

Sino-Indian Rapprochement and The Sino-Pakistan Relationship in Early 21st Century

Dr. D. Chandra Mouli Reddy

Asst. Professor, Department of Political Science & Public Administration, S.K.University, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract

China's 'all weather' relationship with Pakistan, an adversary of India in South Asia has been impinging on the Sino-Indian Rapprochement. It is essential to make a critical analysis of the Pakistani factor in Sino-Indian relationship because international system is profoundly permeated by the linkage phenomena and the relations between any two States are never determined by their bilateral relations exclusively. Sino-Indian relations can be better understood only within the broad framework of these national-international relations. The Sino-Pakistani security and strategic nexus have remained a central issue in India-China relations ever since Beijing and Islamabad signed a historic border agreement in March 1963. The signing of the border agreement in 1963 and also the opening of the Karakoram Highway in February 1971, led to the foundation of a lasting relationship between the two. It continues to persist even to this day and has continued to grow stronger by day. This research study tries to analyse if the efforts made for Sino-Indian Rapprochement has in any loosed the bonds of relationship between China and Pakistan or it has no effect virtually on their relationship.

Key words: Kashmir tangle, Sino-Indian war 1962, Bandung conference, Pressler Amendment, Simla Agreement, Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)

Introduction

Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in December 1988 marked a watershed in the relations between the two Asian giants. It was only after his visit that Sino-Indian relations became more cordial than at any other time since the 1962–conflict. However, China's 'all weather' relationship with Pakistan, an adversary of India in South Asia has been impinging on the Sino-Indian Rapprochement. It is essential to make a critical analysis of the Pakistani factor in Sino-Indian relationship because international system is profoundly permeated by the linkage phenomena and the relations between any two States are never determined by their bilateral relations exclusively. State 'A's policy towards State 'B' is invariably conditioned by A's perception of the global strategic environment in terms of its own perceived national interest and vice-versa.¹ Sino-Indian relations can be better understood only within the broad framework of these national-international relations.

The Sino-Pakistani security and strategic nexus have remained a central issue in India-China relations ever since Beijing and Islamabad signed a historic border agreement in March 1963. The signing of the border agreement in 1963 and also the opening of the Karakoram Highway in February 1971, led to the foundation of a lasting relationship between the two.²

Logically, the dilution of the Sino-Pak link could provide an impetus to the improvement of Sino-Indian relations. The important questions that needed attention are: what is the effect of Sino-Indian rapprochement on Sino-Pak relations? Did the improved Sino-Indian relations lead to the weakening of Sino-Pak friendship?

The crux of the argument here is that there isn't any substantial shift in the Sino-Pak relations. While Beijing modified its pro-Pakistan position on the sensitive Kashmir issue and while Beijing's traditional amity with Pakistan has been offset by new elements of co-operation in Sino-Indian relations, the

underlying strategic rationale and component of the Sino-Pakistan Entente remains unchanged. The strained relations between India and Pakistan drove the latter to west initially and subsequently to China as Sino-Indian relations deteriorated and resulted in Sino-Indian War of 1962. Pakistan's geopolitical importance, its historical enmity with India and geographical proximity of Kashmir to India-China boundary brought Pakistan into the centre-stage of China's South Asian policy. Pakistan sought Chinese help to establish a stable supply of military hardware to contain its powerful neighbour from its perceived threat of aggression and to wrest Kashmir from it. It became even more imperative to Pakistan to seek Chinese help because of the American failure to come to its help in the 1965 and 1971 wars with India.³ On the other hand, the Chinese hoped that closer co-operation with Islamabad would serve as a bridge to other Muslim countries especially in the Middle-East. All along Sino-Pak relations have been inversely proportional to the state of Sino-Indian relations.⁴

In the period between 1949-60, while India and China were caught in their "Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai" syndrome, Sino-Pak relations although established had no military content and only economic and political understanding was reached. In the 1950s, there was a reorientation of both Sino-Indian-Pakistan and Sino-Soviet relations. While the Soviets by 1955 had begun to cultivate India, Pakistan began to move towards China. It is important to note that at Bandung conference in 1955, both China and Pakistan established good rapport with each other despite the fact that Pakistan was a member of SEATO and CENTO. Pakistan seemed to have assured China at the conference that though it was a member of U.S. led military alliances it was not against China and that it entertained no fear that China would commit aggression against it. While, both the Sino-Soviet and Sino-Indian relations have undergone a sea change, the Sino-Pak relations for the most part have been static except for two brief phases during President Ayub's time in 1958, when Ayub at first showed greater tilt towards U.S. and criticized China.⁵ Even at a later date, President Zia-ul-Huq took reins into his hands by deposing China's favourite Pakistani politician Bhutto.⁶ When India and China clashed in 1962, Pakistan's reaction was to suggest that India was the aggressor. With the moral support given by Pakistan to China during the Sino-Indian war, the bonds of friendship between them thickened. It even led to border agreement between the two in March 1963, which led Pakistan to cede to China large chunks of territory in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. Pakistan had the political acumen to eliminate a source of potential friction with China and win a reliable friend and at the same time could counterbalance the Soviet sympathy for India on Kashmir issue.⁷

