



# Geopolitical Interplay of Pakistan, China and India: International Organizations as a Dynamic

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**Abstract:** Pakistan, China and India are the three bordering countries with a lot of geopolitical interconnectedness but they are still not formally integrated in a region. China is located in a different region, carrying a distinct geography, history and civilization that in return has hampered to frame a regional organization for cooperation with Pakistan and India, despite the fact that all the three share common regional bonds through various other regional and international bodies. The paper therefore, examines that how the international bodies have been helping to bring the countries closer to realize the purpose of international cooperation. Being qualitative in nature the data for the research is gathered both from primary and secondary sources that was analyzed through thematic means. The findings refer that Pakistan, China and India are going closer to realize the sense of regional integration.

**Key words:** Pakistan, China, India, Geopolitics, Region, Organizations

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## 1. Introduction

Regional integration is a phenomenon in world that developed after World War Second. Post war world order created certain motives that pushed the European countries for regional integration. Regionalism promoted its member countries for greater interaction and dependency in various parts of the world. South Asia and China also followed the suit- though much later and different way. Though Pakistan, China and India aren't tied a separate organization that should speak for the social, economic and humanitarian uplift of the people, they have developed interactions that can realize the objective of regional integration.

### 1.1 Objective of the Study

To analyze that how Pakistan, China and India are behaving on the pattern of regionalism, though they aren't tied in a separate organization.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Neo-Functionalism explains that how territory, economic interdependence and supranational market rules are key to integrate a region, formally speaking. Pakistan, China and India are territorially contiguous with a lot of economic interdependencies and parts of liberal economic and financial system.

## 3. Research Methodology

Qualitative Approach of research is adopted to gather and analyze data.

### 3.1 Data Collection

Data is collected from both primary and secondary sources. Interviews are conducted with relevant experts as primary source. While books, journals and newspapers are consulted for secondary data.

### **3.2 Data Analyses**

Thematic Analysis Technique is adopted to analyze the gathered data. All its relevant steps of coding was followed.

### **4. Literature Review and Discussion**

The region of Pakistan, China and India has not been the part of one geographic region. All the three are in Asian Continent but China is towards its Southeast and Pakistan and India towards its South. Regionalism has been the phenomenon of capitalist world and its followers while China was practicing Socialism. Therefore, Pakistan and India have been the part of various organizations since last three decades while China started participation in 1990s. South Asia remained without regionalism till the evolution of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1980s. The change in attitude happened towards regional interdependence in late 1970s and 1980s. Indian foreign minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee said, "The subcontinent, as a whole, pulsates with a new confidence in peace and desire for cooperation" (Tiwari, 1985, p. 1).

The actual start for the creation of SAARC was taken by Mr. Zia ur Rehman, the president of Bangladesh. He wrote letters to all heads of six nations of South Asia for a summit regarding the creation of a regional organization. Positive response was received from smaller countries while Pakistan and India called for restricting role of the proposed organization only to economic cooperation. The invasion of Afghanistan by USSR, posed threat to South Asia that brought India and Pakistan closer. Series of bureaucratic and high officials meeting started in different places that discussed regionalism. At the end, they agreed upon nine areas for cooperation; transport and communication, tourism and transport, scientific and technological cooperation, deep-sea mining, agriculture, health care, meteorology, postal services and rural development (Mehmood, 2000). Some directive principles were also decided for intra-regionalism (Mehmood, 2000). It included: 1) to avoid discussing bilateral contentious issues on the forum of regionalism, 2). discussing of issues that each member can veto, 3). steps for progress and 4). Regionalism would not replace bilateral relations. The meeting of foreign secretaries in Islamabad in August 1982 in Islamabad almost finalized the things for future SAARC.

Actualization for the proposed organization started on August 1, 1983 when the foreign ministers of seven regional countries; Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Nepal. In the meeting South Asian Regional Cooperation (SARC) was officially launched. The meeting decided for annual meeting. SARC held its second meeting in Maldives in July 1984 and discussed regional politics in the context of world politics of North-South division and suggested for 'collective regional effort'. The name of the organization was changed to South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) It was the time that Pakistan also started enthusiastically participating in it with "positive perception and the spirit to sincerely implement the ideology of regional cooperation" (Tiwari, 1985). In the same meeting it was also stated for a summit of all the member states in 1985.

