

# Do Statist Ideology and State-Sponsored Nationalism Intervene in Pakistan's China Policy? A Neoclassical Realist Perspective

ABDUL RAZAQUE LARIK, SHAH NAWAZ MANGI, AND  
SYED GULZAR ALI SHAH BUKHARI

*In its relations with China from 1972 to 2018, Pakistan has endeavored to extract and mobilize its domestic resources while conducting a foreign policy of balancing under systemic pressures and power disparities. Statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism have been both useful and influential in this process. While there is abundant literature on ideology, nationalism, and Pakistan's foreign policy using theoretical foundations, a neoclassical realist approach has yet to be made. This paper seeks guidance from neoclassical realist theory as explored in the works of Taliaferro (2006) and Schweller (2004). We argue that Pakistan's ties with China have been facilitated domestically by an Islamic statist ideology and anti-Indian state-sponsored nationalism. These both have facilitated internal balancing through the extraction and mobilization of natural resources and emulation while externally they justified Pakistan's balancing efforts aimed at countering a perceived Indian threat. The nation's military and civil elites therefore agree on the necessity of closer ties with China.*

**Keywords:** statist ideology; nationalism; neoclassical realism; Pak-China relations; Sino-Pakistan ties.

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**ABDUL RAZAQUE LARIK** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Government College University, Hyderabad, Pakistan. His research interests include foreign policy, neoclassical realism, sustainable development, and teaching and learning. He can be reached at <razaq.larik@gcu.edu.pk>.

**SHAH NAWAZ MANGI** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at the Government College University, Hyderabad, Pakistan. His research interests include democracy, democratization, party politics, public opinion, political participation, political communication, digitalization of politics and representation. He can be reached at <shahnawaz.mangi@gcu.edu.pk>.

**SYED GULZAR ALI SHAH BUKHARI** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Science and Technical Education at the University of Sindh, Pakistan. His research interests include educational management, educational evaluation and assessment, student learning and development, teacher education, and educational technology. He can be reached at <gasb@usindh.edu.pk>.



Pakistan was founded in 1947 amid inherent internal problems and external disputes. While it was initially created as a separate Muslim homeland within British India based on a “two-nation theory,” domestically the new state soon faced issues of national integration (Brasted et al., 2019). Sub-nationalistic sentiments and the failure of their prognosis by political leadership during the early decades led to Pakistan’s dismemberment and the conversion of East Pakistan into Bangladesh in 1971 spotlighting the gravity of difficulties internally (I. Khan, 2006). Pakistan’s status as a predominantly Muslim country did not deter secession by sub-nationalistic groups.

Externally, Pakistan has always seen India as a threat since its inception in 1947. India’s new leaders were not willing to tolerate a Muslim state carved out of British India (I. Hussain et al., 2020). This tense relationship and the legacy of violence surrounding the partition (Malik, 2019) have left an indelible mark on Pakistan’s foreign and security policies. The secession of 1971 was also aided by India, inflicting a permanent dent in the national unity of Pakistan.

Pakistan’s domestic and external problems continued in the aftermath of its dismemberment. Even in the post-dismemberment era, Pakistan was faced with acute problems of national integration (Brasted et al., 2019) and a sense of external insecurity (Jaffrelot, 2016). With such deep-seated issues, the redefined state of Pakistan from December 1971 was in search of viable solutions (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020). Externally, after losing half of its geographical area with Indian involvement, Pakistan’s greatest and most pressing existential threat still emerged from India (Pardesi, 2018).

Although Pakistan’s elites were reluctant to rejuvenate ties with China after the country failed to lend sufficient aid in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War (Boon & Ong, 2021), Pakistan invigorated its ties with China under the auspices of the new government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. This policy was only possible because the domestic environment was supportive or at best least-warranting in terms of national unity. The policymakers could divert their maximum attention to the external affairs rather than consuming their energy on domestic issues. The reintroduction of statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism partly eased the domestic pressure and thereby helped in the re-establishment of strong bilateral ties with China.

Pakistan’s preference for China as a balancer was based on systemic considerations. The country stood as a rational choice due to its border issues with India and the principle of “the enemy of my enemy is my friend” (Tkacik, 2011, p. 10). This harmonized with Pakistan’s politico-defense policies which were already drastically preoccupied with the security threat posed by India (Pardesi, 2018). Pakistan may also have been motivated based on geographical proximity (Boni, 2019) and the potential for uninterrupted material assistance in the extraction and mobilization of its resources (Jaffrelot, 2016).

Nearly all of Pakistan's civilian and military governments have found it difficult to weld the nation into a single unit and exploit domestic resources to counter the perceived existential threat of India. National integration is indispensable, and resource extraction would be impossible or at least highly difficult without it. With the India factor dominating foreign and security policies, policymakers were under great pressure to unite a diverse Pakistani population and develop a national consensus over the country's resources and foreign policy options (Jaffrelot, 2016). Various governments have been engaged in engineering state-oriented ideology and state-sponsored nationalism directed at dual strategic goals. These include both introducing Islam as a bonding element and empowering agent for ethno-nationalistic sentiments and defending the nation from the threat of India (Mezger & Aftab, 2009). The dismemberment of Pakistan in December 1971 rendered the country vulnerable in the face of a more powerful neighbor, i.e., India and forced her to explore durable options (Malik, 2019). In the post-secession period, Pakistan was left with no choice but to search for allies for dealing with India's relative increase in power, and it had limited choices concerning balancing.

