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CHANGING DYNAMICS OF SOUTH ASIAN BALANCE-OF-POWER

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A B S T R A C T

The emergence of nuclear factor in international politics has overwhelming transformed the essence of balance-of-power concept. This dynamic is an escalation of political dimension of balance-of-power and reduction of military aspect (hard power). However some realists argue that in world politics military and political both characteristics of balance-of-power indeed shape nation-states' balancing approach against dominant players in a system. Therefore weak players get engaged with strong one stopping its opponent's military threat and having deterrence capability. As a result, strategic balancing comes to light. As the focus of the study is concerned, this entire scenario can be seen amid two major players of South Asia i.e. Pakistan and India. It has been analyzed that the balance-of-power politics has long been troubling due to hard power imbalance between Pakistan and India since independence. Besides the influential role of superpower(s) in the theatre of South Asian politics has also been a great disturbing factor for regional equilibrium and widening hard power unevenness where the U.S. or (USSR in past) is/were trying to maintain global balance in Asian-oriented global politics by making dyadic strategic partnerships with regional players. As the strategic triangle - Pakistan-China-India - seems quite significant wherein Pak-China strategic relationship has emerged owing to one of the very basic and common Indian factor and China being the most adjacent player of South Asian region has played a role by creating a balancing aptitude in its relations with both India and Pakistan whereas the U.S. (as a sole superpower) could not do this. While changing dynamics in India and U.S. partnership regarding strategic balancing after civil nuclear deal, Pakistan and China both have also strengthened their 60-years old strategic relationship. As a result, the strategic quadrangle - the U.S.-India-China-Pakistan is getting eminent as a new dynamic of the South Asian balance-of-power politics.

Keywords: South Asia, balance-of-power, strategic triangle, strategic quadrangle.

INTRODUCTION

Bearing the high level of conflict and rivalries at the regional level, hard balancing is tough to gain while altering amount of soft balancing and asymmetric balancing that seem to be practiced by states in terms of political and military dimensions of balance-of-power (Waltz, 1979). In modern international system, the realists argue that political dimension of balance-of-power is still important and will be pursued by states as their strategies. In its defence, the realist school of thought envisages that that states seek balancing behavioural approach against the preponderant state by developing their nuclear capabilities or enhancing their prevailing nuclear capabilities with allies for safeguarding their own survival (Riley, 2008). In this way, states want to give signal to dominant states not to encourage for making an attack against their sovereignty. Robert Jervis states, "Whatever these weapons can do, they can deter all-out invasion" (Jervis, 2003). Moreover, this political consideration escalates a state's military strength as well somehow (Riley, 2008). Therefore, strategic balancing in terms of nuclear filed has realistically been reducing war chances since Cold War.

Since post 9/11, South Asian politics has been changing rapidly around Pakistan and China because inter-state relations are experiencing new equations. In this regard, the new Indo-United States (U.S.) strategic nexus is rapidly influencing balance-of-power and stability in South Asian region. Indo-U.S. restoration, re-balancing and re-counterbalancing strategies are mainly driven by bilateral strategic partnerships based on "engagement-and-resistance" (Nadkarni, 2010) but by repeating Cold

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War strategic balance-of-power alongside soft balancing. Therefore, in analysts view, both China and Pakistan have transformed their old strategic relationship in new strategic partnership to offset this dynamic regional equation. The Indo-U.S. strategic partnership is a threatening factor for both China and Pakistan because U.S. is creating the strategic imbalance by supporting India. China being a steadfast friend and non-transient partner has always stood with Pakistan in legitimate security needs, political support and economic development. Moreover, it contributes regional stability and peace at large as well. China and Pakistan in fact seek to make a bond of mutual security, economic cooperation and peace with all countries of South Asia, Central Asia, and Russia as a "balancing factor in today's unipolar world" (Ahmad, 2006) and offsetting Indian strategic ascendancy as well. In this regard, it is not wrong to say that Pak-China strategic relations are directly proportional to the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership in South Asian region.

In the light of above arguments, this study is aimed to analyze South Asia balance-of-power dynamics providing the emerging complex changes at regional structure. Therefore, this study is significant to raise critical issues given current changes in the global political economy such as how new geopolitical formations do change the balance-of-power in a specific world region, in this case, South Asia and how new alliances within as well as outside the region helps to shape the emergent balance-of-power.

