

## **Sino-Indian Ties and the Future of South Asia: Geopolitical Implications for Pakistan**

**Abdul Razaque Larik and Shah Nawaz Mangi**  
Government College University (GCU) Hyderabad

**Syed Gulzar Ali Shah Bukhari**  
University of Sindh, Jamshoro

This paper offers insights about the geopolitical perspectives of Pakistan on possible China-India ties in future. It argues that the closeness between Delhi and Beijing may bring healthy and positive effects for Pakistan on six grounds. To start with, the warmth in Indo-China ties is not likely to yield any unfavorable impact on Sino-Pakistan relationship. Secondly, the probable friendly ties between China and India can offer assistance in drawing India and Pakistan closer and avoiding any armed clash. Thirdly, the furtherance of Sino-Indian relations is likely to pave way for peace and stability in Afghanistan since the three are the main stakeholders for regional security in and around Afghanistan. Moreover, it would resultantly open vistas for regional peace. Fifthly, the likelihood of Sino-Indian friendly relations can bring greater economic prosperity and development for the region. Lastly, the probable bond between New Delhi and Beijing can infuse fresh blood into the less effective South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

**Keywords:** Sino-Indian relations, Indo-China, South Asia, Pakistan, Regional security

Scholars call the current century the Asian century. Within the Asian continent, South Asia is an important region in global politics on account of its economic stature, natural resources, security issues and a gateway to the major oil producing Middle-Eastern and African sources (Thoker & Singh, 2017). The region has been under the spotlight since late 1940s. The emergence of new states, such as India and Pakistan, and the rise of communist China at the Indo-Pakistan borders brought the attention of the communist and capitalist blocs; and South Asia gradually became a battleground for proxy wars between the two major camps (Gokhale, 2021). The secession of Pakistan and the consequent advent of Bangladesh, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the civil war in Sri Lanka, and power struggle in Afghanistan directly or indirectly kept the region embroiled and at the center of international politics.

The South Asian region stretches from the mountainous Afghan region to the shores of Indian Ocean, from the deserts of India and Pakistan to the valleys of Kashmir, and includes the states of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, and Afghanistan. “Geo-economically, [it] possesses an abundance of natural resources whose

proper utilisation [sic] could lead to economic well-being of the entire region.” (Thoker & Singh, 2017, p. 138). The gradual rise of India as an economic power has highlighted the potential of the region. Moreover, Afghanistan draws attention owing to its untapped resources. From geostrategic perspective, the region has huge importance. Pakistan’s military and nuclear capability is another point of attraction. The Soviets have always wanted to come ashore the hot waters through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The immediate neighbor of four South Asian states i.e. Pakistan, India, Bhutan, and Nepal, China has mammoth geostrategic, geo-economic, and geopolitical interests in the region.

The South Asian region, on account of its economic, strategic, and political characteristics, has attracted attention and invited the interest of multiple players and sought involvement of several actors including the big powers e.g. the USA, Russia, and China (Thoker & Singh, 2017). Since the genesis of Cold War, both USA and former USSR aimed to expand their respective ideologies, and South Asia was turned into a battlefield for supremacy and influence between the two camps. The secession of Pakistan, Soviet occupation of Afghanistan may be quoted as the prime instances that exhibit the scale of infiltration. After the dismemberment of USSR and emergence of unipolar world, the USA has been wooing both India and Pakistan to be in its area of influence in order to keep South Asia in its backyard. However, the Sino-Pakistan close ties have forced Washington to come closer to New Delhi (Allauddin et al., 2020). Conversely, Islamabad has been striving to improve its ties with Moscow recently. Scholars have dubbed the efforts at improving the relationship among China, Pakistan, and Russia a new alliance that could change the entire fabric of South Asia (Mohan, 2022; Suryanarayana, 2021; Thoker & Singh, 2017).

