

The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics. By ANDREW SMALL. New York: Oxford University Press, 2015. xvi, 319 pp. ISBN: 9780190210755 (cloth; also available as e-book).
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Andrew Small, in *The China-Pakistan Axis*, seeks to explain the lineaments undergirding one of the most important—albeit poorly understood—bilateral relationships in Asia. Small relies upon extensive interviews in China, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India as well as a thorough review of the extant secondary and primary sources. The result is a thickly descriptive, highly readable account that is truly indispensable to scholarly and policy analytical communities.

Small's central question is what explains the remarkably resilient relationship between these two countries given that it lacks the "cultural affinity or common values that so often underpin friendships and alliances" (p. 2). Part of the explanation is that China generally has not asked Pakistan to do anything divergent from what it would do absent its ties with China. In recent years, China has wanted Pakistan to do a better job combating Uighur militancy and to exercise greater caution when dealing with India. However, despite these challenges, China essentially benefits from forcing India to keep a wary eye over its western border. China in turn provides Pakistan with serviceable weapons that embolden it to remain the revisionist power in its security competition with India. It usually provides it with political and diplomatic cover as well economic investment, although on terms that generally favor China.

However, as Small carefully documents, there is often less to the China-Pakistan relationship than meets the eye. China has not generally supported Pakistan in its wars with India in any material sense. It has retrenched from its pro-Pakistan position on Kashmir towards one that supports the status quo, and, increasingly it wants Pakistan to be a more responsible actor in the region. China's calculus has changed due to the nuclearization of Pakistan's conflict with India and the proliferation of Islamist militants in Pakistan.

Perhaps one of the most useful discussions centers on the economic and trade dimensions of the relationship. Much has been made of the \$46 billion "China Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) that ostensibly will link Kashgar, in China's Xinjiang Province, with Gwadar, in Pakistan's restive Balochistan Province. To the north, the project hinges upon the Karakorum Highway (KKH), a precarious, landslide-prone, high-altitude paved road that took twenty years to build and claimed the lives of nearly 1,000 Chinese and Pakistani engineers. Even though the KKH is the "most potent symbol of China-Pakistan relations" (p. 99), what you see very little of on the KKH is actual traffic. In 2010, a massive landslide submerged a large section of the KKH. Boats, which can barely accommodate a small SUV, shuttle goods across the vast lake engulfing the road. Small contends that the KKH's value was never economic, but rather political. It heightened Indian anxiety about its diminishing control over Pakistan-administered Kashmir and that part of Kashmir that Pakistan ceded to China in 1962 while strengthening Pakistan's own hold over previously inaccessible frontier areas.

The southern end of the CPEC is the deep-water port at Gwadar, which the Chinese developed. Like the KKH, the Gwadar project is not a convincing commercial proposition and, consequently, much of the promised Chinese development has not transpired. By 2008, "Gwadar stood virtually isolated" (p. 101). Part of the problem is that the entire project is targeted by Baloch nationalist groups who fear that the massive project will render them a "minority in their land" (p. 102). Small notes that some Chinese were wary of taking on a project with "an enormous target sign painted on it" (p. 102).

Taken together, the proposed transport and energy corridors that the two projects bookend are not only vulnerable “to security threats in Balochistan and to landslides in Gilgit-Balistan, but also the cold logic of the market.... The cost of sending [one barrel of oil] overland via Gwadar and Xinjiang would run at between four and five times that of the sea route through Shanghai” (p. 102). This raises the question of what China’s ultimate aims are in developing this corridor, should it ever fructify. Small hints at a simple answer: for China it is a redundant transport corridor that can protect China during a naval blockade or other wartime scenarios. At the same time, Gwadar’s potential military value may have become more salient to Beijing in light of its recent far-flung military expansion.

Readers will also find Small’s analysis of China’s role in Pakistan’s pursuit of non-state actors to be illuminating. During the 1960s and 1970s, both countries collaborated in sustaining insurgencies in India’s northeast. In fact, by 1969, they established a coordination bureau to oversee the training and supply of various Indian insurgents (p. 77). The biggest collaboration took place during the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan when China, Saudi Arabia, the United States, and Pakistan were the primary principals of the effort. In the intervening years, Pakistan continued to rely upon Islamist militancy as tools of foreign policy in Afghanistan and India. While China has specific concerns about Uighur militants, China has generally understood the mutual utility enjoyed by Pakistan’s use of Islamist militants in India. Despite Pakistan’s commitment to jihadi causes, it cracks down on Uighurs whenever China asks (p. 80). Small notes that some Chinese believe that Pakistan does not comprehensively eliminate Uighurs from Pakistan because doing so would partly obviate Pakistan’s strategic utility to China. China and Pakistan collaborated in Afghanistan, reflecting Beijing’s preference to make deals, not enemies. China came to an understanding with the Taliban, facilitated by Pakistan, that Afghanistan would not be used as a base for Uighur attacks.

Small is not entirely Panglossian about the long-term viability of the relationship given Pakistan’s trajectory of increasingly internal instability, risk-seeking behavior with respect to India, and impacts of these factors upon China’s internal security and regional investments. He acknowledges that Pakistan is an imperfect partner, but Pakistan is the only country upon which China can consistently rely. For Pakistan, the list of options is equally short. Should the United States retrench from the region in coming years, Pakistan will have to increasingly rely upon a small set of countries, which includes China.

While theorists may be disappointed in Small’s atheoretic approach to this puzzle, he does provide adequate data for such scholars to formulate and even test their own models to explain this emergent axis.

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In many ways, the story is familiar. As an array of enmeshed planetary crises—environmental, financial, biological, social—converge in the contemporary moment, classic