The available options included great powers such as the United States, USSR, and UK; regional powers like China; and neighboring states. Pakistan had ties with the United States based on timeserving primacies, insufficient assistance from the UK, a lack of interest from the USSR, and the inability of its neighboring countries. States in West Asia and the Middle East were preoccupied with an unstable security environment and unable to assist Pakistan as allies in internal and external balancing (Tkacik, 2011). Pakistan opted for a policy that incentivized her to attend to these systemic pressures and initiate "a comprehensive strategic relationship (with China) that has been a part of South Asia's geopolitical landscape" (Tkacik, 2011, p. 10). Under these impelling circumstances, the domestic political atmosphere was cultivated to prioritize the reestablishment of strong ties with China.

This study argues that in the post-dismemberment era since 1972, in response to the internal problems of national unity and a perceived existential threat from India, the Pakistani state reinforced both a statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism that aided its foreign policy goals and justified its balancing priorities. Policymakers reintroduced this ideology based on a template of Islam to homogenize its ethnically heterogeneous population (Haqqani, 2005). At the same time, policy elites constructed a nationalism based on anti-India sentiments and the portrayal of the country as an existential threat to Pakistan's sovereignty (Shafiq, 2009). Both these policies were aimed at addressing the internal problems of national integration and were intended to curb anti-state sentiments. Both also led the general masses to identify India as the greatest threat and created a justification for Pakistan's balancing options.

## The Rationale of the Study

The discourse on the political, diplomatic, security, and foreign policies of Pakistan is comprehensive. Equally, extensive literature is available on Pakistani ideology and the role of Islam (Alavi, 1988; Askari-Rizvi, 1983; Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985; Jalal, 1994; Pande, 2011; Rauf, 2020). Moreover, there is a wealth of literature discussing multidimensional aspects of Pakistani nationalism (Ayres, 2009; Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020; Mezzera & Aftab, 2009; Nandy, 2019; Shafqat, 2009). Most authors have explored the relevance of ideological and national undercurrents with reference to the internal contours of the Pakistani polity such as the Pakistani state's search for legitimacy through Islam (Alavi, 1988), the official imaginings of Pakistan through its education system and the state-sponsored narrative on integration (Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985; Jalal, 1995), cultural connotations such as language (Ayres, 2009), and national integration (Nandy, 2019; Pande, 2011). Rauf (2020) defends Pakistan's use of state ideology, justifying it with modern-day logic for a new generation. Some scholars have submitted the case of Pakistani nationalism and its relevance to marginalization (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020; Saeed, 2007), while Mezzera and Aftab (2009) discuss relations between Pakistan's nationalism, state, and society. The wealth of literature is largely directed at socio-political perspectives with little discussion of how this relates to foreign policy. As such, the current study is likely to be an important addition to the existing body of knowledge.

The current literature also does not include any reference to a neoclassical realist perspective, especially concerning Pakistan in the wake of its dismemberment (see Rahman, 2017). This paper offers a neoclassical realist lens to examine the role and utility of statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism. It endeavors to determine what role the two play in the extraction and mobilization of Pakistan's resources in addition to its choice of emulation and balancing in its ties with China from 1972 to 2018.

Governments from 1972 to 2018 have been both democratic and authoritarian (see Table 1) and can be classified as centrist, center to left, and center to right. This study proposes that statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism have helped policy elites to re-establish strong ties with China in the aftermath of Pakistan's dismemberment in 1971. The main question of our research is, "Do statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism intervene in Pakistan's China policy?"

Theorists have encouraged applying this theoretical approach to developing countries (Lobell, 2009; Taliaferro, 2006). This study is also a novel supplement to the literature in both its theoretical foundation of neoclassical realism and its linking of ideology and nationalism with foreign and security policies.

**Table 1**

*Showing Tenure, Type of Government, Ruling Party, and Ideology of the Ruling Party in Pakistan from 1972 to 2018*

Tenure	Type of government	Political party in power	Ideology of political party in power
1972–1977	Democratic	Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP)	Center to left
1977–1985	Military rule	N/A [One-man rule]	N/A [Center to right]
1985–1988	Pseudo-democratic	Non-party-basis	N/A [Center to right]
1988–1990	Democratic	PPP	Center to left
1991–1993	Democratic	Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) <sup>a</sup>	Center to right
1993–1996	Democratic	PPP	Center to left
1997–1999	Democratic	Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) (PML-N)	Center to right
1999–2003	Military rule	N/A [One-man rule]	N/A [Centrist]
2003–2008	Hybrid-democracy	Pakistan Muslim League (Quaid-e-Azam) (PML-Q)	Centrist
2008–2013	Democratic	PPP	Center to left
2013–2018	Democratic	PML-N	Center to right

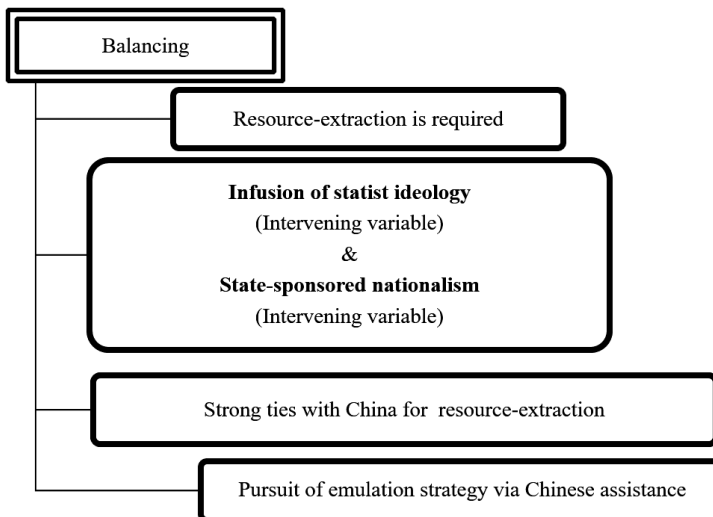
*Note.* Data sources are developed by the authors.