Because of Russia’s engagement in Europe and recent intervention in Ukraine, there is high likelihood that there would be four main players in the South Asian region: India, Pakistan, China, and the US (Mohan, 2022). The power game in the region suggests that the two pairs i.e. Pakistan and China, and India and USA have to reciprocate (Gokhale, 2021). While Pakistan is showing signs of frustration with the US, India is trying to absorb the Sino-Pakistan bond and has readied to keep its relations with China (Jacob, 2020).

The ground realities for Pakistan and India concerning their reliance on Washington, the preoccupation of the US with the Middle East, Europe, Russia, South Asian anti-capitalist states, and China have demanded the US to diminish its role. In the backdrop of such circumstances, it leaves the current situation in South Asia with three key players: India, Pakistan, and China who make up a strategic triangle with peculiar characteristics of being neighbors, at war, and in possession of nuclear weapons (Allauddin et al., 2020; Freddy, 2020). This complicated, strategic triangular relationship can rediscover the potentials of the region with special role of India and China (Jacob, 2020). Keeping in view the primacy of these three actors in South Asia, the current study aims to find answer to the question “How does Pakistan geo-politically view the probable betterment in Sino-Indian ties in the post-Galwan, post-pandemic, and post-NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan scenario?” This study forwards the argument that the possible warmth in Sino-Indian relations may generate positive geopolitical and geo-economic implications for Pakistan. The likely improved bond may be heartening and healthy for the greater South Asian region including Pakistan.

### ***China's status in South Asia***

China, the largest developing state in the world, has displayed its capability, resilience, and ultimately strength during the Covid-19 period highlighting its improved health infrastructure, resilient economy, poverty-alleviation capacity, international trade, global engagement, and technological advancement (Xuetong, 2021). Throughout the globe, China's rise is viewed differently. It applies equally to South Asia where Beijing's economic growth is positively perceived by Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, while the same is frowned upon by India (Jacob, 2020). China has established lasting ties with South Asian states by engaging them in bilateral, trilateral, and multilateral arrangements in economic and security spheres.

China intends to make its mark in South Asia as a stakeholder without fundamentally altering the contours of regional security. Both India and China have been endeavoring to grasp South Asia in their area of influence (Allauddin et al., 2020). Conversely, China has close ties with Pakistan, the biggest adversary of India. China's relationship with Pakistan is based on long-term geopolitical and security vision (Jacob, 2018). This triangular prelateship has confounded the South Asian politico-economic and security spheres.

### ***India's stature in South Asia***

Within the South Asian region or the Indian Ocean, there cannot be two views that India occupies the status of an "elephant" economically, politically, and militarily (Gill, 2020). Its territorial size and population makes it the leading South Asian state (Shafiq et al., 2019). In its neighborhood, New Delhi shares distrust with both Pakistan and China (Suryanarayana, 2021). India's claims for grandeur and acclaim are opposed by Pakistan. Being the immediate neighbor and adversary of Pakistan, the elevation of India, founded on her population, territory, military might, economic rise, and geopolitical position, have always sent shockwaves to the policy elites in Pakistan (Freddy, 2020). Resultantly, both India and Pakistan have almost invariably seen each other as overt adversaries, and their ties have been perpetually tense (Suryanarayana, 2021).

For counterbalancing the Sino-Pakistan entente cordiale, India has sided with the Soviets or the Americans (Rather, 2019). India's nuclear deal with the US in 2008 strengthened the former's position politically but simultaneously, it also severed her ties with Beijing. To stamp its aspirations for regional hegemony, India has, besides Pakistan, territorial issues with multiple countries. India has come into several armed conflicts with China in 1962, 2017, and 2020 (Karackattu, 2020) armed clash with Sri Lanka in 1987, 1990 and intervention in Sri Lankan civil war (Awad & Todkar, 2020); armed clash with Bangladesh in 2001 (Rana, 2018) and with Myanmar in 2015 (Das, 2018). India has displayed its stature and strength by successfully blocking Beijing's entry into SAARC against the aspirations of other member states (Yang, 2021). India considers the rise of China as a point of worry (Xuetong, 2019), and likewise, New Delhi's ambitions for South Asian hegemony are halted by the growing influence of Beijing (Ali, 2022). Resultantly, the Indian foreign policy objectives and means have been compelled to cater China.