In short, this paper on South Asian balance-of-power dynamics has focused mainly on exploring pivotal drivers of balance-of-power in South Asian region based on the current formulations while changing nature of international politics and historically specific dynamics of South Asian regional relations.

DYNAMICS AND PLAYERS OF SOUTH ASIA BALANCE-OF-POWER

South Asian balance-of-power dynamics do mostly revolve around study of power struggle in the fields of military build-up as well as nuclear clout between tradition players (Pakistan and India) and great powers (United States or China and USSR in past). Therefore, it is essential that balance-of-power in this region may comprehend as compared to other region.

Basic features of South Asian balance-of-power are different from old European one but the essence of the concept is same (Thomas, 2004). In case of features, South Asian balance-of-power is a bipolar system having heterogeneous and multilingual societies along acute interstate conflicts. Conversely, the European balance-of-power was a multipolar system while possessing a homogenous and harmonized society in which balancer was prominent in the form of Britain (Thomas, 2004). The "Western great-power politics" has influenced conventional and strategic (nuclear) oriented balance-of-power in South Asia (Thomas, 2004). Likewise, balancer has not been clear at all in this sub-system in which sometime either America or China or Russia do play this role. But it is note-worthy that in the case of struggle for nuclear power among traditional players, China comes up as a balance for Pakistan and as an unbalance for India according to many western and Indian analysts. However the same case is with U.S.

Sub-Continent Players: It mainly includes two players i.e. India and Pakistan. Both states are different in size, population and resources. Historically, since independence due to proximity of rivals, there was a need to offset security threats against each other through military means. Pakistan started external balancing[i] (Amin, 2011) through CENTO and SEATO with U.S. under bilateralism policy and India internal one by adopting non-alignment strategy. Pakistan and India entrenched this concept as a fundamental instrument of foreign policy due to the sense of extreme insecurity and multilateral strategic influences of Great Powers in subcontinent particularly during the Cold War (Tahir-Kheli, 1973). For Pakistani policy-makers, bilateralism has been meant to seek equal relations with all major powers - the U.S., the USSR (now Russia), and China. India under the shadow of non-alignment has played the U.S. card or the USSR card or China card at a right time as compared to Pakistan because Pakistan's policy has considerably been pro-Western.

Great Power Politics: The region of subcontinent has a deep history of great powers' influence. During Cold War bipolar global system, the two superpowers attempted to maintain regional equilibrium ("tightly") through both hard and soft balancing (Thomas, 2004). During this tight bipolarity, the game of power struggle over South Asian theatre was just between two blocs led by the USSR and U.S. But later China was "the third active competitor". China is largely playing a role in the post-Cold War unipolar global system in the South Asian power equation after the USSR demise. On the other side, Indian partnership with U.S. with "steady constancy

is intended to preserve its security and interests by a combination of external and internal balancing viz-à-viz China" though it has never labelled this policy as bilateralism as Pakistan used to do, indeed it is bilateralism (Tellis, 2009). China as the nearest neigbour of Pakistan and India, China has always tried to maintain a balancing approach in its relations. However, when superpower follow pro-India policy, China tries to offset this disturbance in South Asian balance-of-power by supporting Pakistan.

