



RESEARCH PAPER

**Pakistan's Perennial Relations with China: Imran Khan Tenure
(2018-22)**

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's relations with China that established seven decade ago, flourished and cemented with the passage of every passing day. These relations were never effected by the change of government in both states because it is penetrated in the heart and soul of people of both states. Imran Khan tenure was crucial because there were many transformations in region as well as at world level. This was the time when U.S was planning to take its troop from Afghanistan, India had illegally changed the status of Kashmir, economic rivalry between China and U.S was growing day by day, CPEC and challenges, and above all Covid-19 pandemic. This paper is an attempt to highlight the events and there consequences during Khan tenure on Pakistan-China relations. Secondary data was used to analyze this paper. Material from Chinese and Pakistani ministries and foreign offices was taken beside consulting books, newspapers and articles from research journals.

Keywords: China, CPEC, Foreign Policy, Pakistan, Planning, Project

Introduction

A cordial and friendly relation with China is the cornerstone of Foreign policy of Pakistan. Even the People of Pakistan considered China as a trustworthy friend. When all sources of assistant dried up for Pakistan, China always comes up to assist Pakistan. These friendly relations are not affected by the change of government in Pakistan and China. In the same manner relations with Pakistan is on highest priority of China. Pakistan always stood with China on core issues of her concerns and Chinese supported was always there for Pakistan at international forum on various issues (Begum, et. al. 2019; Muzaffar, 2021).

The elections of 2018 brought Imran Khan into power, previously he was a cricketer and 20years struggle brought him in political arena. This happened for the first time that someone came in power that did not belong to two main political parties of Pakistan, PML-N and PPP that came into power one after another. Pakistan Tehreek Insaf (PTI) had very strong support from youth and having young people as its members. The guiding principle of foreign policy of Khan was to cultivate relations at bilateral or multilateral level while keeping mutual interest and international norms. Khan had also engaged the foreign media, think tanks, business communities besides meeting with foreign leaders to highlight the foreign policy priorities of Pakistan. He also used Twitter account for this purpose. For the first time in the history of Pakistan an Advisory Council on Foreign Affairs was constituted under the headship of Foreign Minister to get the opinion of intellectuals, scholars and experts on various issues of national interest. The purpose of this council was to advise the P.M on foreign affairs. Strategic Policy Planning Cell was established to involve experts and intellectuals in policy making process. Foreign Minister FM Connect was also established in this regard (Yaseen, et. al. 2017).

Khan was an admirer of policies of Beijing. China was on the top of the list of the State he had mentioned in his first speech after securing its victory in election. He always appreciated and acknowledged the economic policies of China. Due to these policies, in last four decades almost 700 million people came out from poverty and living a stable and balanced life in China. Khan expressed his desire to learn such model from China and implement it in Pakistan (The News, 2018). He emphasized to learn the technique from China to alleviate the poverty and how to defeat the corruption from Pakistan. He term CPEC as channel to uplift the economy of Pakistan. He assured to take the Pak-China relations to next level. During his tenure three factors related to China were crucial for Pakistan. These factors were the on-going progress on CPEC, huge criticism on Chinese involvement in development projects in Pakistan and fragile economy of Pakistan (Ghulam, 2022).

Literature Review

Literature in the form of books, journal articles and newspapers were supportive to pen down this paper. Data taken from Pakistani Embassy in China, Chinese Embassy in Pakistan and Pakistan Foreign Affairs provide ample help to analyze data. Chinese (Xinhua) as well as Pakistani newspapers were helpful to get the day to day update about the Pakistan-China relation during Imran Khan Era. Two books, *Pakistan: Statecraft and Geopolitics in Today's World* by Shahid Javed Burki and *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Development and Dynamics* by Ghulam Ali were latest book dealing with the subject.