### ***Pakistan's position in South Asia***

Pakistan is considered as a state with a significant military power (Allauddin et al., 2020) along with its geostrategic position, which attracts the attention of big powers. Pakistan is one of the key component of the South Asian security triangle (Jacob, 2020) where her biggest security concern comes from India (Allauddin et al., 2020). Both have fought multiple wars, engaged in several standoffs, and are on the course to armed clash. Scholars have called India factor as the foundational ground for the Sino-Pakistan ties (Suryanarayana, 2021). For

Pakistan, establishment of cordial ties with China was a rational choice due to the Beijing's unsettled territorial dispute with New Delhi carrying an implicit indication to 'enemy of my enemy is my friend' notion (Tkacik, 2011).

The security triangle involving South Asia also carries the feature of Sino-Pak bond. Beijing and Islamabad share decades-long, most stable, and rare relationship defying the common wisdom and the dictates of politics rhetorically dubbed as all-weather friendship (Gul et al., 2021). Jacob (2018) argues that the Beijing-Islamabad bond is founded on the long-term vision of geopolitical and military underpinnings. Conversely, the Sino-Pak ties have also been criticized for their fair-weather friendship outlook (Ranjan, 2021; Tkacik, 2011). According to Kuszewska and Nitza-Makowska (2021), Pakistan serves as a cherished tool for expanding Beijing's influence in South Asia. Some scholars believe that the foundation for China to forge strong ties with Pakistan has been to contain India (Gill, 2020; Ranjan, 2021). Pant (2012) calls Pakistan a "thorn" in the passage of smooth Sino-Indian ties.

### **Sino-India ties**

The dawn of the new century has tendered opportunities and offered new roles for both China and India. Scholarship attentive to South Asian security upholds that there exists both divergence and convergence of interests between Beijing and New Delhi on their respective roles in South Asia and Indian Ocean region (Gill, 2020; Gokhale, 2021; Ranjan, 2021; Suryanarayana, 2021). Some analysts believe that a marked change in near future is unlikely (Khokhar, 2020). Others believe that the probable ties should regard that their territorial issue might remain intact for a long time; and that their military competition would affect other South Asian countries (Pardesi, 2021). Gokhale (2021) argues that the ties in future may opt one of the four possible courses i.e. military clash, armed coexistence, positive competition, or cooperation. Roy-Chaudhury (2018) suggests a pattern of competition and cooperation between the two key actors in South Asia. The competition of the titans for supremacy in and around South Asia involves multiple regional and international actors including USA, Russia, Iran and other South Asian states suggesting a road to divergence (Gill, 2020; Pardesi, 2021).

The probable negative competition is likely to squeeze the probability of improved ties between China and India (Allauddin et al., 2020). In the view of Roy-Chaudhury (2018), the primary factor embroiling the two leviathans is likely to remain focused on territorial dispute that may trigger armed clash. From the 1962 border war to the 2017 Dokhlam standoff and the recent Galwan Valley clash ending in the death of dozens of soldiers provides a glimpse of the possible clash between the two giants displaying clear signs of rigorous, constant competition (Bloomfield, 2021).

Another possible negative likelihood may involve armed coexistence (Gokhale, 2021). This also relates to the portrayed or perceived rivalry that acts as the biggest challenge to the direction of sustainable Indo-China ties (Garver, 2020). Gokhale (2021) maintains that both states have encountered the mistrust of the other based on the misperception about each other's rise. India considers China containing its growth through three-pronged strategy i.e. "trade and investment,...soft power diplomacy,...and development of strategic ports" (Gill, 2020, p. 5). China contemplates India with the same intensity of following and abetting strategies that ensue China containment policy (Pardesi, 2021). Gill (2020) specifically accuses Beijing of containing India's rise. New Delhi is dubious about the rise of Chinese influence in

South Asia. It is also unwilling to eschew its status as a dominant South Asian power (Grossman, 2020; Pant, 2016). India perceives each move of China cautiously and suspiciously exhibiting utmost mistrust (Allauddin et al., 2020). Alternatively, Beijing recognizes the lack of trust towards India based on the premise that New Delhi acts as a partner in the encirclement of China policy in the South Asian region directed by capitalist big powers (Gokhale, 2021; Thoker & Singh, 2017). This perception may be substantiated by India's opposition to CPEC, development of Chabahar Port, development of ties with the USA, Japan, and Australia (Ali, 2022).