A loose regional organization, SAARC was created amidst diverse national interests and priorities. India was having odd relations with its neighboring countries and was having apprehensions of their collective forum that could impose themselves over India. Pakistan also was reluctant to join the SAARC. Pakistan had fears of an organization that might have maximized Indian political influence for being the biggest state of all the members. Pakistan therefore, had a view to resolve bilateral issues with India including, Kashmir, before joining the regional organization. The turn in politics, both regional and global made India and Pakistan to participate in SAARC. The main reason was Soviet threat the region after its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Both, Pakistan and India were ready to join SAARC but with limited powers that the major issues would be discussed bilaterally, outside the common regional forum. To remain outside SAARC, India would have pushed itself into a dangerous isolation. Pakistan calculated for counter-balancing India in better way, through the support of other regional countries.

The Cold War was closely relevant to South Asian politics that had caused fragmentation of the region. Then in 1979 an important event took place that endangered the security of all the South Asian nations, when USSR invaded Afghanistan. The geopolitics of the region was changed. United States combined its resources with regional states against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. American \$3.5 billion aid to Pakistan against the USSR, caused fears in Indians mind. But still the convergence of geopolitical interest of Pakistan and India helped them to enthusiastically support SAARC. The immediate threat from Soviet Union, made Pakistan to override its bilateral issues with India and go for regional and multilateral approaches (Mehmood, 2000). Pakistan tallied its overall politics with Soviet presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan rejected Soviet offer to assist it for a nuclear power plant and cooperation for

peaceful nuclear technology in 1984- for the reason of its occupation of Afghanistan (Hilali, 2017).

Despite a contradictory-looking and complex regional policy, United States supported the creation of SAARC between the regional countries. Jimmy Carter addressed Indian Parliament in January 1978 and said, "for developing the water resources of India, Bangladesh and Nepal, we are prepared to give our support when the regional states request a study that will define that how the international community, in cooperation with the nations of South Asia, can help" (Tiwari, 1985). Despite all this United States had little priority for the region in the context of its Cold War priorities till the Soviet invasion.

By the time of the creation of SAARC, China had also started reviewing its foreign policy towards South Asia. China had already improved relation with United States that helped China reshaping its foreign policy- as source of fear was neutralized. Indian attitude changed towards Soviet Union after its invasion of Afghanistan. India and China were no more a serious threat towards each other. A united South Asia could have been a best defense against Soviet Union and therefore, that could serve Chinese interests (Mehmood, 2000). China lauded India for joining SAARC but it never was in favor of Indian regional dominance in South Asia.

SAARC started its journey in the background of changing geopolitics of the world and region. Iranian revolution took place that stirred Islamic uprisings in various parts of the world and apprehensions were that it might spread to this region too. Conditions in Afghanistan went uncertain and destabilized after King Zahir Shah was deposed on July 17, 1973. The country fragmented into various political forces. Communist forces became stronger which worked against the kingship. Saur Revolution resulted into banishing kingship in Afghanistan forever as Sardar Daud and his family was killed by the revolutionaries. Later on, Hafeezullah Amin and Noor Muhammad Tarakai were killed that finally led to Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. American CIA and Pakistani ISI planned for the anti-Soviet resistance and supported *Mujahedeen*.

The developments in Afghanistan gravely impacted regional geopolitics as Pakistan promoted close ties with United States. Pakistan received huge military and financial help from America. For Pakistan's need in Afghanistan, America postponed all its reservations and problems in relations with Pakistan. It was the right time that Pakistan speedily progressed its atomic program. It was something unacceptable to India (Bhasin, 1984). Cooperation in that type of uncertain environment became very hard on regional level. Some tensions were also witnessed at various points of time in 1980s between the two countries. The SAARC continued its pace in midst of regional issues that did not let it develop on the pattern of European Union or Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The regional geopolitical considerations and priorities divided the member's states according to their stances on regional issues. Some member countries of SAARC suggested for discussing bilateral issues under the platform. Pakistan supported Sri Lankan position for bringing bilateral issues under SAARC. Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Abdul Sattar said, "we have always believed that improvement in bilateral relations in South Asia and our collective endeavors for regional cooperation are complementary and mutually supportive process" (Mahmood, 2000, October). Pakistan had a background of bilateral negotiations with India in Tashkent and Simla. In mid 1990s the members countries signed SAARC Preferential Trade Area (SAPTA) which later on converted into a more developed form; SAARC Free Trade Area (SAFTA) in 2004.