South Asia Strategic Triangle: Three major players i.e. Pakistan, India and China have been devising South Asian Strategic Triangle (SAST) since 1947/1949. The joint front which was basically initiated in early 1960s between Pakistan and China against India after the Sino-Indian territorial conflict fixed three states into "tight" triangular relationship that transformed into "loose" triangular relationship in 1980s. Currently all three players are engaged in political and economic engagements, yet non-confrontational arms race (Kapur, 2011). In this engage-and-resist based triangular interaction, the flexibility is high in Indo-China relations rather than Pak-India. In connection with South Asian power equation, Pakistan and China interact with each other by sharing common interests against India. The most common interest of Pak-China friendship against India is to keep check on Indian military might for gaining regional supremacy. Considering this interest along with China's nuclear assistance to Pakistan and Chinese rise as major threat to Indian security (Yuan, 2007), India has underpinned its ties with U.S. and reciprocally both want to contain China's influence and Pakistan-China strategic balancing approach. The expansion of Indo-U.S. nexus after nuclear civil deal can broaden political differences especially between China and India and enlarge strategic alliance between Pakistan and China. Pro-Indian approach of U.S. after nuclear deal causes changes in strategic positioning as well as shifting balance-of-power in South Asia (Tasleem, 2008). Moreover, nitty-gritty of this policy is that growing affinities between India and U.S. will not bury the hatchet among players of strategic triangle and somehow become a source of well-built binding amid Pakistan and China against India. Balance-of-power in SAST is based on Kautilyan's balance-of-power principle "an enemy of my enemy is my friend" (Thomas, 2004). Likewise, John J. Tkacik in his testimonial delineates that Pak-China strategic alliance is simply based on Kautliyan's maxim (Lee and Zinnes, 1994; Tkacik, 2011). Such kind of strategic balance is suitable for nuclear states of South Asia for balancing relationship of cooperation and confrontation among players of strategic triangle. Since 1998, the western world and Indians have been blaming China for extensive nuclear cooperation with Pakistan. Chinese Foreign Minister, Zhu Bangzao expressed that India's nuclear explosions of 1998 are indeed an alarming factor for global nuclear non-proliferation efforts and "to the peace and stability in South Asia and in the world at large" ("China's Statement on India's Nuclear Tests", 1998; Yuan, 2007). As U.S. and India are claiming to cooperate in nuclear energy field, similarly Pak-China cooperation in nuclear field is aimed for energy objectives and somehow strategic balance against India ("China's Statement on India's Nuclear Tests", 1998; Yuan, 2007).

The enduring power relationship in SAST is similar to what U.S.-USSR-China trilateral interaction during Cold War ("World's Double Standards on Pakistan-China Nuclear Deal", 2010). However few differences have been noticed also. In the former case, both triangles encompass of nuclear powers. They increasingly agreed on the issues of economic engagements, global non-proliferation and disarmaments, energy security and terrorism. In the latter case, due to continuous military and nuclear power competition, collapse of any key players is eminent as in the case of USSR in Great Powers' triangle whereas such kind of collapse will not happen at all whether Pakistan is a weak player (Kapur, 2011). Besides geographical proximity and territorial disputes among all three players, there are many security concerns because of on-going India and China power competition. Moreover, unequal economic and military capabilities (conventional imbalance) among strategic triangle players intensify clash of interests. For instances, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) 2011 Yearbook, by the year of 2010, China's military budget was $119 billion (officially $78 billion) whereas India's was $41.3 billion and Pakistan's was $5.16 billion (Sam Perlo-Freeman et al., 2011). See figures 1 and 2 for GDP growth rate and military spending of Pakistan, India and China.

Balance-of-power under Influence of Sole Superpower Favouring to India: The balance-of-power has been operating in a unipolar system in wider sense as well as in loose multipolar structure in the South Asian region. The U.S.'s South Asia policy has always

been drawn from its global grand strategy. It seeks to strengthen ability as the sole superpower by intervening in all areas of the world and preventing any major power from challenging its leadership" (Jaspal, 2007).

To maintain balance-of-power, the U.S. has played a leading role either with the help of its strategic ally or through direct involvement (Murad, 2012). As within South Asia framework, U.S. vital interests are mainly associated with terrorism, nuclear proliferation and geo-economics. Therefore U.S. interaction with the India, Pakistan and China keeps central significance (Yusuf, 2007).