The third alternate scenario in the passage of Indo-China rapprochement is the growing Chinese geo-economic influence in the region through Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and particularly China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). The geopolitical vision to access the Indian Ocean region along with economic logic is the principal driver of Chinese policy for the initiation of CPEC (Gill, 2020). In order to counter CPEC and development of Gwadar Port in Pakistan through Chinese assistance, India supported the development of Chabahar Port in Iran (Singh & Singh, 2019). Moreover, the rising foothold of China involving superiority in the Indian Ocean is another possible impediment (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). Beijing's efforts aimed at dominating Indian Ocean have been received by New Delhi with huge suspicion (Bloomfield, 2021). India looks upon herself as the protector and key stakeholder in the Indian Ocean (Gill, 2020). The String of Pearls notion as forwarded by the US suggests the efforts aimed at widening the scope to carve out a safe geostrategic and geo-economic communication channel (Bloomfield, 2021) "in the Indian Ocean, which stretches from mainland China to Sudan" (Thoker & Singh, 2017, p. 134).

On the other hand, apart from the border issues, competition for influence, divergent foreign policy objectives and the incidents on the border, some scholars are still hopeful about prospects of cooperation between the two neighboring states (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018), which may be witnessed in BRICS, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Forum and so forth. Scholars had predicted improvement in ties in a steady, positive direction before the resurgence of military show off on border (Thoker & Singh, 2017). However, the current scholarship still argues in favor of ties based on convergence of interests and cooperation (Suryanarayana, 2021). The geo-political feature of the Indo-China ties is expected to lead the geo-economic aspect of the ties (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018). New Delhi also appears to go past the Pak-China ties and looks ahead to improve ties with Beijing (Jacob, 2020).

Keeping in view the above discussion, the current study argues that the improved Beijing-New Delhi ties may render the Sino-Pakistan ties unaffected, exert a healthy impact on Indo-Pak relations; support peace and stability in Afghanistan, prove to be instrumental in uplifting regional peace, prosperity, and cooperation, can serve to rejuvenate the less effective SAARC.

### ***Sino-Pakistan relations to remain unaffected***

A careful observation at the circumstances around the South Asian security triangle suggests that any possible strengthening of the ties between Beijing and Delhi is not likely to affect existing relations between Beijing and Islamabad. China and India are two most populous states globally. Both are Asian superpowers who want to extend their influence through "a mix of soft and hard power" modes (Roy-Chaudhury, 2018, p. 100). Both are the

bordering states to Pakistan where China is considered all-weather friend while India is dubbed as the most pressing security threat (Freddy, 2020). The possible normalization and strengthening of ties between Beijing and New Delhi are not likely to affect the Sino-Pakistan ties on account of two reasons. First, keeping in view the decades old close Sino-Pakistan ties and growing high Chinese stakes in Pakistan in the shape of military and economic cooperation, especially after the establishment of CPEC, the possible Sino-Indian cordial ties are not likely to alter the course of Pak-China ties (Gill, 2020). CPEC suggests a marked shift from Beijing's politico-security driven and elite-centred bilateral relations to realistic and economically-oriented ties (Jacob, 2018). It has been dubbed as a game-changer that has been capable to address the genuine domestic issues of Pakistan and has helped Pakistan exploit its rich geostrategic and geo-economic resources especially (Hussain et al., 2021).

