen Square incident of 1989, and the dismemberment of the Soviet Union.

The book delineates Pak-China relations based on shared interests like the containment of Indian hegemony and the expansion of China's political influence in the region. China required Pakistan's help to contain militancy in Xinjiang. The author also discusses the regional dynamics and their impacts on Pak-China relations. In this context, it is opined that India, Afghanistan, and Iran are significant factors affecting Pakistan's relationship with China. Due to this, it is imperative to trace Pakistan and China's perception of those actors, mutual linkages of regional states, and how they affect the fluid regional environment driven by political and strategic imperatives. It describes the India-centric perception in Pak-China relations as India is a common threat for both, with its competitive course and complex interdependence between China and India.

The author notes that the global milieu during the post 9/11 era and emerging global political and economic order has strongly influenced Pakistan's bilateral relations with China. The rise of China as a great power, US containment policy, and US-India strategic partnership, has an impact on Pak-China relations. Bilateral, regional, and global imperatives have driven Pakistan-China relations. Regional imperatives stemmed from Pak-China's bilateral and multilateral ties with countries such as Iran, Afghanistan, and India. In contrast, global imperatives are derived from certain factors such as emerging competition in the Asia-Pacific vis-a-vis containment of China strategy of the US.

The bilateral perspective of Pakistan and China is also vital as various regional and global development has impacted how the two countries view each other's standpoint. They have faced numerous challenges in the past, and the future too looks fraught with impediments of various make and types. China Pakistan Economic Corridor is a peace bridge for regional integration. Both states should not only formulate a knowledge corridor for the promotion of the common good but also devise strategies to keep the pace of CPEC while defusing the impacts of the pandemic.