In exchange for the ceded territory in Pakistan occupied Kashmir, Pakistan appeared to have obtained a guarantee of military assistance from China in case of war with India. Prime Minister Bhutto announced in the Pakistan National Assembly that the war between India and Pakistan would involve the territorial integrity and security of the largest State in Asia.⁸ China also gained by its relationship with Pakistan because Pakistan could provide the breach in an area of hostile powers surrounding China an ally that could prevent the consolidation of Soviet power in an area of vulnerability.⁹

It is imperative to state here that the Sino-Pak relations have been rather peculiar. The peculiarity of the relationship is that they were allies and at the same time they were in camps which were mutually antagonistic to one another. This anomalous relationship can be explained by the fact that Pakistan did not join the U.S. led military alliances namely SEATO and CENTO to serve the aims for which they were established i.e., to contain communism, but to further its own interest of checkmating India. As it found that China too was preoccupied with the same objective, it extended its hand of friendship to China. The same was acknowledged by Pakistan when its Prime Minister Mohammed Ali told Chinese premier Zhou-Eu-Lai at Bandung conference that Pakistan's membership of SEATO was not directed at China¹⁰ and that it would not fight alongside the United States in any war against China.

During the Indo-Pak war of 1965, though China did not help Pakistan militarily it extended all the moral support that was necessary to boost the morale of Pakistan. It issued a note of protest to New Delhi demanding that it dismantle all aggressive military structures on the China-Sikkim border, withdraw its armed forces and stop all its acts of aggression and provocation against China in the Western, Middle and Eastern sectors of Sino-Indian borders. **11** It warned that otherwise India must bear responsibility for all the consequences arising there from. The ultimatum had the desired result. The Indian armed forces were tied down in Eastern sector and could not pursue the war with Pakistan with all its vigour.

After the war of 1965, China increased its military cum economic assistance to Pakistan. For the period between 1960-70, it even granted aid worth \$ 106.4 million. Later it also followed a systematic policy of extending technical and economic assistance to the defence related fields, which began with the Chinese decision to build the heavy machinery complex at Taxila.**12**

The fag end of 60s saw the evolution of U.S. — China — Pakistan axis to contain Russia mainly and along with it India, its ally in South Asia. The newly elected American President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger believed in the policy of rapprochement with China. Kissinger's secret trips to Beijing via Pakistan in the middle of 1971 followed by Nixon — Kissinger visit at the end of the year gave concrete shape to Washington's new China policy.**13** Pakistan having arranged the secret trip of Kissinger to Beijing, won the gratitude of both U.S. and China. At the time of Bangladesh crisis, the triangular axis between Washington, Beijing and Islamabad appeared to be in the offing, posing a direct threat to India's security.

Notwithstanding the fact that China did not involve militarily in the 1971 Bangladesh conflict on behalf of Pakistan, the relationship between the two countries stood in good stead. Between 1971 and 1975 Pakistan acquired arms worth \$ 1.28 billion of which the U.S. share was only 5 per cent.**14** As the Pakistani dependence on U.S. arms reduced after the 1971 war, the Chinese began participating in military collaboration and technology transfers to Pakistan.

The 1980s have seen remarkable developments, both in international arena and in Asia, which altered sub-continental politics. With the coming of Gorbochev to power in Russia, there has been relaxation of tension in the Super Power relations. In Asia, the Soviets facilitated the establishment of peace and tranquillity by withdrawing from Afghanistan and normalizing Sino-Soviet relations. During the same time, China and India too were trying to establish better rapport with each other. These coupled with China's internal economic problems and relaxed atmosphere both in Asia and world at large made China to encourage Pakistan to mend fences with India

There has been some shift in China's policy towards Pakistan since early 90s especially with regard to Kashmir issue. The arms support however continued on the same pace.