Khan Tenure and China-Pakistan Relation

After his victory in election Khan took oath as Prime Minister on August 18, 20018 and received a congratulatory phone call from his Chinese counterpart just after two days. Chinese Primer Li Keqiang not only extended his warm wishes to newly elected Prime Minister but also assured to continue Chinese support. But this warmth was a bit damaged by the statement passed by the Abdul Razak Dawood the advisor for commerce, textile, industry and investment controversial statement about CPEC. He said, "Chinese companies received tax break, many breaks and have an undue advantage in Pakistan; this is one of the things we're looking at because it's not fair that Pakistan companies should be disadvantages". This statement was well perceived in West. West already declared CPEC as debt trap for Pakistan. Although his main target was his opponents especially PML-N and to exposed their corrupt policies but it impacted negatively of Pak-China relations. This happened for the first time that after the cultivation of relation between two states and such controversial statement came from government side of any state. Although, during election campaign PTI highlighted all the projects of CPEC for the sake of clarity and transparency as the corruption free Pakistan was their manifesto. After coming into power PTI government established a CPEC committee consisting of nine members to evaluate all the projects of CPEC (Jamil, 2018; (Rahim, et. al. 2018). Problems and Prospects of CPEC for Economic Development and Regional Integration. *Global Economic Review*, III (I), 21-30. The statement of Razak came when a Chinese Foreign Minister visited Pakistan and he was agreed to renegotiate the trade deal with Pakistan. He also mentioned that CPEC would not wreak the debt burden on Pakistan. Chinese were concerned about the statement of Razaak because it negatively impacted BRI the pet project of President Xi and CPEC was its flagship project. There were also speculations that on the bailout terms of IMF, Pakistan may take few steps back to its relations with Beijing. In this backdrop Army Chief, General Qamar Bajwa visited Beijing and tried to neutralize all confusion created by the statement of Razaak. Bajwa assured his firm support for CPEC.

The visit of COAS was followed by the visit of P.M Khan. Khan officially paid his first visit to China for four days in early November 2018 just after three months to control the rein of government. Before his visit to Beijing he visited five more states. The backdrop of

these visit were the bailout from IMF. This visit was an outcome of the invitation extended by Premier Li Keqiang. During his visit Khan met with high official of Chinese political hierarchy: President, Vice President, Premier, and Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress. The matters of mutual interest and regional security issue were particularly come under discussion during his meeting with Chinese leadership. China-Pakistan group that was established in the Parliament of Pakistan was appreciated by China. They agreed to further extend the linkage between the legislative bodies of both states. Khan got an honour to deliver a lecture to trainee of Party Central School that produced future officers and leaders for Chinese government. The most disgusting thing was that while live broadcasting his lecture from Beijing the Pakistan State Television instead of writing Beijing wrote Begging. Although it was corrected within one minute and apologies were recoded but it was highlighted at many places because many believed that Khan Intentions were to get some loan from China so in this context PTV might wrote begging to Beijing (BBC, 2018). Khan also attended the first ever import expo of China as guest of honour. In 'China International Import Expo (CIIE)' that was held in Shanghai, he also delivered a keynote speech. Pakistan acknowledged the services of Chinese personnel working on numerous economic project of Pakistan. China also appreciated the security measure taken by Pakistan. Both sides expressed their commitment to negate the propaganda against the CPEC and expressed strong determination to protect the all projects related to it. Both states also expressed their desire to expand the scope of CPEC by including other states like Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan. Pakistan supported Chinese resolve against the 'East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM)' to save its state from three evils of terrorism, extremism and separatism. Due to this visit both states signed 15 agreements and MoUs on various areas of bilateral cooperation. Both states agreed to celebrate 2019 as year of friendship sister provinces/ cities. It would strengthen the relations at local government and cities level (The NEWS, 2018). Indian analysts keenly observed this visit as it was before the Chinese President Xi visit to India and Nepal (Agrawal, 2019) (Shah, et. al. 2020). In diplomatic circle it was termed as a very productive and successful visit. Mr. Ning Jizhe, the Chairman National Development and Reform Commission called the P.M visit to China as "Phenomenal Success" (CPEC Authority, 2018). Before this visit there were speculations in local as well as in western media that Khan might not honour the CPEC and projects related to it but during his visit he reaffirmed the commitment of Pakistan to precede the project on strong footing and they were committed to face any challenge and threat (Awan, 2018) Many analyst believed that Pakistan would compromise on CPEC to bailout from IMF. Trump administration also mentioned that IMF would not provide funds to Pakistan to pay back loan to Beijing as the Americans and Chinese were engaged in trade war with each other since early 2018 and initially Khan also showed some reservation over the CPEC and its few project (Ide, 2018).