<sup>a</sup>IJI (The Islamic Democratic Alliance [Translation]) was an alliance of nine political parties.

This study has devised the following model, see Figure 1:

**Figure 1**

*Portraying the Effect of Statist Ideology and State-Sponsored Nationalism on Pakistan's China Policy*



This model indicates how balancing may be achieved through the intervention of state-sponsored ideology and nationalism to achieve domestic homogeneity and integration with an external threat in sight. It also shows how policy elites use these domestic tools to guide public opinion and justify their foreign policy goals, to better extract and mobilize national resources, and make use of emulation. This model examines Pakistan's China policy from 1972 to 2018 to predict and propose recommendations for the future.

### Theoretical Guidance

The anarchic nature of the world as dictated by realists offers fundamental guidance to states concerning their external environment. States examine and adjust to variations in accordance with their outer atmosphere based partially on distinct and intricate intrastate factors that serve as "transmission belts" gifted with the capabilities to convey, intervene, and guide foreign policy decisions in response to systemic pressures (Schweller, 2004, p. 164). The neoclassical realist approach proposes that a state's foreign policy is primarily guided by relative power capabilities, though domestic factors play a definite role (Meibauer, 2020). Neoclassical realism has given birth to "an approach to foreign policy and international politics that retains the primacy of the international system" while incorporating domestic variables into force for a clearer explanation (Ripsman et al., 2016, p. 25).

Neoclassical realism shares a number of key assumptions with the realist school of thought. It considers the primacy of the system and subsequent ideas about anarchy, threats, and foreign policy choices (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Neoclassical realists agree on the basic assumptions of the anarchy of the international system, systemic pressures, and a balance of power wherein a state's behavior is guided by "the incentives and constraints derived from an international system organized by the structural rule of anarchy" (Meibauer, 2021, p. 350). Neoclassical realist theory at its core does not claim to be an advanced version of Waltz's conception of power, nor does it overstate the domestic constructs for explaining anomalies in foreign policy choices (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Unlike an externally-motivated neorealist approach or internally-focused *Innenpolitik*, it offers general guidelines for a state's choice of foreign and security policies (Ripsman, 2009). The beauty and novelty of neoclassical realism lie in its incorporation of intervening variables with a state's ability to extract and mobilize its domestic resources. This serves as the mediating variable between systemic pressures and actual foreign policies. At the same time, the ability of a regime

to avail itself of resources is not achieved through bureaucracy or the foundations of its power. Rather, “institutions, ideational factors, such as ideology and nationalism can play an instrumental role in helping the leadership extract, mobilize, and direct societal resources and cultivate support among its power base” (Taliaferro et al., 2009, p. 38).

Proponents of neoclassical realism (Lobell, 2009; Rose, 1998; Taliaferro, 2006) suggest that future research must explain how mediating variables at the state level prevent the foreign policy decision-making predicted by structuralists. The neoclassical realist lens also explains how a variety of “psychological, ideational and cultural factors might influence ... foreign policy” (Rose, 1998, p. 168). Neoclassical realism is unique in its emphasis on both ideational forces and material features and repudiation of the notion that one ideational or material factor is superior and warrants the elimination of the other (Gvalia et al., 2019). Following this line, this study examines socio-ideological factors in Pakistan's ties with China through a neoclassical realist lens.

This study offers particular consideration to the extraction and mobilization of domestic resources, and emulation. According to the resource-extraction model by Taliaferro (2006, p. 471), an exposure to external vulnerability leads states to choose out of “three broad categories of internal balancing strategies: (1) to continue with existing politico-military strategies and technological practices; (2) to engage in emulation; or (3) to engage in innovation.” Pakistan in early 1972 was not economically prosperous and had weak infrastructure and minimal expenditure on research and development. Moreover, the country had undergone many setbacks during the 24 years after its inception and was not in a position to opt for innovation. Continuing its existing politico-defense strategy was not an option for Pakistan after its dismemberment in 1971, as it would risk more dents in its security framework. Thus, emulation was the strategy most suitable and viable. The states are required “to emulate the practices and institutions of the leading states in the system. A failure to emulate, and thus to conform to the logic of anarchy, would risk succumbing to relative power gaps, heightened vulnerability, or even extinction” (Taliaferro, 2006, p. 476).

Neoclassical realists maintain that ideology is one of the most decisive factors. The dearth and sufficiency of nationalistic beliefs and ideology play a decisive role in a country's success in connection with the extraction, mobilization, and capability for emulation with respect to its domestic resources. As a result, the higher the level of nationalistic sentiments and ideological input in a country, the greater its capacity to extract and mobilize resources, emulate, or innovate (Taliaferro, 2006).