China's Support for Pakistan over Kashmir:

Changes in China's support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue are one measure of the impact of Sino-Indian rapprochement on the Sino-Pak relationship. Improvements in Sino-Indian relations led to a weakening of China's endorsement of Pakistan on this key issue.

Kashmir has been the crux of Indo-Pakistan conflict since 1947. From Pakistani perspective the essence of the Kashmir problem is that India has denied the people of Indian occupied Kashmir the right of self-determination as has been provided by the United Nations Resolutions of 1948 and 1949 on Kashmir. India's stand is that Kashmir issue was settled in 1954, when the Constituent Assembly of Kashmir voted

for accession to India thereby exercising the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination. India further contends that if there is a problem over Kashmir the issue must be solved through bilateral negotiations as has been envisaged by the Simla Agreement of 1972. In India's view, the Simla Agreement supersedes earlier U.N. Resolutions on Kashmir and precludes efforts by Pakistan to internationalise the Kashmir issue. Pakistan contends that the Simla Agreement in no way supersedes the United Nations Resolutions on Kashmir or limits Pakistan's right to avail itself of various international mechanisms to resolve disputes especially through appeal to the United Nations under the U.N. Charter and various U.N. Resolutions. In this context, references to self-determination or to U.N. Resolutions constitute support for Pakistan while references to strictly bilateral efforts to resolve the Kashmir problem indicate support for India.

Kashmir had long been the touchstone around which the Soviet Union and China have oriented themselves regarding the India-Pakistan confrontation. While Moscow came down squarely on India's side on the Kashmir issue in 1955, China sided with Pakistan in 1964. The Joint Communiqué signed during Zhou Enlai's February 1964 visit to Pakistan "expressed the hope that the Kashmir dispute would be resolved in accordance with the wishes of the people of Kashmir as pledged to them by the people of India and Pakistan."¹⁵ This was an elliptical reference to the Kashmiri people's right to self-determination and to the U.N Resolutions of 1948 and 1949.

This has been the Chinese stand over Kashmir during 60s and 70s. In June 1980, Deng Xiaoping stated that the Kashmir issue was a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan and that it should be resolved peacefully. This stand was reiterated in December 1980 when Pakistani Foreign Minister Agha Shani visited Beijing. The Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua on his visit to Pakistan stated that China "appreciated Pakistan's efforts to seek a just settlement of the Kashmir issue in the spirit of the Simla Agreement and in accordance with the relevant U N Resolutions."¹⁶ By mentioning both the Simla Accord and the U.N. Resolutions, Beijing straddled both the Pakistan and Indian positions. After 1980, Chinese officials no longer made a conspicuous mention of the Kashmiri people's right of self determination as they had done consistently during the 1960s and 1970s. However, such an endorsement of the Pakistani stand was still implicit in references to "relevant United Nations Resolutions". Thus while China's post-1980 position on Kashmir was substantially more neutral than before there remained a subtle but perceptible pro-Pakistan slant.

War clouds thickened between India and Pakistan in 1990. India's strategy was to increase military pressure on Pakistan so that it suspends support to Kashmiri and Punjabi militants. Pakistan denied supporting the Kashmiri militants and refused to repress demonstrations of sympathy within Pakistan for the Kashmiris. It even responded by launching its largest ever peace time military exercise on Indian borders. ¹⁷ Tempers ran high on both sides and both countries traded protests.

Most Chinese statements during the 1990 Kashmir crisis simply called for peace. In fact during this time, China's status on Kashmir tilted a little towards India's position. It spoke of settling the Kashmir issue peacefully through bilateral negotiations. Pakistan was angry with Beijing's stand as it supported India's stand and as a result China changed its stand and mentioned about U.N. Resolutions on Kashmir in its subsequent statements. When India expressed its displeasure on the Chinese stand and said that if healthy relationship was to be established, China should stop supporting Pakistan, China got the message and stopped doing it subsequently. It only referred to "consultations" to resolve the crisis.

In early May, 1990 the National People's Congress Chairman Wan Li travelled to Islamabad for consultations. He wanted to assuage the feelings of Pakistan. The differences between them over the

Kashmir issue were quite manifest when their speeches were juxtaposed. While Pakistan praised the Pakistan-China bond and referred to Pakistan's support of the struggle of the Kashmiri people for self-determination, China made no mention of the U.N. or its resolutions. Instead it said that China appreciated Pakistan's willingness to solve the problem through negotiations. China also advised Pakistan against efforts to bring the Kashmir issue before U N. because the international community does not have interest in it. China's primary concern was to avoid a conflict between India and China and to this end it had encouraged a friendly and healthy relationship between the two.