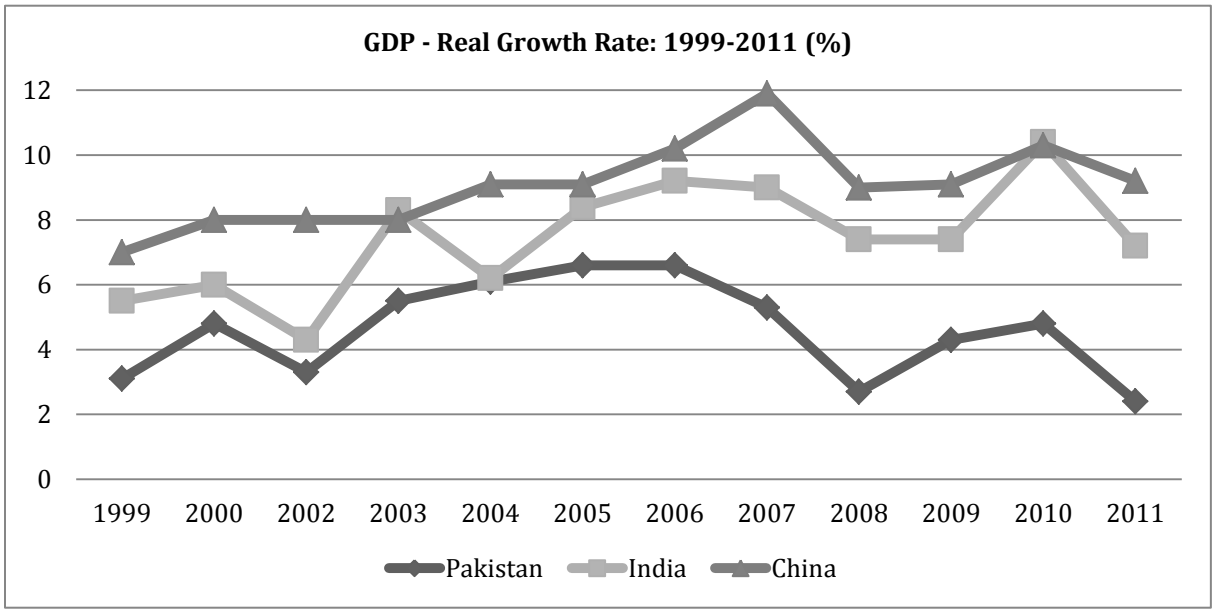

Figure 1 shows GDP – Real Growth Rate: Pakistan, China, India, 1999-2011 (in percentage).
Source: (The World Bank, 2013).

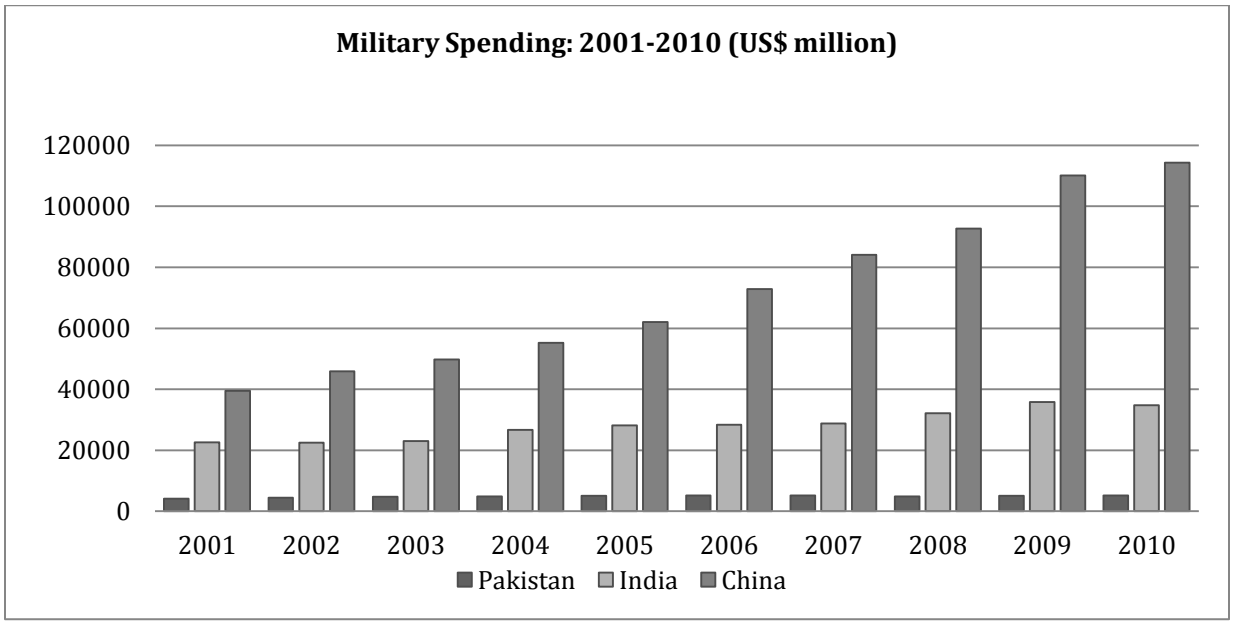

Figure 2 Military Spending: Pakistan, India, China, 2001–10 (US$ current prices millions).
Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Yearbook 2011.