After this successful visit of P.M to Beijing the 8th meeting of 'Joint Coordination Committee (JCC)' was planned in mid-December. JCC was the highest body to take decision on CPEC and the committee meets every year in December and prepares a roadmap for future projects and developments on CPEC. But before few days of this meeting the Baluchistan government refused to participate in the upcoming meeting. The main cause of refusal was the detail presentation of Baluchistan CPEC Cell to the provincial cabinet member on project. The details disclosed that except the Gwardar no other progress was made in Baluchistan through this project and only 9% of this \$ 62 billion project would be part of Baluchistan. It also revealed that Zhob to Surab highway was not part of upcoming discussions. These details shocked the cabinet members and in protest they decided to refuse to take part in 8th JCC meeting. As the details of cabinet meeting got viral on media the federal government along with Chinese ambassador came with assurance to Baluchistan government to take-care of their concerns. Then on the demand of Government of Baluchistan nine new projects related to development of Baluchistan were added in the agenda and Provincial Minister for Information, Mr. Zahoor Buledi led the delegation on behalf of his provincial government (Adnan, 2018). After this settlement the meeting was

held on prescribed schedule and co-chaired by Mr. Ninglizhe and Mr. Khusro Bakhtiar, Minister for Planning and Development of Pakistan. Both side expressed their satisfaction over the ratification and enactment of technical cooperation on highways between the two states for five year. They also agreed to take necessary measures to develop the KKH as all-weather highway. On few projects Pakistan have not completed the homework and cannot satisfied the other side like on the project of Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) worth of \$ 2 billion Pakistan failed to produced necessary procedural requirements, mainline (ML-1) Railway project of \$ 8.2billion, Quetta and Peshawar mass transit schemes and five other small projects related to roads in different areas (Shanbaz, 2019). Both sides expressed their commitment to speed up the Special Economic Zones, MoU was signed on industrial development and agreed to cooperate in maritime, port development and automobile sector. It was decided to establish Joint Working Group on International Cooperation and Coordination (JWG-ICC) in the first quarter of next year. As per the commitment in JCC meeting, the JWG-ICC was inaugurated in April 2019 in Beijing. Tehmina Janjua, the Foreign Secretary and Mr. Kong Xuanyou, Vice Foreign Minister represented Pakistan and China respectively. Both sides expressed their satisfaction on ongoing projects of CPEC and assured to maintain the momentum in future. They also negated all negative propaganda against CPEC and assured to counter such moves by joint ventures. The action plan of six areas of cooperation came under discussion during this meeting, agriculture, education, poverty alleviation, skill development, water supply, healthcare, and vocational training projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, 2019).

Another positive development of Khan's visit to Beijing was that a 'Forum on Cooperation between China and Pakistan Friendship Provinces/cities' was held in Beijing in March 2019. In this forum three cities of China and Pakistan were termed as sister cities. The cities of Karachi, Gwardar and Multan were declared as the sister cities of Urumqi, Puyang and Xi'an repectively. Pakistani delegation under the supervision of Dr. Fahmida Mirza, Federal Minister for Inter-Provincial Coordination attended this forum. While addressing to the forum Dr. Mirza appreciated the people to people contact between the two states. It would accelerate the existing bilateral ties. She acknowledged the role of China that it had played to defuse the tension arose between India and Pakistan after Pulwama incident. She expressed that in future this forum would be helpful in 'management, public health, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, trade and investment, tourism cooperation, urbanization and professional education' of these cities (Dawn, 2020).

In April 2019, Khan again visited China to attend the 'Second Belt and Road Forum (BRF).' This forum was attended by almost 5000 high level delegates from 150 states of the world including head of the states and governments and head of various international organizations. As an outcome of BRF the cooperation between China and Pakistan enhance in space technology. They inked down an agreement on space exploration. The up-gradation of ML-1 railway, and construction of SEZ's were part of discussion during this visit (Ghulam, 2022). A protocol on China Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA) Phase II spanning 2019-2024 was signed between the two states. Although the first phase was under criticism as trade balance was in favour of China but this time it was specially kept in mind that Pakistan would also get maximum benefit from this agreement (Ministry of Commerce, 2019). The phase-II would provide an opportunity to Pakistani exporter to export their 313 product to China on zero duty. Firdous Ashiq Awan, Prime Minister Special Assistant on information and broadcasting, while commenting on CPFTA-II said, "I congratulate China on implementation of the second phase of free trade agreement which will enhance bilateral trade and facilitate Pakistani traders to export its products to the Chinese market on zero duty." She said textile sector would get more benefits from this agreement beside the agriculture and leather sectors. She further added that almost 724 products of Pakistan were already enjoying zero duty under the CPFTA-I and after the implementation of this phase more than 1000 products would reachable to markets of China without any duty (Sajid, 2019).