China's support to Pakistan over Kashmir continued to be neutral under the impact of Sino-Indian rapprochement. In December 1996, during the Chinese President Jiang Zemin's visit to India and Pakistan, China explicitly expressed support for the Indian position of addressing India-Pakistan disputes through bilateral consultations and negotiations. The same stand was reiterated by China during the Kargil crisis of 1999. President Jiang Zemin drawing attention to the China's all-weather friendship with Pakistan categorically told that it would not lend support to Islamabad's efforts to raise the Kashmir issue in the U N. Security Council.

After analyzing the changing stance of China over Kashmir, one may conclude that Pakistani leaders were unhappy with China's stance. The fact however is that Pakistan always saw China to be a trusted friend who can be counted upon in times of emergency. They appreciated the fact that China under compelling conditions was mincing words to placate India.

China's Support for Pakistan's Comprehensive National Security:

India drew a lot of solace and comfort from the Chinese stance on Kashmir issue. However this was offset by the mammoth support lend by China to Pakistan to bolster its national security by supplying conventional arms and nuclear and missile technology. This is another yardstick to measure the impact of Sino-Indian rapprochement on Sino-Pak friendship.

The close military ties that developed between China and Pakistan during the 1960s have been a major source of friction between India and China. From Indian perspective the Sino-Pakistan military relationship confronts India with a two-front threat. It also believes that the unholy nexus is basically anti-India. It also blames the Sino-Pakistan military link for drawing extra-regional powers into South Asia. From New Delhi's view, the Sino-Pak link has not only drawn China but also the Soviet Union and United States into South Asia and led to further militarization and great power rivalry in the region.

The military nexus between the two developed after the Sino-Pak border agreement of 1963 where China promised Pakistan of military assistance. After the Indo-Pak war of 1965, China increased its military-cum-economic assistance to Pakistan.¹⁸ It followed a systematic policy of giving technical and economic assistance to the defence related fields which began with the Chinese decision to build the Heavy Machinery Complex at Taxila in 1966.

After the 1971 war, China replaced the U.S.A as the major source of arms supply to Pakistan. Between 1971 and 1975 Pakistan acquired arms worth \$ 1.28 billion of which the U.S. share was only 5 per cent.¹⁹ As the Pakistan dependence on U.S. arms reduced after the 1971 war, the Chinese began participating in the military collaboration and technology transfers. It was mainly for three reasons:

- (i) Military collaboration would allow development of greater links with Pakistan.
- (ii) The arms supply to Pakistan could become a show case for potential exports to the Third World countries.

(iii) It would help Chinese subsidize its own R&D programme.

In 1980s too, the Chinese arms sales to Pakistan continued along with supply of nuclear and missile technology. Between 1986 and 1988 China delivered 90 A.S.Fantom fighters and 60 F. T. Fighters to Pakistan. In 1987, Pakistan ordered another 150 F-7 fighters.²⁰ F-7s were the modernized version of MIG-21, the main work horse of Indian Air Force. China also agreed to help Pakistan modernize its tank force and it supplied Pakistan with 825 T-59 tanks between 1978 and 1988.²¹ In June 1990, the North China Industries Corporation (NORINCO) and the Pakistan Defence Ministry signed an agreement regarding the joint design and development of a new tank to be Pakistan's main battle tank in the 21 st century. It is to be a state of the art weapon with increased mobility, lethality and survival.²²

China's assistance to Pakistan's defence related heavy industry also remained large and diversified. During the late 1980s, China assisted the development of an aeronautical complex at Kamra, a light aircraft manufacturing factory, the Pakistan Machine Tool factory, the Karachi Shipyard and Engineering Works and three research and development laboratories involved in propulsion ballisters and aerodynamics.