## Statist Ideology

Ideology may be defined as “a series of widely held beliefs, causal relationships, and assertions about the proper relationship of the state to domestic society and the role of the state in the international system across a range of issues” (Taliaferro, 2006, pp. 492–493). Hinich and Munger (1996) define ideology as intricate belief systems based on dogma that guide people’s interpretation, rationality, and justification through their actions and institutions. Ideology appears to be double-edged that it can both help and hinder leaders’ attempts to extract and mobilize resources “depending on the content of that ideology and the extent to which elites and the public hold common ideas” regarding the opposite position of the state concerning social and economic issues (Taliaferro, 2006, pp. 491–493).

Ideology holds extraordinary importance for states and nations. It has been witnessed through the ages that religion has enormous potential to homogenize diverse groups into a monolithic whole due to its supernatural characteristic (Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985). Pakistan in 1947 became an ideological state founded on the premise of Islam (Kamran, 2008). As a new Muslim country, it offered a solid foundation for a social milieu based on Islamic ideals for South Asian Muslims (Alavi, 1988). In the years following the secession, Pakistani policymakers reintroduced a statist ideology in the form of a religious ideology based on Islam to homogenize its ethnically heterogeneous population — a “convenient tool of mobilization” (Haqqani, 2005, p. 22) that was unquestionable (Hoodbhoy & Nayyar, 1985), and powerful (Cohen, 2011). This helped policymakers construct a Pakistani socio-political aura where ideology became the lifeline, mother, progenitor, and survival kit (Kamran, 2008).

The preservation of Islamic ideology as Pakistan’s foundation can be seen in the chanting of its presidential, prime ministerial, ministerial, and bureaucratic oaths. Opposition to the state-oriented ideology has been seen as an affront to Pakistan itself (Haqqani, 2005). This ideology-centered identity is both internal and external (Pande, 2011). Policymakers have made use of it as a means for the country’s survival, especially after the 1971 episode (I. Khan, 2006; Nandy, 2019). Internally, it was aimed at binding citizens together and vehemently opposing sub-nationalistic and ethno-nationalistic ideas (Haqqani, 2005). Externally, Pakistan’s foreign policy over the decades has displayed clear signs of “an Islam-centred worldview” (Pande, 2011, p. 1).

Despite the bonding role of Islam in the socio-political fabric of Pakistan, sub-nationalistic elements and tensions abound (Jalal, 1995; M. S. Khan, 2014).



Pakistani society cannot fit into a single framework of a nation where ethnic groups carry the features of a nation based on their “language, culture and even identity” (Cohen, 2011, p. 27). The four major ethnicities of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are sub-group identities that place the notion of a homogenous identity in contest (Mezzera & Aftab, 2009). Scholarship on the subject suggests that the imposition of this state-sponsored ideology on such a heterogeneous population has partly smothered socio-political growth (Jalal, 1995; M. S. Khan, 2014). Concerned with addressing this sub-nationalism that could turn into another fiasco like the fall of Dhaka in 1971 (Pande, 2011), policymakers reintroduced and rejuvenated state ideology and nationalism to unite the nation and minimize the threats posed by ethnic diversity at home. The state intended this double-edged domestic policy as an antidote to fragmentation and an attempt to keep the nation integrated.

A state-sponsored Islamic ideology has helped both civilian and military rulers to avoid domestic strife and center their attention on external relations under the systemic pressures described by the neoclassical realist model. This study argues that this assistance from state-engineered ideology has also facilitated the road to strengthening ties with China. China can tolerate and bear the socio-cultural role of Islam in Pakistan and understand it in the political framework of its polity. Beijing has acted as “a major factor, building in Pakistan an acceptable Islamic identity (which is) just Islamic enough to claim legitimacy in terms of its historical roots” (Cohen, 2011, p. 51).

The state has so endeavored to maintain national pride and unity through its Islamic character that almost all names of military equipment, such as tanks (*Al-Khalid*, *Al-Zarrar*, *Al-Qaswa*, *Al Hadeed*), vehicles (*Talha*, *Al Qaswa*), and missiles either derive their nomenclature with Islamic relevance (*Hatf*, *Nasr*, *Ababeel*, *Zarb*, *Barq*) or they are named after Muslim heroes of the pre-British Sub-Continent (*Abdali*, *Ghaznavi*, *Ghauri*, *Babur*). Even anti-terrorist military operations are given Arabic touch to enhance their legitimacy (Operation *Rah-e-Haq*, *Rahe-e-Rast* (2007–2009), *Rahe-e-Nijat* (2009–2010), *Zarbe-Azab* (2014–2016), and *Radd-ul-Fasaad* (2017)).

### **State-Sponsored Nationalism**

Balibar (2009) views nationalism negatively due to its exclusivity. The opponents of this view forward a two-way typology of liberal and illiberal nationalism (Ignatieff, 1994), with the liberal form possessing the “values of liberty, equality, sanctity of individual rights, and democracy, regardless of class or ethnic identifications”

and the illiberal one consisting of an exclusionary religious nationalism (Saeed, 2007, p. 133). Taliaferro (2006, p. 491) operationalizes nationalism as a tendency of individual citizens based on three forms of identification that are rooted in group affinity, i.e., “common culture, ... common history,” and a belief that “the group requires its own state if it is to survive.” The literature on the influence of various forms of nationalism indicates that an identity based on nationalistic sentiments can bring individuals together despite their ethnic or sectarian differences (Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020). Scholars also argue the central role of cohesion in the growth of a country as a cohesive society (Nandy, 2019). Nationalism induced by the state is aimed at augmenting “social cohesion and the propensity of individuals to identify with the state, which in turn facilitates leaders’ efforts to extract and mobilize resources from society for national-security goals”; and “leaders deliberately inculcate nationalism” as a constituent of state power to attain social cohesion in the face of external threats (Taliaferro, 2006, p. 491).