After Khan visit to Beijing, the Chinese Vice President, Wang Qishan paid highly successful visit to Pakistan in May (2019). The main achievement of his visit was launching of four mega projects, inked down five accords, reviewed the on-going progress on CPEC, Phase-II of CPEC, Industrial development, cultural exchange, tourism, special economic zones and implementation of 2nd phase of CPFTA were also discussed. In recognition of his services to further strengthen the Pak-China ties President Arif Alvi conferred on him the highest civil award of Pakistan 'Nishan-i-Pakistan'. During his stay in Pakistan he also met with CM Punjab, Mr. Usman Buzdar during in Lahore. At airport CM Punjab presented him an album of his visit to Lahore. Mr. Wang was over joyed by the hospitality and love given by the Lahoris to him.

Pakistan and China was always strong advocate of peace and stability in the world and they took measures in this regard. Stability and peace in Afghanistan was also their concern. To promote peace in Afghanistan the third 'China-Afghanistan-Pakistan Trilateral Foreign Ministry' dialogue was held on September 7, 2019 at Islamabad under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister of Pakistan. The agenda of talks were to promote peace process, security, counter terrorism and cooperate to develop connectivity among these states. This trilateral forum was setup three years ago among the three states on the initiative of Beijing and two consecutive meeting were held in 2017 and 2018 in Beijing and Kabul respectively. Pakistan got the opportunity to hold this third meeting. The top most agenda of this meeting was to curb the terrorism in all its form, curtail the use of soil against other nation and peace in Afghanistan. They condemned the recent terrorist attack in Kabul that had taken the lives of innocent civilians including women and children. The next meeting of this forum was expected to hold in Beijing next year (Siddiqui, 2019).

To expedite the projects of CPEC, in October 2019, CPEC Authority (CPECA) was established in Islamabad through Presidential Order. This institution would effectively look into the scope and pace of CPEC and also find new avenues of production by connecting regional and global network (Maiana, 2019). The Lt-General Asim Saleem Bajwa was appointed as the first Chairman of CPECA and given vast authority to keep check on CPEC activities. Opposition strongly reacted on the creation of CPECA. PML-N and PPP rejected its formation and said it the gross violation of the recommendations of the parliamentary committee. PPP said creation of CPEA challenged the authority of parliament. PML-N was of the opinion that its creation would lead to the complications between ministers and departments and also create bureaucratic hurdle. JUI-F also came forward to criticize the CPECA and said that it would make the CPEC controversial (Aamir, 2019). Now after coming in to power PML-N considered to disband the CPECA and already transferred major authority to planning commission. They associated the disbandment with the approval of China government. P.M Shahbaz Sharif said CPECA was controversial since its inception and hampering the progress of CPEC so his government was considering to abolish it after getting approval from China (Shahzad, 2022).

After the establishment of CPECA, Khan left for four days trip to China on October 9, 2019. He was accompanied by COAS and DG ISI along with other ministers. Besides discussing the development of CPEC the regional issues were also discussed during his meeting with President Xi. Khan highlighted the lockdown situation in Kashmir and how Indian had hostage the Kashmiris in their own land and houses and the humanitarian crisis emerged due to the lockdown. This was the first visit of Khan to Beijing after Indian decision to change the status of Kashmir from disputed territory to its union territory by revocations in article 370 and 35A of its constitution. On the support of China after fifty years first time Kashmir issues was discussed in UN Security Council again. Both leaders also discussed the Afghanistan issue and its prospects for the peace of region. Xi assured Chinese supported on core issues of Pakistan's interest and appreciated the sacrifices of Pakistan to combat terrorism. They express their committee to further enhance the bilateral exchange at high level between the two states (CPECA, 2019). Later on Khan met with his Chinese

counterpart Li Keqiang. Li warmly welcomed him by presenting Tri Services Static Guard. The national anthem of both state were also played at occasion to show solidarity between the iron brothers. Khan delivered speech at China Council for Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT). He also met with corporate leaders of China. While his stay at China he also attended the closing ceremony of the International Horticultural Exhibition 2019 in Beijing (PTI News, 2019).

