

Trump's outburst deepens Sino-Pak. ties

Already its "iron brother", China now appears set for an even tighter embrace of Pakistan, following a possible slide in ties between Islamabad and Washington.

An op-ed in the state-run tabloid *The Global Times* posted late on Sunday noted that China should pay more attention to the potency of its economic assistance to Pakistan "as ties are set to get closer amid hostility from the U.S."

Beijing the clear winner

An article in the Hong Kong based *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) had earlier noted "there is one clear winner from Donald Trump's tweet tantrums this week: China, which suddenly finds its leverage over Pakistan multiplying as a result of the U.S. President's mood swings".

The rise in anti-American sentiments in Pakistan appears to be conflating with the perception of China as a more reliable ally. This is notwithstanding the recent differences between Beijing and Islamabad regarding some of the financial aspects of a hydropower project under the omnibus \$57-billion China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Soon after Mr. Trump's tweet, Pakistan's Central Bank swiftly announced that it would use the Chinese Yuan to settle bilateral trade and investment with China.

"The central bank's decision is significant given Islamabad had been resisting this demand from China. But one tweet from Trump managed to achieve what months of intense pressure and lobbying from Beijing could not," the *SCMP* article observed. Mr. Trump's tweet also played into the hands of the religious-Right, now harbouring political ambitions in Pakistan's elections later this year.

The Hafiz Saeed-led Jamaat-ud-Dawah (JuD) demanded the expulsion of the U.S. Ambassador during street protests in Lahore.

The Global Times article signalled that Pakistan would be justified in defining a new geopolitical calculus that covers China and Russia. "In these circumstances, it makes perfect sense for Pakistan to shift its foreign policy focus toward China and Russia," it observed.

China, it said, will continue its economic support to Pakistan, which is its prime partner. China sees Pakistan as a prime partner "under the Belt and Road initiative, with land and sea projects worth billions of dollars (known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) under construction," it observed.

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