China has always been interested in South Asia for geopolitical and geo-economics reasons. China has the policy of developing closer cooperation with various regional blocs and organizations. China has always been observing the developments in South Asia. China officially became the observer member of SAARC in 2005 after getting the support of SAARC member states. On the eve of 18th SAARC summit in 2014 in Nepal, China voiced for the full membership of the organization and was supported by Pakistan while India opposed (Zongyi, 2014). India has the apprehension of Pak-China dominance of the organization. India's Chinese fears increased as a result of China's growing cooperation with Nepal i.e. developing land port.

Sino-Nepalese relations have been centuries old as both are close geographically, religiously and have cultural affinity. Nepal people had been in regular contact and interaction with the Tibet, being the center of Buddhism, also the religion of Himalayan Nepalese. Both the countries resolved their border disputes through Sino-Nepal boundary agreement in 1960. Relations between them grew, making China the largest Foreign Direct Investor (FDI) in Nepal (Wignaraja, 2015). Nepal tried to present itself a 'zone of peace' between China and India after Indian annexation of Sikkim. China also supported Nepal against Maoist insurgency. China also constructed a road in 2007-8 for connecting Tibet with Nepal. In 2016, both states signed a transit trade agreement, giving access to Nepal to use Chinese sea ports. Growing Sino-Nepal relations increased Indian concerns (Bhattarai, 2017, Jan 6). India's ambivalent approach towards Chinese bid for SAARC membership may be seen that its existence in the organization may have some positive impacts for India. Poverty and ignorance, terrorism, drug trafficking, communication and

transportation; population explosion and environmental degradation are the common issues of all the member states and China. Therefore, China may be helpful in solving such issues in South Asia. The economic ties between China and SAARC countries are important. China has already developed economic relations with individual countries of the region and spreading its economic power.

On April 26, 1996, Shanghai Five was established at Shanghai as an organization after signing, Treaty of Deepening Trust in Border Region by Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. They also signed in Moscow, the Treaty on Reduction of Military Forces on Border Regions on April 24, 1997. The platform potentially meant to discourage liberal democracy in the member countries. They also decided opposing any intervention on the basis of 'protection of human rights' and 'humanitarianism'. The organization also meant to safeguard the sovereignty, independence, social stability and territorial integrity of the member countries (Gill, 2001). The organization was developed into Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Shanghai Five summit in 2001 as Uzbekistan became its sixth member. All the six members signed the Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on June 15, 2001. The following year they finalized its charter.

The primary concern for the organization has been security. Its security actions were directed against extremism, separatism and terrorism in Central Asia. Regional Anti-terrorism Structure (RATS) was established in 2004. In Dushanbe, an agreement was signed between it and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Under the arrangement, cooperation was broadened in the areas of drug trafficking, security and crime. The members of SCO also have been cooperating in military exercises. Peace Mission 2007 was held as a military exercise in which 4000 soldiers took part (Moynan, 2013). The member states also cooperated in economic and cultural aspects.

"As a historian, I fully understand the enmities, rivalries and mistrust between India and Pakistan. And yet it seems so obvious that the changing world of the 21st century should provide the opportunity to put the past to one side, to explore closer ties, and to assess closer collaboration. I cannot see that happening in the short term – which means, ironically, that both India and Pakistan have many fewer options when it comes to regional geopolitics. But, as they say in France, 'c'est la vie'" (Peter Frankopan, Personal Communication, Nov 7, 2017).

The organization is closely relevant to the region of Pakistan, China and India. India has important interests in Central Asia and China. For India, Central Asia is its extended neighbor (Laruelle, & Peyrouse, 2013). The country has failed to develop closer relations with the region because of no land connectivity and adjustment. The region of Central Asia has been important for trade, economics, investment, energy and security. Instable situations in Afghanistan since 1979 and its enmity with Pakistan have been obstructing Indian access into the region. Indian membership in the organization therefore, has been central to its permanent regional geopolitical interests. India submitted its application for full membership in SCO. The application was approved in 2015. Going through formalities, India became active member of SCO in its 2017 summit, held in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Likewise, SCO has been significant for the geopolitics of Pakistan. The peace and stability in Pakistan is closely attached to what has been happening in Afghanistan (Felbab-Brown, 2015). Central Asia therefore, is closely linked with Pakistani interests. The role of Pakistan in Afghanistan and Central Asia has always been very active. Pakistan was given the status of observer in SCO in 2005. It also applied for full membership in 2010. RATS system of SCO best suit to the security interests of Pakistan. The energy needs for Pakistan may be easily fulfilled from the energy reservoirs of Central Asia. Turkmenistan-Pakistan-Afghanistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline is under process that for meeting the energy requirements of Pakistan. Russia supported Pakistan's decision for SCO membership in 2011. China also provided its support for its membership in 2014. Finally in 2015, SCO approved its membership. The memorandum of obligations was signed by Pakistan on June 24, 2016 to become SCO full member. In 2017 it formally accedes to the organization.