Nationalism and ideology can help leaders extract and mobilize resources (Taliaferro et al., 2009). Taliaferro (2006) differentiates societal cohesion and political schisms and acknowledges that each polity in the world contains divisions in politics, economy, society, ethnicity, and the distribution of domestic resources; and that despite all these differences, state nationalism helps the state maintain its legitimacy “particularly during periods of high external vulnerability” where “leaders have an incentive to inculcate nationalism as a means to extract greater societal resources for the production of military power” (pp. 491–492). In the case of Pakistan since 1972, various democratic and authoritarian governments have found it difficult to extract and mobilize national resources. The external problems faced by the redefined state of Pakistan after 1971 necessitated expediency concerning its internal issues. Systemic pressures, security issues with India, and the dismal picture of domestic politics forced policymakers to adopt a policy that could both treat domestic ills and address external woes (Pande, 2011). One of the key jobs for both civilian and autocratic policymakers has been to nurture nationalist sentiments and build a collective nationwide identity by assuring security in the face of India (Mezzera & Aftab, 2009). The antagonism with India is therefore foundational to Pakistan’s national identity and foreign policy (Lavoy, 2006). It is what Akhtar (2009, p. 24) calls “official nationalism.” The portrayal of India as an existential threat has shaped foreign and defense policies, and national resources have been allocated to meet defense needs. The India factor would continue to be pivotal in Pakistan’s future foreign and security policies (Cohen, 2011). The facet of nationalism that created the country is still vital in Pakistani identity and external relations even in the 21st century (Lavoy, 2006). It is this anti-India stance that the policymakers aim to manipulate to unite this diverse nation and justify their

foreign policy choices. This is true for Pakistan's ties with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China. Both the ideology and nationalism of the Pakistani state have been introduced as an antidote to fragmentation and to overcome the nation's struggle with integration. Pakistan in 1971 viewed India as an existential menace, and China and India had fought a border war in 1962 and maintained competing territorial claims. Finally, Pakistan had already lost half of its geographical area with Indian assistance. Islamabad and Beijing were therefore understandably on the same page in their policy toward India.

## **Statist Ideology and State-Sponsored Nationalism in Pakistan**

### **The Z. A. Bhutto Regime**

Z. A. Bhutto is generally hailed as the architect of the ties between Islamabad and Beijing. He was also responsible for convincing civil and military elites to re-establish this bond during his tenure as Prime Minister in the aftermath of the 1971 secession (Kamran, 2008). The military and other elites in Pakistan were unhappy with China's failure to meet their expectations in 1971 (Boon & Ong, 2021). Pakistan's balancing options with respect to India were limited, however, the Z. A. Bhutto government chose to move toward Beijing (I. Hussain et al., 2020). Thus, the stage was set to gradually forge closer ties with China and see Beijing as a balancer. Pakistan had already been dealing with its ethnic heterogeneity and saw India as the main challenge to its foreign and defense policy (Rizvi, 2004).

Z. A. Bhutto initiated a domestically oriented foreign policy that also addressed international issues. At home, Bhutto firmly believed in the bonding capacity of religion in uniting the divided nation. Though an apparent misnomer, he introduced the novel idea of *Islamic socialism* to represent his politico-economic vision. This was an ingenious and improvised national policy that essentially combined Islam with an astonishing mixture of the conflicting ideology of socialism that was close to the Chinese system of governance (E. Hussain, 2013). This new national policy contained the popular slogan that religious lives would be guided by Islam, the polity would be led by democratic ideals, and the economic system would be driven by socialism (Jaffrelot, 2016). The successful drafting and promulgation of the Constitution of 1973 that is still in force today bears witness to the role of Islam in society and polity during Bhutto's government (Nakanishi, 2014). By introducing Islamic socialism and other policies to woo the religious elite, Bhutto paved the way for his foreign policy initiatives, one of which was forging closer ties with China and seeking Chinese assistance

against the perceived Indian threat (Pande, 2011). It was under Bhutto that the fractured Pakistani-Chinese ties were repaired and brought to their height (Boni, 2016).

The Bhutto period was marked by a strengthening of Pakistani-Chinese ties that was concentrated in the defense sector in the face of an American arms embargo (Lavoy, 2006). Beijing began assisting Islamabad in its nuclear capabilities which were subsequently developed over the next several decades (Curtis, 2009) in the backdrop of India's 1974 nuclear testing. This campaign began during Bhutto's tenure and by the "1980s, Pakistan had acquired sensitive technologies from China to start its nuclear program. During the subsequent decade, Beijing helped Islamabad to build a 40-megawatt reactor, which could be used to provide plutonium for its weapons program" (Jaffrelot, 2016, p. 25). Paul (2003) rightly maintains that the dream of nuclear weapons would not have been realized in the absence of Chinese assistance. Beijing also assisted Islamabad by dispatching 60 MiG-19 fighter planes, 150 tanks, and other types of conventional weaponry (Burke & Ziring, 1990). Pakistan and China also started the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) which was to serve as the gateway to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Singh & Singh, 2019). These steps indicate Pakistan's success in gaining military assistance and seeking emulation to match Indian military capabilities (Small, 2015). These endeavors were only possible in the presence of a domestic tranquillity for which Pakistan's policy elites had already made arrangements by re-introducing statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism.

