

# PAKISTAN HAS NOT USED ITS GEOGRAPHICAL ADVANTAGE TO BECOME A TRADING NATION

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Pakistan

A highly regarded senior ex-police officer of Pakistan, Tariq Khosa, writing in Dawn in July 2018 ('The Mess We're In') stated: "First, Pakistan must stop harbouring a massive insecurity complex. As a nuclear state with the world's sixth-largest army, we should be confident and end our garrison-state mentality and constant worrying about survival. Rather, we should be a trading nation that takes advantage of its geographic location for economic prosperity. Second, there is no doubt in my mind that the relevant stakeholders in the state security establishment have finally undertaken to end support for erstwhile militant jihadi groups that was given on account of some strategic compulsions that are counterproductive in the present milieu."

Not long ago there was talk of India and Pakistan cooperating economically to facilitate extra-regional connectivity. An Iranian pipeline was poised to cross into Pakistan for onward connection with India and another gas pipeline from Tajikistan was also destined to reach India through Pakistan. India had requested Pakistan to allow it to ply its trade with Afghanistan through a road-link in Pakistan. But invariably Pakistan's "strategic" inclination was negative, based on the fear of domination and its anti-status quo thinking vis-à-vis Kashmir. Add to that the disturbance in Afghanistan which led to America's longest war embroiling Pakistan in international terrorism, and you have the current scenario of confrontation with an aggressive India asserting itself on the Line of Control and putting Pakistan under pressure.

Fighting wars with India, Pakistan has forgotten to look at itself as a strategically-located state — not for fighting wars, but for conducting trade. Such is the hostile environment in the region that this advantage has been converted into disadvantage. India has built a wall separating Pakistan from itself and Pakistan is currently in the process of wire-fencing its long western border with Afghanistan and Iran, the Durand Line. When you build walls instead of roads you can't progress economically and instead focus on fighting wars with unrealistic military budgets that affect the well-being of the population. The military paradigm has been made permanent by the acquisition of nuclear weapons in competition with India.

But Pakistan will soon become a trade artery for China through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Its status as a connection between China and the Gulf economies is quite clear but the lateral function of this road — in the east India and the west Afghanistan — is not clear although India trades with Afghanistan and Central Asia and would like to use Pakistan's territory to make this more viable. China, India's largest trading partner — \$94 billion both ways — has to use the roundabout route through Southeast Asia to transport its goods. Yet, Pakistan is on the verge of changing its identity from a war-fighting nation to a trading one. But if it continues to view India with fear, the new identity of a trading nation with a prosperous population will not be achieved.

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In October 2008, a World Bank official in Islamabad said the Bank was ready to lend Pakistan \$2.25 billion for a trade and energy corridor. He could have added the Iranian-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline to the above "projects of peace" but for the complex tripartite negotiations going on about the IPI. But a much more important thing happened during President Asif Ali Zardari's meeting with the Indian Prime Minister [Manmohan Singh](#), in New York in 2012. The report said: "The two met on the sidelines of the 63rd United Nations' General Assembly session and

announced mutual agreement on a number of vital business-related issues. On top of everything else came Pakistan's agreement to allow Indians an overland access to Afghanistan."

Pakistan and India have missed many opportunities to become "normal" neighbours. Unlike India's praiseworthy option of trading with China which it considered a rival, Pakistan never traded with India which led to much smuggling that benefited no one in Pakistan. Recently, after the Pulwama incident, it stopped even the border trade with India that caused untold hardship to the Pakistani population in Sindh. Clearly, India and Pakistan — as nuclear powers — must opt for normalisation through trade and trade routes to make South Asia a prosperous region.

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