Like the last year visit of Khan to China 8th JCC meeting was held, this time also after his visit the 9th JCC meeting was held in Islamabad on November 5, 2019. The meeting was co-chaired by Makhdum Khusro Bakhtyar, and Ning Jizhe. 'Gwardar Master Plan' was approved and signed during this meeting along with two more MoUs. One was related with the exchange of worker and was signed between 'All-China Federation of Trade Union (ACFTU) and Ministry of Planning" and the other one was about the healthcare and signed between 'Ministry of Health and Research Development International'. During the proceedings a ceremony was held in which eastern corridor of Multan-Sukkur motorway was inaugurated. This time Chinese delegation was bigger than the previous one to highlight the significance of CPEC and projects related to it. Other project of CPEC and future plan was also discussed during meeting. Both side appreciated the commitment of each other towards CPEC (9th JCC Meeting, 2019).

The year of 2020 started with a hilarious news of epidemic in Wuhan, China. Covid-19 that started it take off from Wuhan province of China in late 2019 engulfed the world shortly. It also shakes and paralyzes the major economies of world. The first covid-19 case was detected in Pakistan in late February. To control the rapid spread of this virus government imposed the lack-down in different form sometime partial or sometime complete. During the intense phase of covid-19 the major economies of the world also faced set back. Pakistan fragile economy reached at crippling stage. Even at this time of pandemic China supported Pakistan. It not only sent its technical and medical experts but also provided thirty-thousand face masks, and one thousand goggles, long shoes and protective kits. Pakistan was the first state to receive the donation of Chinese vaccine. Beijing sent a gift of 1.2 million covid-19 vaccine from Sinopharm. Later on Pakistan received and purchased different batches of vaccine from China to protect its population from the devastating effects of this pandemic (Albert, 2021).

On January 3, 2020 Khan inaugurated the first Special Economic Zone out of nine Special Economic Zone at Faisalabad. Allama Iqbal Industrial City (AIIC) was priority economic zone and construction of it was start in November 2019. AIIC is constructed on an area of 3217 acres near M-3. The main AIIC investments sectors were, textile, engineering, electrical & electronic, chemical & paints, food processing, pharmaceuticals automobiles, packaging and building material. 20 industrial Units started their work in AIIC. It would attract foreign investment and create for local jobs and boost the economy of the state (CPEC Authority, 2020)

Although this was a high time of pandemic and major states of world sealed their borders and limited their communication but the high level delegation still move on between the China and Pakistan. That reflected the nature of strong bond between them and they always stood with each other at thick and thin. During this time of pandemic President Arif Alivi visited Beijing and met with his counterpart, Prime Minister and Chairman of the National People's Congress Standing Committee. This was not only his first visit to Beijing but he was the first foreign dignitary to visit China after the outbreak of Covid-19. He praised the way President Xi was fighting with the virus by imposing rigorous laws. He also acknowledged the services and donation provided by China to Pakistan to secure its people from this pandemic. Both leaders declared Covid-19 as a challenge for humanity and all nations should come forward to collaborate and cooperate to fight against this virus because this was a global issue. Besides discussing covid-19 and ways to fight against this pandemic both leaders also exchanged the views on regional and international issues of common

interests. CPEC and its different projects also come under discussion. Pakistan highlighted the atrocities of India on Kashmir and issue of peace in Afghanistan. A number of agreements were signed during this visit (Huaxia, 2020).

The second high level exchange between two states during this critical time of pandemic was held in the first week of December. Chinese Defense Minister along with Chinese State Councilor visited Islamabad. In Islamabad they met with President, Prime Minister, Army Chief and Joint Chief of Staff Committee. The Defense Minister said “we should push the mil-to mil relationship to a higher level. So as to jointly cope with various risks and challenges, firmly safeguard the sovereignty and security interests of the two countries, and safeguard the regional peace and stability.” While meeting with Joint Chief and Army Chief both sides discussed the regional and international issues and military and technological cooperation (Zhuo, 2020).

Pandemic did not affect the routine matters between two states. The second meeting of JWG-ICC was held on December 25 in Urumiqi, the capital of Xinjiang autonomous region. During this meeting both sides expressed their strong commitment to publicized the constructive role of CPEC by improving the living standard of local population and they assured to keep a check on the news and reports that tried to damage the purpose of CPEC and negatively portray it. Means both states would effectively deal with the negative propaganda against CPEC. Both sides encouraged their media, T.V, film, publication sectors, think tanks, scholars and experts to portray positive image of CPEC. Multilateral and bilateral exchange would be encouraged by both states.