### **The Zia Regime**

Pakistan's political record displays how religion has been manipulated equally by both civilian and military regimes and combinations such as illiberal democracy or liberal authoritarianism (Nandy, 2019). It was during the military dictatorship of General Zia that Islamic ideology and Pakistani nationalism took their clearest forms. Under General Zia, the approach toward ideology involved a ferocious bid to implement Islamic character and extreme nationalism. To him "the ideology and the Islamic character of the Pakistani state" were as crucial as physical borders and were to be protected at all costs (Kamran, 2008, p. 108). General Zia used Islam during his 11-year regime as the basis of his ruling ideology while recognizing the military as the vanguard of the nation, the defender of its physical borders, and the protector of statist ideology. At the same time, he turned "the pre-existing state ideology into an official policy of Islamization" (Haqqani, 2005, p. 90).

General Zia was convinced of the primacy of religion as a necessary bonding agent to address the problem of ethnic sub-nationalism. Through this connection,

“the Islamic nature of the country’s national identity was offered as the solution to Pakistan’s problems” (Topychkanov, 2009, p. 5). Establishing itself deep in the socio-political fabric of Pakistan, his regime addressed five key foreign policy priorities of India, the United States, China, Middle Eastern states, and Afghanistan. While Bhutto made use of Islam through his Islamic socialism, General Zia went for Islamization. The main derivative was Islam, however, it was different in its form and extent (Jaffrelot, 2016). Bhutto’s use of Islam had broader applicability and sphere of influence. It was for the social betterment of entire society by creating conducive environment at home so that the country may divert its attention to bigger foreign policy goals. His Islamic socialism was aimed to minimize socio-economic inequalities. General Zia’s use of Islam had a narrower scope. He wanted to “Islamize” the entire Pakistani society with his own version of Islam, which was for the purpose of seeking legitimacy and bringing calm domestically.

During Zia’s tenure, Pakistani-Chinese ties “maintained their steady march towards greater cordiality and a wide-ranging cooperation in various fields” (Rizvi, 2004, p. 19). China was keen to offer support to Pakistan due to its shared position with India on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The country offered assistance through various sectors such as agriculture, nuclear capabilities, electricity generation, and security-oriented industries (Boon & Ong, 2021). With Chinese assistance, Pakistan Heavy Industry at Taxila was also upgraded to manufacture Western and Chinese-style weapons for domestic and export purposes (Allauddin et al., 2020). Akhtar (2009) notes that Beijing provided around \$200 million in weaponry for anti-Soviet forces. Pakistan owes a great deal of its nuclear capabilities to Chinese assistance that began in the 1980s (Jaffrelot, 2016; Paul, 2003). Pakistan and China signed a Comprehensive Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in 1986. All this strengthened Pakistan’s military and allowed the country to emulate diverse technologies from China (Burke & Ziring, 1990). Pakistan was also inclined to maintain these ties due to comparatively tranquil domestic circumstances.

### **The Restoration of Democracy: 1988–1999**

The death of General Zia ushered in an era of democratic government. Various governments under the PPP (center-to-left) and the PML-N (center-to-right) in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s continued Pakistan’s Islam-based statist ideology, albeit in differing degrees and efforts to Islamize Pakistani society (Topychkanov, 2009). During the PPP’s first term, Benazir Bhutto as the first female PM of both Pakistan and the Muslim world departed from her father’s left-leaning ideology and tilted toward a centrist ideology in keeping with the domestic atmosphere and ground

realities. At the same time, she continued to follow the existing ideology founded on Islamic teachings and a nationalism based on opposition to India (Nandy, 2019).

Benazir Bhutto's government was succeeded by a center-to-right coalition called the IJI led by the PML under the leadership of Nawaz Sharif. The IJI staunchly followed the official state and nationalism and ideology (Cohen, 2004). During Sharif's second tenure starting in 1996, the government decided to openly conduct nuclear testing after India had done so in May 1998. It referred to these tests as *Youm-e-Takbir* (the Day of Greatness), a clear reference to Islam. Despite American pressure not to conduct the tests, the Sharif government decided to proceed to demonstrate solidarity with the Muslims of South Asia, show the domination of Islam, and offer a prominent display of nationalism and anti-India sentiment. Former PM Bhutto offered her agreement to the position that Pakistan must proceed and respond to India in kind (Kifner, 1998). On the same lines, PM Sharif gave *Shariah* (Islamic law) an essential guiding and dominant part of Pakistani Constitution in 1999 (Haider, 2010). In the outfit of religious ideology and state-sponsored nationalism, these efforts at home, provided legitimacy to governments that were accused of corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency (Mezzer & Aftab, 2009). These domestic ventures were also fruitful in paving the way for stronger ties with China. All political parties and both civil and military bureaucracies were unanimous in their support for strengthening ties, while there were marked differences between the various political and bureaucratic groups concerning Pakistan's ties with the United States (Rizvi, 2004).