In the strategic triangle's countries which are virtually dwelling of 2790 million people[ii] ("2012 World Population Data Sheet", 2012), U.S. has inconclusive bilateral strategic partnership(s) with its players due to

security issues after nuclearisation of two conventional rivals, unresolved border issues, and lastly fast-emerging structural changes of region. In this manner, regional balance-of-power between Pakistan and India at one place and China and India at other place in wake of U.S. leading support to India is undergoing rapid change with respect to dynamic and complex strategic quadrilateral China-Pakistan-India-U.S. relationship. It considerably favours India and therefore, U.S is making strategic realignment/partnership based on "engage-and-resist" hedging strategies"[iii] (Nadkarni, 2010) through bilateral and multilateral cooperation with strategic triangle players but leveraging Indian concerns regarding regional stability with reference to Pak-China. It is initiating a range of strategic dialogues with its partners to offset balance-of-power dynamics.

However, it is noticeable that U.S. has been pursuing dual policies while engaging all three strategic players in soft and asymmetry balancing strategies. She is supporting India to hedge against China at large and Pakistan after disintegration of USSR, thus introduced new strategic balance-of-power. Pakistan and India have long been rivals and Chinese support to Pakistan in its clash with India are considered as a major cause of enduring tensions between China and India. Meanwhile, U.S.-Pakistan rift is widening because of its improving ties with India following the 2008 civilian nuclear deal and violating Pakistan's sovereignty as a result of Osama bin Laden's operation. Indo-U.S. growing association and their expanding involvement in Afghanistan have brought about some concerns in China and Pakistan. China deems risk from U.S. containment or encirclement policy which in turn compels China's relationship with both the U.S. and India. Concurrently, China and Pakistan are strengthening their ties to balance and hedging U.S.-India within this strategic quadrilateral China-Pakistan-India-U.S. context (Merrington, 2012). As the result of above factors, it can be said that a new strategic framework is emerging that is strategic quadrangle.

Figure 3 shows the complexity of this strategic quadrilateral interaction in South Asian politics. The extremely complex interactions among these four players have been making South Asian politics a spider's web. Due to involvement of great powers in simple balance-of-power between Pakistan and India in South Asia, its nature has changed into complex balance-of-power (Bull, 2002). This complexity of balance-of-power makes considerable U.S. interference in South Asia due its grand global scope.