Another important regional organization that has made the region of Pakistan, China and India, a gateway, is Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). The organization was founded in Tehran in 1985 by its original member countries; Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. The main objective of the organization is the creation of a single market. The member states are Muslim majority according to religion. The bloc connects the Central Asian states with Mediterranean Sea, passing through Turkey. The area consists of the territories that are rich in agriculture and energy resources. The cooperation is maximizing the interests and resources of the area that makes it more attractive for other regions and the world. Apart from collective understanding, the member states also have bilateral level arrangements for cooperation. The organization may become instrumental in regional politics in future for its geo-strategic representation of interests, making it the gateways for the three countries (Shuja Nawaz, Personal Communication, Sep 7, 2016). Pakistan has Free Trade Areas with Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan. Transit Trade Agreement is already signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan. After the end of the Cold War, seven more countries



joined in 1992. They are; Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan.

The plan of ECO for the development of the region is extensive and embracing as the objectives are settled. A plan for the sustainable development of the member states is envisaged. The organization also has a plan for progressive growth and development based on economic openness, removal of trade barriers, economics liberalization and privatization (Ali & Mujahid, 2015). The Charter also calls for the control of drugs, environmental and ecological protection and strengthening cultural ties and relations between people and regions. The principles and objectives of the organization also suggests for developing cooperation and relations with other regional and international organizations. The activities of the organization are in the light of its charter. These include cooperation in the fields of transport and telecommunications, agriculture, tourism and industry, trade and investment, energy, minerals and environment, human resource and sustainable development.

The region of the Economic Cooperation Organizations has been geopolitically important for its location, politics, culture, population and resources. The member states are different from each other in population, development and size. All the members are developing third world countries. Afghanistan is in continuous internal troubles and instability for last four decades that has challenged the regional cooperation and development. Instead, the debilitating conditions in the country have fragmented the regional politics. The success of the ECO is mainly dependent upon peaceful Afghanistan as it provides a link amongst the member countries of the organization. Energy lines, roads, rails and transits go through Afghanistan to connect Central Asia with Pakistan, Iran and Turkey. Likewise, the internal conditions of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) that are the members of ECO, are also challenging the regional politics.

In addition to other problems, terrorism and terrorist organizations are the biggest issue of the region. The post-Cold War era witnessed the rise of non-state actors and fought against the governments. Talibanization emerged in Afghanistan and captured Kabul. The Taliban regime patronized the likeminded actors e.g. al-Qaeda men and provided them refuge. They fought all over the world for their interests. Therefore, the issue of Talibanization and terrorism demanded collective action. Almost all the regional organization have developed consensus in this regard. ECO in its 13th summit determined for fighting against terrorism, among other issues. Pakistan's ministry of foreign affairs issued a statement, saying, "collective determination to face regional challenges together, such as extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking and address unresolved conflicts, to make the region a zone of peace and prosperity" (Sikander, 2017, March 1).

India and China has a close relationship with member states of the ECO on individual and multi-lateral level. Both the states are active towards the politics of Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs) in the context of 'New Great Game' (Laruelle, & Peyrouse, 2013). They have a big deal of investment and cooperation for the rebuilding of Afghanistan and CARs. China and Kazakhstan have a rail link, passing through Xinjiang province. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have road link with China also. Central Asia will also be connected closely with China through its One Belt One Road (OBOR) project. The CARs are also closely tied with China through the platform of Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Central Asia and Afghanistan are equally significant for India for geopolitical, geo-economic and geo-strategic reasons. Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan and its link with the security and politics of the region has always been pivotal to Indian interests. The over throw of Taliban regime provided an opportunity to India to develop closer ties with the people and governments of Afghanistan. Therefore, India is one of the biggest investor for the developmental projects in Afghanistan. Indian investment has been cause of friction between Pakistan and Afghanistan on one side and Pakistan and India on another.