The period from 1988 to 1999 was marked by the strengthening of Pakistani-Chinese ties, especially during the 1990s in the defense sector in the face of an American arms embargo (Lavoy, 2006). Islamabad and Beijing signed two military accords in 1989 and 1993. Pakistan in 1989 acquired military equipment while conducting joint research and collaboration for arms manufacturing and technology transfers. China also assisted Pakistan in the building of a 40-megawatt reactor that was to be exploited for plutonium enrichment and used for Pakistan's security purposes (Jaffrelot, 2016). The military and nuclear assistance was a step further in the direction of Pakistan's emulation of China.

### **The Musharraf Regime**

General Pervez Musharraf took over the civilian government of PM Sharif and imposed fourth military rule in 1999. The Musharraf era attempted to change the country's socio-political fabric with his policy of *enlightened moderation* (Haider, 2010). While Musharraf's decision to support the American War on Terror

and his change of stance toward Afghanistan policy were seen as indications of the reversal of General Zia's policy of Islamization, he was still pushed to seek assistance from statist ideology and nationalism (Topychkanov, 2009). Although Musharraf did not pursue a hard-line religious ideology, this was only a matter of degree. Pakistani statist ideology was manipulated and state-sponsored nationalism exploited in the same fashion as his predecessors (Pande, 2011).

The bond between Pakistan and China faced a challenge from terrorism during and after the late 1990s. China was concerned about the potential export of fundamentalist and terrorist elements to its western province of Xinjiang, a Muslim-majority area that had experienced separatist movements for years and presented a great challenge to both Beijing and Islamabad (Curtis, 2009). Pakistan has been attentive to China's sensitivities concerning its relationship with its Muslim minorities, especially with the Uighurs. It was alleged that Uighur separatists had a safe asylum in north-western Pakistan. In fact, Pakistan had never supported the Uighur struggle for autonomy but remained tolerant of their presence within its borders until the late 1990s (Haider, 2005). It was in the late 1990s that Pakistan began to take strict measures against Uighurs seeking safe asylum on Pakistani soil to quell China's fears. These measures included the capturing and handing over of 22 alleged Uighur terrorists to China in 2002. In 2003, Pakistani forces killed "Hasan Mahsum, head of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, which China [had] classified as a terrorist organization for its activities in Xinjiang and [was] based in Waziristan" (Kabraji, 2012, p. 8). These gestures have greatly addressed Beijing's apprehensions and aided in winning its support.

Though ties between China and Pakistan during Musharraf remained on a similar course as before, his era did see efforts to bring large-scale investments into the country. Musharraf paid a visit to China in early 2000 and held a meeting with President Jiang Zemin during the UN Millennium Summit in New York in the same year. Chinese PM Zhu Rongji visited Pakistan in 2001, which was reciprocated by General Musharraf in the same year. In this visit during the War on Terror, Musharraf stated clearly that one of the main pillars of Pakistan's external ties was its "close association and relationship with China," and the major objective of his visit was "to reassure Beijing that Pakistan's new anti-terrorism alliance with the United States does not come at the expense of its ties to China" ("Musharraf in Key China Visit," 2001). Musharraf wanted China to remain a strong friend of Pakistan's in South Asia (Boni, 2019). The year 2002 marked the beginning of landmark Pakistani-Chinese economic collaboration in the form of the Gwadar Port construction (Consulate-General of the People's Republic of China in Karachi, n.d.), which was to ultimately transform into

CPEC in later years. PM Jamali also visited China in 2003 and founded the China-Pakistan Friendship Forum.

### **The Restoration of Democracy: 2008–2018**

A new civilian government came into existence under the PPP in 2008 which completed its first constitutional tenure of five years in 2013. The center-to-right PML-N remained at the helm of affairs from 2013 to 2018. The domestic scene experienced relative calm after the restoration of civilian rule, and the official statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism persisted without any major changes. The bilateral diplomatic ties during this period continued in the usual friendly pattern, and visits were routinely exchanged among the highest political leadership. Pakistani Premier Gilani paid two visits to China in 2008. Pakistani President Zardari made a trip in 2008 to attend the Boao Forum for Asia, where he was called upon by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, and paid yet another visit in 2009. Pakistani premier also visited China in late 2009 to attend the SCO summit, where he was called on by both the Chinese President and Premier. President Zardari paid two visits in 2010. The strengthening of Sino-Pakistani ties during the post-Musharraf period is evident from the fact that during the official trip by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in 2010, Beijing offered an abundance of economic assistance and bilateral trade accords of around \$35 billion (Small, 2015). Wen also addressed a joint session of the Pakistani parliament, an honor given to the political leadership of a few countries. 2011 was announced as the year of Pakistan-China friendship, and a Pakistan-China Friendship Centre was inaugurated in Islamabad. Both President Zardari and Premier Gilani paid visits in the same year. PM Gilani also attended the SCO meeting. Pakistani Army Chief Kiyani visited China in 2012, and Premier Gilani did so in the same year to attend the Boao Forum for Asia yearly forum. In 2012, President Zardari paid a visit to China to attend the 12th meeting of the SCO. Two landmark visits by the Chinese political leadership were made in 2013 and 2015: the first when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang paid a visit to Pakistan and laid the foundations for the CPEC project and the second when President Xi Jinping came to Pakistan and announced the CPEC (Boni, 2019). With Chinese assistance, Pakistan also began developing JF-17 Thunder multi-role fighter aircraft in 2015 (Jaffrelot, 2016).

