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## BRICS was no victory for India: Why China won't break ties with Pakistan

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The challenge is to enable Islamabad to make a soft-landing rather than a crash that can have unpredictable consequences.



Youyi Bridge that links Pakistan and China

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After hitting Islamabad on the head with the BRICS declaration that named two outfits based in Pakistan for fomenting violence in the region, Beijing is now applying soothing balm on its “good brother and ironclad friend” by saying that it has fought the good fight against terrorism.

The Chinese aim, as indeed the US goal, is to gently nudge Pakistan in the direction of abandoning support for its proxies which include not just the Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba, but the Taliban, which in turn shelters the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the East Turkestan Islamic Movement.

## No victory for India

Unlike India, which has an adversarial attitude and is happiest when Islamabad is humiliated, China and the US see considerable value in retaining good ties with Pakistan.

People in India who saw the BRICS declaration as some kind of victory for Indian diplomacy are delusional. China, as the host country, drafted the declaration and did so with its eyes open.

After all, China has been party to UN actions to proscribe the LeT and JeM in the past. It needs to be recalled, too, that the context of the statement was in relation to Afghanistan.

China would hardly abandon Pakistan at this stage. It has invested a great deal of treasure and goodwill in the half-century to use Pakistan to offset Indian primacy in the South Asian region. Now, Islamabad has become an even more important prop for its ambitious Belt Road Initiative, both as a means of providing blockade-free access to oil from the Persian Gulf, as well as a platform to reach out to the rich Gulf region for trade and investment.

Checking militants, be they the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, or the ISIS, is also important for the security of China's Belt Road ambitions.

Pakistan probably knows what it needs to do. It has, after all, suffered enormously from the blowback of its support to jihadi terrorists. According to the authoritative South Asia Terrorism Portal, Pakistan has suffered a loss of 21,900 civilians and 6,813 security forces personnel in fighting terrorism since 2003.

In comparison, a much larger India has lost 24,983 civilians and 10,000 security force personnel since 1994. A great deal of terrorist violence in India was, of course, fostered by Pakistan-based groups, or those who were financed and sheltered by the Pakistani state.

## Pakistan suffered too

The challenge, as Islamabad's friends, the US and China, realise is to get Pakistan to work against its baser instincts. These arise primarily from its kneejerk attitude towards India. Islamabad is happy cutting its own nose to spite its face, when it comes to dealing with New Delhi.

This is the time when India has to decide whether it wants to gloat over Pakistan's difficulties, or, in its own interests, become part of the process which will, if handled well, not only transform Pakistan, but the region.

India's challenge, which it has miserably failed in meeting, is to break the Sino-Pakistan alliance. The problem is that its approach has been incorrect. Instead of enhancing India's equities in both countries and then dealing with them from a position of strength, New Delhi has been content to deal with the issue in a securitised framework which emphasises military responses over economic.

## Wrong approach

A major reason for this is that Pakistan becomes fodder for the electoral process. Bashing Islamabad has played well for the BJP going back to Modi's "Mian Musharraf" days in Gujarat. Now, all that we seem to

have in the menu are “surgical” strikes and more “surgical” strikes.

The second reason is that many in the establishment simply cannot stomach the idea of an India-Pakistan reconciliation. Revenge seems to be the overriding emotion, rather than a pragmatic approach which would argue that India’s interests are served better by encouraging Islamabad’s transformation with the help of China and the US, rather than in the schadenfreude of seeing Pakistan squirm in being pinned down on the issue of terrorism.

Let us be clear about one thing. Pakistan is not about to go away from our neighbourhood. The hardliners can seek perpetual confrontation which will not get them what they want — wiping Pakistan from the face of the earth.

It is a large, nuclear armed state and India’s military options are very, very narrow, especially since it has powerful friends in China and the US. All the braggadocio about two-front wars, is essentially self-defeating bluster. It is also a volatile polity.

The challenge is to enable Pakistan to make a soft-landing rather than a crash that can have unpredictable consequences.

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