Moreover, the anticipated strengthening between the two competitors should be founded on the principle of no-strings attached policy where none should ask the other to withdraw support and retain ties with any other actor/partner. China is unlikely to bargain the long-standing politico-economic and security ties with Pakistan and eschew its status of an old trusted friend (Gul et al., 2021). In the likely event of Indo-Chinese entente, Pakistan will be confident of its "strategic partnership with China... with little concerns that the Sino-Indian economic relationship would cause China to re-evaluate its support on Pakistan's core concerns vis-à-vis India" (Khokhar, 2020, p. 2).

#### ***Healthy Impact on Indo-Pak ties***

There are three main physical actors in South Asian region: China, India, and Pakistan (Jacob, 2015). The Indo-Pak conflict on Kashmir has generated fear of the larger neighbor and consequently created what may be dubbed as India factor in the foreign and security policies of Pakistan (Allauddin et al., 2020). This study maintains that the likely furtherance of Indo-China ties may improve Indo-Pak relations, and at a minimum help them avoid further deterioration in relations.

The deepening of ties between Beijing and New Delhi may divert the attention of both India and Pakistan from any possible aggressive moves. "Pakistan hopes that the importance of China's economic relationship with India may help Beijing play the role of a moderator on New Delhi's belligerent behavior vis-à-vis Islamabad" (Khokhar, 2020, p. 10). A recent study has also concluded that the likelihood of the success expands after the mediation of a third-party (Malik, 2019). Beijing is highly likely to continue extending its due assistance to Pakistan. On the other hand, under the proposed circumstances, India would probably avoid giving "disproportionate attention to Pakistan, attempting to shame and isolate [the latter] rather than engaging in a sustained and high-level politico-strategic engagement with China to normalize [sic] the strategic triangle" (Jacob, 2015, p. 95). Positive approach and emphasis on healthy aspects at domestic and regional levels could be instrumental in minimalizing adverse effects on disproportionately long and unsettled Kashmir issue.

#### ***Peace and stability in Afghanistan***

The three key actors i.e. China, India, and Pakistan have been striving for greater amount of influence in Afghanistan under the Taliban government. The possible contribution of the probable rejuvenated Sino-India ties may face a number of challenges vis-à-vis peace and stability in Afghanistan. Scholars have pointed towards India's engagement with China on multiple bilateral matters, however, New Delhi has not succeeded in joining efforts with Beijing and other neighboring states in addressing the rampant global and regional issues of

terrorism, stability in Afghanistan, and IS threat (Jacob, 2015). Some scholars believe that Beijing follows plans to oust India from Afghanistan with the support of Pakistan (Ali, 2022), which is possible due to Pakistan's geostrategic position as central vis-à-vis Afghanistan (Akhtar & Sarkar, 2015). China was "...increasingly engaged in regional conflict management initiatives, mediating between Kabul and the Taliban, and organising (sic) trilateral strategic engagements with Afghanistan and Pakistan" (Jacob, 2015, p. 96). However, under the new Taliban government starting in 2021, India may not be able to wield similar influence as it had during the government of Ashraf Ghani. China may also have witnessed the diminishing of its influence while Pakistan may experience change in its influence in the post-NATO Afghanistan (Jacob, 2020). The biggest concern for the three i.e. China, India, and Pakistan on their parts vis-à-vis Afghanistan would be the elimination of any pedestal working against their countries (Ali, 2022). The power struggle among the three for broadening their area of influence on Afghan soil may produce negative outcomes. If one actor aims for a specific means to achieve certain ends, the other actor(s) might launch countermeasures to discredit the former of any likely positive outcome (Rather, 2019) thereby dragging Afghanistan and resultantly the entire region into a battleground for proxy wars.

With this background, this study endeavors to streamline that apart from the role of outsider actors, the probable normalization in Sino-Indian ties may yield the positive impact on peace and stability in Afghanistan. China, India, and Pakistan, with their role as regional players, are supposed to act together in order to bring about stable and symbiotic bond, and regional peace (Jahangir & Anis, 2016). The wrenched, violent past and continual change of governments in Afghanistan have demanded the positive role of other regional actors. That role may involve non-interference, financial assistance in infrastructure development, engagement of Afghan leaders in mainstream global and regional politics, and support in training and education. Resultantly, the optimists believe that the regional scenario surrounding Afghanistan may change with the involvement of Afghanistan's immediate neighbors such as China, India, and Pakistan (Ali, 2020; Mukherjee, 2018; Suryanarayana, 2021).