With its multibillion-dollar trade, infrastructure, and communication agreements as part of the transcontinental BRI project, the CPEC aimed to transform Pakistan's economy, infrastructure, and connectivity by 2018. The project suggests a marked shift from Beijing's politico-security-driven and elite-centered bilateral relations to realistic and economically oriented ties (Jacob, 2018). It has been dubbed a game-changer



capable of addressing Pakistan's most serious domestic issues and has particularly helped the country exploit its rich geostrategic and geo-economic national resources (Suryanarayana, 2021). Under the CPEC, Beijing and Islamabad have transformed their ties into a strategic partnership (Singh & Singh, 2019). This is one of the prime instances where due to China's assistance, Pakistan has been able to extract and mobilize its national resources while strengthening itself economically and militarily (Hassan, 2020).

## **Conclusion**

This study has endeavored to uncover the role of state-infused ideology and state-sponsored nationalism in the formulation of Pakistan's foreign relations through the case of Pakistan-China ties from 1972 to 2018 employing the theoretical approach of neoclassical realism. In the face of systemic pressures and ever-changing relative power capabilities as dictated by neoclassical realists, Pakistan has been pushed to adopt appropriate balancing strategies, especially in the face of a perceived Indian threat since 1972. To realize this balancing strategy, Pakistan has had to deal with its domestic issues and prevent domestic weakness from hampering its strategic, defense, and foreign policy plans. For that purpose, Pakistan's policy-makers engaged in an internal balancing that rejuvenated an ideology founded on Islam and nationalism based on opposition to India. The crafting of state-oriented ideology and state-sponsored nationalism have been successful domestic policies in Pakistan's internal balancing strategy aimed at extracting and mobilizing its domestic resources and paving solid ground for establishing long-term ties with trusted partners.

Having been dismembered in 1971, Pakistan endeavored to reshape its foreign and domestic policies under a new civilian government. Although the macro-determinant of Pakistan's foreign relations remained India-centered, various steps taken by the government at the domestic level intervened to assist in achieving the best outcomes. A statist ideology and state-sponsored nationalism intervened to smooth the domestic scene and set the stage for the pursuit of a foreign policy that achieved the consensus of the elite. "[T]he perceived external threat, mainly from India, and the fear of internal collapse ... led the policymakers to assign the highest priority to external and internal security" (Rizvi, 2011, p. 128). This argument is based on the observation of Schweller (2004) that greater cohesion within a society helps a state to avoid external balancing while greater fragmentation in a society facing external threats forces a state into external balancing.

Pakistan's foreign policy has leaned toward closer ties with China from 1972 to 2018. Despite serious and conflicting differences on other policies and issues, the civil-military elites in Pakistan have agreed at least on the rejuvenation and continuity of state-sponsored ideology founded on Islam to counter ethnic fragmentation and bring about a much-needed unity. They have also agreed on a state-infused nationalism based on the portrayal of India as an existential threat. This has led civil and military elites to the conclusion that sustaining strong ties with China should remain one of the country's foremost foreign policy objectives.

The successful culmination of various projects that have been financed and assisted by China is indicative of a strategy of emulation for the mobilization and extraction of Pakistan's natural resources. This strategy taken by Pakistan and supported by China mainly addresses security-related concerns in domains such as nuclear capabilities, missile technology, and conventional weapons. At the same time, it also includes non-security domains such as the construction of the KKH, the establishment of the Pakistan Ordnance Factory (especially for export purposes), and the initiation and functioning of the CPEC. With Chinese assistance, Pakistan has now been able to export weapons, tanks, and JF-Thunder fighter planes to Myanmar, Turkey, Nigeria, and several African countries (Bokhari, 2019). Analysts also point out that Pakistan's share in global arms sales has been on the rise in recent years (Alam, 2022). Moreover, China has also been a source of inspiration in agriculture, and the China-Pakistan Agriculture Corridor aims to revolutionize Pakistan's agriculture sector ("China-Pakistan Agricultural Corridor," 2023).

Along with appeals to statist Islamic ideology, the portrayal of India as an enemy has been a feature of every regime from the dictatorships under General Zia and General Musharraf to the democratic governments formed by political parties with different political orientations and manifestoes such as those of Z. A. Bhutto, Benazir Bhutto, and Nawaz Sharif. They have attempted to seek unity through this opposition to India while seeking help from a statist ideology founded on Islam. The self-representation of Pakistan as an ideological country founded on Islam is likely to continue since under widening ethnolinguistic schisms, only an Islamic identity possesses the capacity to salvage and unify the nation (Nandy, 2019). Support for this assessment was also offered by a report from the Carnegie Moscow Centre (Topychkanov, 2009). Governments of all kinds in Pakistan are likely to continue exploiting Islamic ideology for the sake of national unity and state-sponsored nationalism to gather support for balancing options, and the only difference between various governments might be in the intensity and extent of this exploitation. As described by neoclassical realism, this state-infused ideology and nationalism allow rulers to focus on foreign policy issues

like those toward India, Afghanistan, the United States, the UK, and China. Pakistan may continue to zigzag in its foreign policy toward countries such as Afghanistan, the United States, and the UK, it is likely to remain on the same footing with China. The biggest advantage of this China policy is its ability to promote extraction, mobilization, and emulation with respect to Pakistan's domestic resources.

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