As per the commitment in the 8th JCC meeting to speed up the work at SEZ, the groundbreaking ceremony of Rashakia Special Economic Zone (RSEZ) was held on May 28, 2021. The agreement was ink down in April 2019 between the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Economic Zone Development and Management Company (KPEZDMC) and China Road & Bridge Corporation (CRBC) and development agreement worth of \$128 million was signed one year later in September 2020. RSEZ covered as area of 1000 acres in Rashakai near M-1. RSEZ was the flagship project of CPEC framework of industrial cooperation. It is also called the Gwardar of North. The advantageous location of RSEZ makes it not only the consumer market of Pakistani provinces of Punjab and KPK but would also attract the customer from South-West China, Afghanistan and CARs. It would also serve as a source of direct foreign investment and transfer of technology to world at large and also create 2500 jobs locally (The Express Tribune, 2022).

Due to the pandemic the meetings, conferences, and seminars were held online throughout the world. In-fact world switched from physical mode to online mode. In this context the fourth Trilateral China-Afghanistan-Pakistan talks were held in June through video links due to pandemic. The three states were concerned about the situation that would emerged after the withdrawal of US troops as US President decided to withdraw its troops on the 20th anniversary of 9/11. Beijing assured its cooperation to hold talks among different groups in Afghanistan and to maintain peace in Afghanistan. The three states reached on eight point consensus after the meeting. These point include, efforts of peace deal among different group in Afghanistan, promote mutual trust among three state, China and Pakistan assured their readiness to support peace in Afghanistan, include Afghanistan in BRI, cooperation in social and health care activities, resolve to fight against the pandemic, discourage ‘double standard’ to fight against terrorism and encourage the face to face dialogue among three nations (Yusufzai, 2021).

It was hardly one month passed to inaugurate the SEZ in Rashakia area of KPK when the enemies of Pakistan-China friendship (TTP) targeted the Chinese nationals that were moving towards their work area in a bus. These Chinese national were working on Dasu hydro power project in Kohistan area of KPK. This incident of terrorism took the lives of nine Chinese along with four others. Both Islamabad and Beijing condemned this attack and

China dispatched an investigation team to probe the matter. The finding of incident disclosed that Afghanistan soil was used to plan this incident and TTP and RAW were involved in this incident (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021. Anti-terrorism Court of Pakistan awarded death sentence to accused ones later on (Hussain, 22). After two weeks of this incident a Chinese national was targeted in Karachi. This time Chinese government showed full trust in Pakistan and declared it as an isolated case. Another attack on Chinese nationals was reported in August in Gwardar by Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA). To counter these terrorists China and Pakistan not only participated in peace Mission 2021 in Russia along with other members of SCO but also held bilateral anti-terrorism exercises in KPK in September (IISS Survey, 2022).

Such activities of enemies of Pakistan and China could not stop them from their resolve to cooperate with each other. The 10th meeting of JCC was held in September via video link. The meeting was co-chaired by Mr. Ning Jizhe and Asad Omer, Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives. Omer extended his warm wishes to Chinese nation on their 72 founding anniversary as well as 100th anniversary of establishment of Communist Party in his opening remarks. He extended his gratitude to Beijing for their support and assistance during pandemic. On the behalf of government of Pakistan he reassured to combat all challenges and threats to CPEC and all related projects. During meeting, '700MW hydro power project at Azad Patan, South-North Gas pipeline, Thar Coal gasification policy framework, strategy for nderground Gas storage, Seismic Study of Sedimentary areas, joint prospecting, exploration, Development, and Marketing of Metallic Minerals, Dir Motorway project, Peshawar-D.I Khan Motorway, Clean and Green Gwardar Movement Project, Karachi Coastal Comprehensive Development Zone, Potential Cooperation in the Copper-Gold mine exploration, Stone processing's, agriculture' and other related matters were discussed. During this meeting MoUs were signed to establish a Joint Working Group (JWG) on Information Technology Industry and Karachi Coastal Comprehensive Development Zone. Agreement was also signed on framework of cooperation between Ningbo Port and Gwardar Port and Lease deed of Gwardar Expo Centre. Mr. Ning appreciated the cooperation between the two states during pandemic period and CPEC was not hindered by this pandemic. Mr. Nong Rong declared this meeting of JCC very successful while talking to media after 10th meeting of JCC (CPECA, 2021).