Under the likely scenario of betterment of Indo-China ties, the stability in Afghanistan may receive unprecedented attention. The divergent attempts for influence in Afghanistan by China, India, and Pakistan, and their consequent effects on Afghan politics and peace may likely receive a fresh positive turn, extricate the probable adverse impact, and produce positive results. Under the patronage and leading role of China, Pakistan would likely join the trilateral/quadrilateral group with India being a member. By this way, China, with its improved ties with India along with the approval of Pakistan, can "consider the region as a security complex (i.e. acknowledging that the security of each state cannot be considered separately from that of the others), and manage its relations with India in a cooperative manner" (Jacob, 2015) for stability and peace in Afghanistan.

### ***Regional peace***

This study submits the argument in light of the dictates of interdependence theory that suggests "reciprocal effects among countries" (Keohane & Nye Jr, 2011, p. 7) that the probable warmth in Sino-Indian ties can bring peace and prosperity in the South Asian region in particular and Asia in general. The improved Sino-Indian ties can yield peaceful environment for the entire South Asian region (Jahangir & Anis, 2016). Through the renewed and strong ties, the region would resolve its tardy and most pressing issue of terrorism. The Indo-Chinese relations are likely to be instrumental in combating terrorism, a menace that has appallingly

challenged security environment of South Asia (Jahangir & Anis, 2016). The dream of “peaceful coexistence with India and Pakistan along with other South Asian countries (would be realized) so that an integrative security mechanism could be developed to safeguard its peripheries, adjacent to South Asia from terrorist activities” (Jahangir & Anis, 2016, p. 12).

The improved security circumstances around South Asia could be hugely capable to enhance prosperity with large sums of amounts to be transferred to development and public spending instead of security expenditures. In the backdrop of this, the Pakistani concerns and interests may be appropriately adjusted where China can act as a moderator in the South-Asian security triangle to maintain peace between India and Pakistan. The possible reinvigoration in the Sino-India ties might serve a practical and plausible template for regional cooperation on peace and joint efforts in the direction of terrorism-free world.

### ***Regional development and prosperity***

In the current international system, states are interdependent and reciprocal (Keohane & Nye Jr, 2011) and they can “can collectively prosper if they go ahead hands in hands for cooperation and coordination” (Allauddin et al., 2020, p. 86). This paper also argues that the feasible betterment of Sino-Indian ties may potentially bring the prospects of development and prosperity in the South Asian region especially and Asia on the whole. The Sino-Indian improved ties may potentially serve in the direction of “expanding economic cooperation and integration mechanism” (Jahangir & Anis, 2016, p. 12). The future ties between New Delhi and Beijing founded on “non-confrontational and cooperative” basis can yield benefits for the entire region (Suryanarayana, 2021, p. 21). By virtue of BRI, with the betterment of ties with Indo-China relations, the regional and supra-regional scenario might undergo swift and fruitful transformation. New Delhi may have to look beyond the petty issues and Beijing would have to address the economic needs of the region before moving towards global direction (Jacob, 2015). India and China can contribute towards several areas in and around region for instance, trade and commerce, investment, security of sea-line communication, safe navigation, fishing, terrorism and so forth (Gill, 2020). China would continue on the course to retain its second largest economy status and it is on the committed path for multilateral arrangements through Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRI, and BRICS (Kuszevska & Nitza-Makowska, 2021). The stature of both China and India is likely to benefit the entire region as their joint GDP per capita income in 2021 was 24522, China 17189 and India 7333 (Bank, 2022). As far as FDI is concerned, recent trends are alarming globally, however, Asia is the exceptional case having received a significant amount of world’ invest inflow which is recorded about 39%. According to the UNCTAD (2019) report, South Asia received an increased amount of FDI inflow (3.5%) and outflow decline to 2.5%. India, China and Pakistan are among the top countries of the region where FDI inflow increased. Sethi et al. (2020) have also pointed out this growth maintaining that FDI to South Asia which, was recorded about 28.004 billion USD during the fiscal years of 1990-1999 was increased to 214.13 billion USD during 2000-2009; and despite the political instability, terrorism and border skirmishes between South Asian countries, the FDI increased to 303.73 billion USD during the years 2010-18.