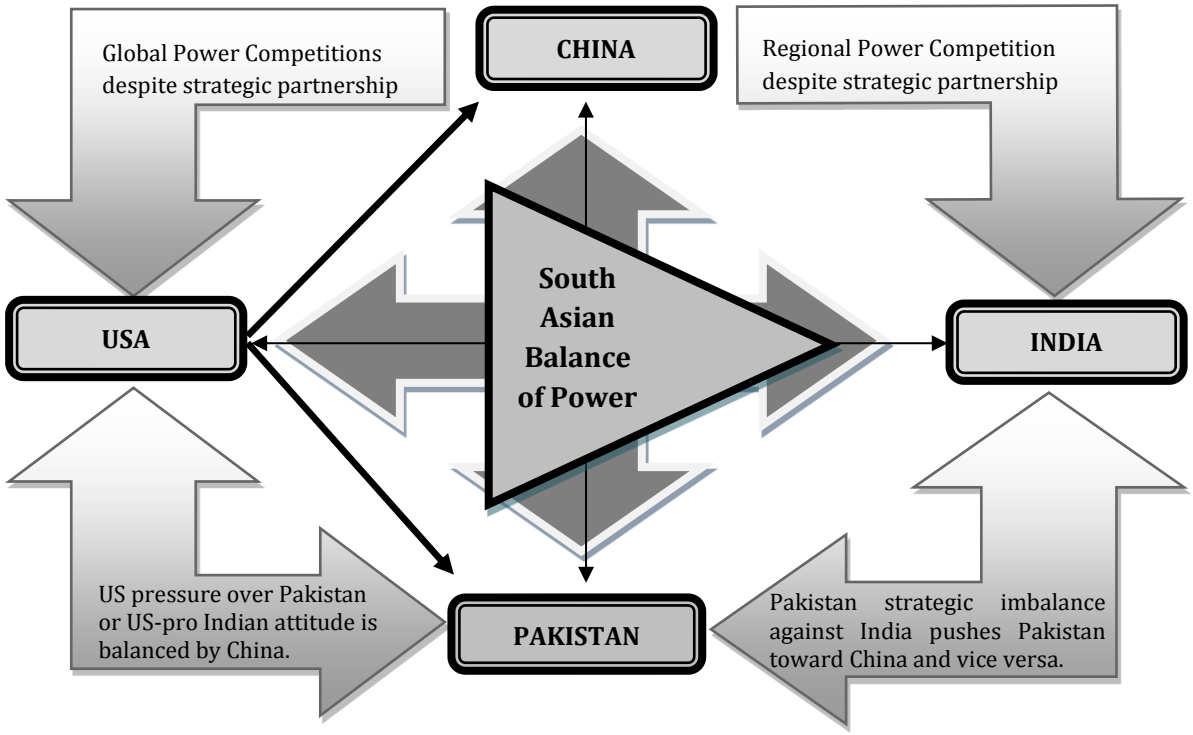

Figure 3: Concept of "India-U.S.-China-Pakistan" Strategic Quadrilateral relationship mainly taken by "Dan Markey". This strategic quadrilateral frames a complex balance-of-power in South Asia region. (Jahangir, 2012).

Strategic Quadrangle – China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership versus Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership: As a result of all these major dynamics of South Asia balance-of-power, a new dynamic of balance-of-power namely "Strategic Quadrangle" has been eminent. In this way, a unique configuration of equilibrium scale has been evolving. As Dan Markey has drawn a sketch in following words;

This (strategic) quadrangle could stretch towards two poles, with the United States and India gravitating towards one end and China and Pakistan towards the other, leaving these two sets of players diametrically opposed" (Markey, 2011).

China and Pakistan are making strong partnership against Indo-U.S. strategic alliance. Both U.S. and India have signed a civil nuclear deal to hedge China and offset its support to Pakistan in 2005. Now there is question how Pakistan would like to offset Indian influence after Indo-U.S. nuclear deal in South Asia and U.S. refusal of equal treatment regarding providing advanced technology in nuclear field as it would provide to India. The answer is that at first place Pakistan has been trying to offset India through external balancing in terms of gaining of qualitatively superior weaponry and diplomatic support from major powers. However after Indian struggle of procuring nuclear capability, Pakistan has found nuclear option as the most suitable to equalize geopolitical and strategic threats of India (Paul, 2005) through its internal efforts. Pakistan wants to counterweight the clout of Indo-U.S. deal through Chinese support in the field of nuclear energy cooperation ("Offsetting Indo-US N-deal to Islamabad's advantage", 2006). After U.S. non-responsive attitude of Pakistan's demand of signing same deal as the former had had with India, Pakistan's eager of enlarging its nuclear ties with China and offsetting Indian influence and the Indo-US civilian nuclear energy plan has risen. This act of Pakistan is also a showcase that it has strong and supportive alternative sources of having nuclear deal with China rather than U.S. On the other side, China also wants to expand nuclear cooperation with Pakistan but "any nuclear cooperation would be for peaceful purposes only and would accept international safeguards" ("Offsetting Indo-US N-deal to Islamabad's advantage", 2006).

In the same way, Pakistan and China are pursuing hedging strategies to counter all global and regional dynamics and challenges but not through violating international laws and norms. As compared to Indo-U.S. alliance which has been an alarming factor not for South Asian strategic stability but for the world's nuclear non-proliferation regime. Both Pakistan and China perceive that nature of Indo-U.S. relations is disturbing strategic balance of this region. Though, apparently it has been felt that in the long run Indo-US nexus might pay dividend to them in the future geopolitics. But emerging Pakistan on the globe as nuclear power in 1998 caused serious setback to Indo-US interests. Thus, the imbalance in South Asian power game which used to be sensed in post-Cold War era, now has been diminished. For example, in the escalation of 2000, India had been forced to take her forces back to the Garrisons, when Pakistani leaders conveyed that they would go to any extent for defending the boundaries. This was the time of nuclear war threat in South Asian field (Raghvan, 2001). Another, setback has been caused to Indo-US strategic partnership, when US forced to accept Bailout package from China for her dissipated economy. Therefore, this is to say that 'Pakistan nuclear capability and China strong economy' are the invisible actors which caused strategic equilibrium in South Asia.