Organization of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is another organization that has been relevant to politics of the region. The organization is primarily connecting the Muslim countries on the basis of common religion, ideology and interests. The organization was founded in 1969 after *Masjidi Aqsa* was set ablaze by Israel. It calls for the protection of collective interests and benefits of Muslim world that would contribute to international peace and security. The current membership of the organization is fifty seven. Traditionally the organization revolves around the uplift of Muslim countries. It works for the increase of cooperation in different fields i.e. science, politics, economic, social and cultural fields. Its charter was formally revised in June 2008. It included the promotion of good governance, human rights and freedoms amongst Muslim countries. The revised charter also pledged for supporting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In geopolitical prism, OIC is of huge significance for all the regions in Asia especially, South Asia and East Asia. The region, in which Pakistan, China and India are located, can hardly be kept away from the connectivity of OIC. Out of the three countries, only Pakistan is the member of the organization. If the map of OIC member

countries is seen, Pakistan is located in the hub of Muslim countries' 'beads'. The series of member countries, starts from Middle East and goes in a long way through Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia. The Central Asian Republics and Middle Eastern countries are geographically and religiously linked with Pakistan. For India and China therefore, joining OIC is equally important. Insert the map

India has been desirous for joining OIC for its Muslim population and its closeness of relations with Muslim countries especially, Middle East. Its bid for observer status has been obstructed by Pakistan over the basis of Indian occupation of Kashmir. The king of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah had a visit to India in 2006, and supported India for joining OIC. He said that observer status may be given to India and will be more fruitful if suggested by Pakistan. Pakistan however, is not supporting Indian entry as India is involved in disputes with Pakistan. The organization itself is not willing to improve relations with India in the wake of Kashmir dispute. The official stance of OIC is that of support for self-determination struggle of Kashmiris according to United Nations resolutions and bilaterally. While India claims full right for membership of OIC as the country is having second largest Muslim population. Hamid Ansari, the Indian vice president said in 2006, "it [India] is not away from it; not a Muslim majority state in statistical terms yet host to the second largest community of Muslims in the world" (Sager, 2009, Oct 9).

China's relations with OIC in the regional geopolitical orientation have also been of paramount significance. Beijing, being in the struggle of global competition, must be in close coordination with OIC. Its effort for reach to Central Asia and its energy dependency over Middle East, make the organization strategic to promotion and protection of its interests. Parts of western China are Muslim populated and adjacent to Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia. If a strong link is created with Muslim world, it will pacify the unrest amongst the Chinese Muslim population. China has officially expressed its desire for becoming the part of OIC. Jhaa Jane, Deputy Foreign Minister of China, visited the secretariat of OIC in June 2012 to know about the criteria to get observer status in OIC. Commenting over the possibilities of China's observer status, the General Secretary of OIC, Mr. Ihsanoglu expressed that OIC and China have common stances and positions over various international issues and affairs of peace and security. OIC is interested that China must use its influence over Myanmar for stopping atrocities against Muslims. In January 2016, the General Secretary of OIC and Chinese president, Xi Jinping met in Riyadh and discussed issues of mutual concerns. They agreed upon further improving cooperation and coordination for combating terrorism and extremism. The general secretary expressed his desire that OIC and China may work for the promotion of cooperation in economic, culture and humanitarian fields.

## 5. Findings and Results of the Study

It is derived from the above discussion that Pakistan, China and India are responding to the imperatives of the regional integration on a style;

1. The contiguous territory brings them the opportunity and thinking that they can benefit of it. All the three countries are densely populated with a history of external and colonial exploitation that in return make them conscious despite huge odds to work together for prosperity and development. The fact can be testified from their increasing cooperation, bilaterally and regionally speaking.
2. The three counties are aware that they can develop market interdependencies. Therefore in most of the cases they set aside politics while developing cooperation. India and China has developed a great deal of trade and technological cooperation. There is also a high cry in Pakistan and India that their bilateral trade can be out of match with any other.
3. Pakistan and China's trade is already practicing the highest degree of freedom (MFN Status). China and India has loosened bilateral market control to a rational optimum. Pakistan and India are the member of SAFTA, though there is still a need that all the three countries should conclude an agreement to this end.

### 5.1 Conclusion

As a whole if regional geopolitics is analyzed from the perspective of regional and international organizations, international organizations have been relevant and playing role in transforming the region of Pakistan, China and India. The world has witnessed a successful regional integration. Under the philosophy of regional functionalism, the organizations have been instrumental in transforming the geopolitics of the concerned regions. Keeping in view the functionalist approach, the behaviors of Pakistan, China and India are undergoing change to adapt themselves with the changing region as envisaged by the charter of the organizations. There has been a problem that no such a regional organization except SCO that all the three states; Pakistan, China and India, are the members of. That is also a blessing

in disguise as the non-member states try to become its members that make them for making compromises towards the organization as well as the regional states.

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