Pak-China diplomatic relations were established in 1951 and with the passing of time these relations were turned into unbreakable bond of friendship. To celebrate the 70 years of establishment of Pak-China relations 'Pak-China friendship Square' was inaugurated on November 4, 2021 in Wuhan. The magnificent inaugural ceremony was held at the bank of river Yangtze and Pakistan ambassador to China, Moin ul Haque was the Chief Guest of the ceremony. The ceremony was also graced by Vice Governor of Hubei, Vice Mayor of Wuhan and other senior officials and leaders. The square was a unique blend of landmarks of China and Pakistan. Mr. Zhao the Vice Governor of Hubei described this square as a gift for lovely people of Pakistan from the residents of Wuhan and it would serve as an icon of strong bond of friendship between the two states for all the times to come. A letter of friendly exchange between the cities of Wuhan, Yiling, Yichang and Karachi, Kahuta and Haripur respectively signed on the occasion. MoU was also signed by the ambassador to establish a 'Centre of Excellence on Chemical and Material Engineering at University of Applied Engineering and Emerging Technology Sialkot' with the collaboration of 'Huazhong University of Science and Technology'. The partnership agreement was signed for the screening of cervical cancer by Wuhan Landing Intelligent Medical Company Ltd with Nishtar Medical University and Pakistan Rehealth Technology and Development Company at this occasion to enhance the cooperation among the cities in healthcare sector (Embassy of Pakistan, 2021).

Khan visited China in early 2022. His visit lasted for four days. During his visit he was accompanied by a delegation of ministers including foreign and planning ministers. This visit was done on the special invitation of the leadership of China. Imran Khan extended

its warm wishes and congratulations on the holding of marvelous and remarkable opening ceremony of the ‘Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022’ (MFA, 22). During his meeting with Chinese President Xi, he discussed the vision of his government about geo-economic policies towards sustainable growth, industrial development, agricultural modernization, regional connectivity, and Chinese investment on Phase-II of CPEC. He expressed his concerns over the major challenges of the world: polarization of the world, climatic change, pandemics and inequalities. P.M discussed the Indian atrocities not only over Kashmiri people but also on the minorities of its own citizens. Both leaders had same opinion over the Afghan crisis that emerged after the withdrawal of the US- forces. Both stressed that peace in Afghanistan was necessary for the development and connectivity of the region. They called to international community to assist people of Afghan to avoid any humanitarian crisis (Siddiqui, 22). There were speculations in Pakistan on the visit of P.M to China. Many analysts believed that the purpose of this visit was to get the loan of almost \$ 3billion from China to boost its foreign exchange reserves. Pakistan attended this ceremony to extend its solidarity with China when few states had boycotted this mega event f Beijing (Carter, 22). Khan supported Beijing when it was under severe criticism from human right organization over the atrocities of it on Muslims of Xinjiang province. Many criticized Khan’s approach as a hypocrite that did not utter a single word in the support of Uyghur’s over their misery. Khan one week before leaving for China criticized the West for their dual standards. He expressed that West was raising their voice for Uyghur’s although there was nothing happening in Xinjiang province but kept criminal silence over the Indian atrocities in Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (The Express Tribune, 22).

This proved the last visit of Khan to any foreign state. In April his government was toppled by opposition by moving no confidence movement against him in assembly.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that Pakistan’s relations with China further strengthened during the tenure of Khan. Khan paid four visits to Beijing during his four years of power. Every time both sides assured their commitment enhance the cooperation between the two states. CPEC that was the pet project of Xi BRI further flourished during this time period. If the period of PML-N was the commitment to take a start to CPEC then the PTI tenure was to accelerate all the projects related to CPEC. CPECA, CPEC cell, regular JCC meetings, establishment of JWG-ICC and inauguration of RSEZ and AIIC were hallmark of this era to take CPEC at next level. Although terrorists backed by RAW tried to ceased Chinese support by attacking Chinese nationals working in Pakistan on different projects but both states failed these motives of enemies by supporting each other. Both states also continued their negotiation with Afghanistan to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Covid-19 that challenged the health sector and economies of world but during this critical time the exchange between two states continued and China provided every possible mean to support Pakistan during this time. Even China is still cooperating with Pakistan during Shahbaz time. They provided \$ 3 billion to support the fragile economy of Pakistan. This proved that change of government do not affect their everlasting relations.

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