Besides in the context of China, U.S. is making alliance partners around China's periphery primarily in the form of its military presence in Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan in Central Asia, Afghanistan, India, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea. Both U.S. and India consider China as a major challenge. India cannot face China's threat alone that is why it needs U.S. support to counter China. Therefore, this strategic partnership is to hedge China on Asian framework and maintain strategic balance-of-power with Pakistan at South Asian level. In this scenario, Pakistan's importance enhances for China more and for China, as the most suitable option. As Huang Jing has opined that the historical pattern of the bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China is likely to change in which both equally needed each other (Zaki, 2010).

A clear manifestation of change in Pakistan and China strategic bond is that the old strategic relationship of both countries has been converted in partnership by signing a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighbourly Relations, in 2005 which has initiated high-level strategic dialogue (Zeb, 2012). In this treaty, the word 'strategic partnership' formally used and has become a common in leaders' speeches as well. Premier of Pakistan Shaukat Aziz explained Pakistan-China

strategic relationship in this treaty as Newton's third law of motion - every action has an equal and opposite reaction (Tkacik, 2011). The start of Pak-China strategic partnership is also a hallmark in the perspective of China's grand security strategy. While the U.S.-Indian and Pak-China strategic partnerships are in the process of being developed, there is clear difference between both partnerships. The former has not long strategic partnership just started moderately since 1980s (Ganguly and Scobell, 2005). While Pakistan-China strategic relationship has long been since 1965 and nuclear cooperation agreement for peaceful purposes signed in 1986. Commonly, both strategic partnerships have been come about multifaceted security dynamics of strategic quadrilateral interactions. The core reason is defence and security dimensions as the result of shift in geostrategic conditions and escalation of both political and military dimensions of balance-of-power once again.

CONCLUSION

Since inception of 21st century, balance-of-power dynamics has been altering within the framework of South Asian region as one of the strategic centres of Asian continent in which current geopolitical and geo-economic realities have further enhanced its geostrategic significance in international politics after U.S.-India strong strategic relationship. This alliance of world superpower with India has changed security and geopolitical scenario of South Asian strategic equation. Balance-of-power theory proposes, just "a system of countervailing power" may well guarantee the sovereignty and autonomy of great and small states (Thomas, 2004). In view of it, Pak-China strategic partnership has driven due to convergence of strategic interests to pin down Indo-U.S. strategic relationship. In this, the most significant convergence lies in geostrategic interests of Pakistan and China which has come up the strengthening relationship between U.S. and India. Yet U.S.'s estrangement from China and Pakistan does not give an idea of two confrontational camps but hostility and realignment is obvious in this new balance of power structure (Xia, 2012). In this entire scenario, U.S. is not acting as a balancer as it must do being the superpower in international politics.

In the regard of Indian plans and rapidly growing capabilities at one place and the provision of nuclear edge by U.S, especially at other place as the result of this deal, Pakistan heavily has to rely more on nuclear weapons by following the tenet of self-help and by making strengthened the already existing nuclear alliance of 1982 with China for peace and stability to balance Indian force. In fact, the balance of conventional forces is in favour of India, and Pakistan counters it by nuclear deterrence. In the present scenario, the delicate and unique balance-of-power is rising in South Asia in which U.S. should play its vital part as a balancer in post-U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and will have to treat equally with both India and Pakistan. This strategic quadrangle - India–U.S.–China–Pakistan will identify the nature of new relationships amid the players as the scale of South Asian region is expanding.

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[i] According to the realism, in internal balancing, states by following self-help concentrate over arms production, defence building and consolidation through available internal sources. In external balancing, relatively weak state makes alliance with powerful state for its defence against opponent(s). In the case of India, India has been an upper hand over Pakistan regarding rapid defence building. According to many historians, India got more capital and military reserves than Pakistan as a result of uneven distribution of then-available resources. On the base of this fact, India focused on internal balancing while pursuing non-alignment policy. Meanwhile on the other hand, India went to external balancing. Despite adherence to non-alignment, India was openly pro-Soviet in its foreign policy and got a lot of defence assistance from USSR whereas the U.S. openly rejected India's non-alignment as "immoral".

[ii] Till the mid-2012, China's population was 1,350.4 million, India was 1,259.7 million and Pakistan was 180.4 million.

[iii] Vidya Nadkarni has quoted Evan S. Medeiros's definition of strategic hedging as "stress engagement and integration mechanisms on the one side and realist-style balancing in the sense of external security cooperation and national military modernization programs on the other side."