### ***Rejuvenation of SAARC***

SAARC, among the regional organizations, has been a dismal entity (Naazer, 2018; Thoker & Singh, 2017). Scholars have highlighted towards several pitfalls responsible for the disappointing outcomes during its 37-year life. One of the key hurdles in the passage of SAARC for its mandated role is the tug of war between India and Pakistan (Bishwakarma & Hu, 2022; Yang, 2021). The scholarship maintains that there are possible remedies for the

transformation of SAARC into a potent regional organization catering to the political, economic, and strategic demands of the region. One of the vital solutions is the grant of full membership status to China, which Beijing has been striving for years, disapproved by India and recommended by Pakistan (Thoker & Singh, 2017).

This study also argues that under the assumption of improved Sino-Indian ties, the non-inclusion of China in SAARC on account of the Indian opposition can be transformed into rejuvenation via the inclusion of Beijing in it (Bishwakarma & Hu, 2022). This addition, under the banner of the probable better Beijing-New Delhi ties, is likely to yield positive results for peaceful and prosperous South Asia. For this, “all three players will have to work jointly for the stable mutually beneficial relationship and the regional development... [where] Pakistan adheres the fact that smooth Sino-India relations are a great source of peace and tranquility in the region” (Jahangir & Anis, 2016, p. 7). Economically, China’s entry into SAARC is likely to bring about exceptional development in trade, infrastructure, and investment (Bishwakarma & Hu, 2022). This likely change is expected to transform the entire South Asian fabric (Thoker & Singh, 2017). The transformation of SAARC from a dormant to a lively organization can also contribute towards Sustainable Development Goals especially education, poverty, clean water, and environmental sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

A Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report has suggested that the future Indo-China ties may opt one of the four possible courses i.e. military clash, armed coexistence, positive competition, or cooperation (Gokhale, 2021). This study strived to submit the scenario streamlining the latter two courses suggesting improved ties between Beijing and New Delhi and present the likely view of Pakistan on that probable situation. The peaceful coexistence, albeit with a number of downs, between China and India may continue to exist. In the event of improved ties between Beijing and New Delhi, Pakistan would likely to foresee six potential possibilities. The growth in Sino-Indian entente is highly unlikely to affect the existing strength and frequency of Sino-Pakistan ties. This study argues that the betterment of ties, would rather improve existing Indo-Pak relations. The warmth in China-India relationship is likely to bring peace in Afghanistan specifically and may serve as a source of peaceful, prosperous and terrorism-free South Asian region. The furtherance in the proposed ties is highly likely to rejuvenate the dead organization of SAARC with the inclusion of China in it. Moreover, fundamental regional problems of poverty and unemployment may get a fresh attention. With reduced mistrust between Beijing and New Delhi, increased interdependence, and the consequent diminishing role of outside actors China’s rise may be fully exploited by all the South Asian states with a likely impact on their trade, infrastructure, and investment. Moreover, China, along with India and Pakistan, can handle the rampant environmental deterioration in the region.

In contrast, some analysts believe that a marked change in near future is unlikely (Khokhar, 2020). While others argue that the future Sino-Indian ties may take extreme diverging course of military clash, armed coexistence (Gokhale, 2021). New Delhi might opt for containment strategy against Beijing for curtailing latter’s growing influence in South Asia (Gill, 2020). In that case, the role of the US may also drastically affect the future course of China-India relations (Allauddin et al., 2020). Border dispute between India and China would continue to nag any positive gestures turning the ties into a rigorous, negative, and constant competition (Bloomfield, 2021).

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