China and Pakistan might have failed to sign a nuclear deal during President Musharaff's visit to Beijing in the first week of November 2003. But there is little evidence to indicate that their co-operation in that area is in trouble. In fact, Pakistan hoped to materialize the deal during the Chinese President Hu Jintao's next visit to Pakistan.²³

Since the fag end of 1980s Pakistan has been making rapid strides in missile technology. Pakistan is grateful to China for the solid support it got from China on that count. It has played a crucial role in Pakistan's guided and ballistic missile programs. In addition to whole missiles, Beijing has provided technology to facilitate Pakistan's indigenization of these weapon systems. It has also supported Pakistan in developing missiles capable of carrying nuclear war heads

In 1988, the two signed an agreement to cooperate in Pakistan's acquisition of the long range M-11 missiles. Under the agreement it accepted to train Pakistanis in the operation of M-11, transfer necessary equipment and technology to Pakistan. In 1995, 30 complete M-11 missiles were delivered to Pakistan. During Lipeng's visit to Pakistan in November 1989 four agreements were signed with Pakistan. One among them was an agreement which dealt with Chinese assistance to Pakistan's rocket development program. In February and May 1989, Pakistan tested 80 and 300 kilometer-range surface-to-air missiles. New Delhi reacted strongly to both tests.

In the same year, two weeks after Lipeng's visit, Lt. General Ding Hauggao, head of China's State Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defence signed a memorandum of understanding in Islamabad covering stepped-up joint procurement, research and development in the national defence industry over a ten-year period. In subsequent years, China also supplied Pakistan with the medium range M-9 missiles and the intermediate range M-18 missiles as well as ring magnets for nuclear weapons program.

Pakistan tested its nuclear capable medium range, Shaheen ballistic missile a replica of M-9, in early October 2002. India got provoked and levelled accusations against China for indulging in missile technology proliferation. It accused China of assisting and abetting Pakistan in the fabrication of Shaheen and Gauri missiles. When Pakistan came in the firing line following revelations in the U.S. media about the missile for nuclear barter deal with North Korea, New Delhi argued that blame should be put on China for making Pakistan, a nuclear weapons State.

Chinese President Hu Jintao visited India and Pakistan in fourth week of November 2006. Nuclear Energy and Free Trade Area agreement for Pakistan and better relations with India through a series of bilateral agreements were on the cards. Beijing had taken pains to impress both the countries that it values its relations with both the countries and that the visit to one country should not be taken amiss by the other. During his four day visit to India from 20 Nov. 2006, India and China signed thirteen agreements on a wide swathe of subjects. However, the nuclear issue proved to be an irritant. New Delhi had lobbied hard for China's support to Indo-U.S nuclear agreement. It had asked China to champion its cause in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and sought to delink the NSG clearance from the India-U.S civilian nuclear energy agreement as it has excellent non-proliferation record. China's position is that it will not allow any amendment to the NSG rules that will dilute the non-proliferation regime, but was willing to consider whatever was feasible. Moreover it made it abundantly clear to the Indian side that the issue could not be discussed bilaterally but would have to come up at the full table of NSG for final consideration.²⁴

Sino-Pak Entente seems to be casting its shadow on Indo-U.S. nuclear agreement. Pakistan is leaving no stone unturned to counter it through good offices of China

After visiting India, the Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Pakistan. The three day visit of the Chinese leader has served to reinforce its long standing friendship with Pakistan and to convey that Beijing's new alliances — possibly a reference to its friendship with India, are not at the expense of its ties with Islamabad. President Hu had assured Pakistan that unlike the United States in the restructuring and realignment of Asian geopolitics, China will not exclude Pakistan and it in fact expressed its desire to raise the strategic partnership between the two countries to new levels.²⁵

Pakistan is conscious about the massive improvement in ties between India and China. It is however not worried that it will cast its negative influence on Sino-Pak friendship. The visit had provided the necessary reassurance to Pakistan that its ties with China were unique and would continue to remain that way. As a mark of enduring relationship, China and Pakistan signed 18 agreements, the most important of which are Free Trade Area agreement and a five year economic co-operation plan. Also significant is a memorandum of understanding for long term collaboration in the development of air borne warning and control systems. The much hyped new civilian nuclear cooperation agreement for Chinese assistance to Pakistan in building additional six new nuclear reactors was not announced. This, however, did not dishearten Pakistan. It drew solace from Mr. Hu's statement that nuclear energy cooperation would continue which by itself indicates that the strategic relationship between the two was going to continue.

According to Farkhan Bokhari, the Pakistan based correspondent of the 'Financial Times', who was among the first to disclose last year that the two countries were negotiating to set up more reactors in Pakistan, "Rather than announce a comprehensive package for nuclear energy co-operation with Pakistan that may attract lot of international attention, it was more likely that China was looking at a piece-by-piece deal. ²⁶ In brief, China's assistance to Pakistan's national development efforts remained quite substantial. Many of these efforts culminated in bolstering the military capabilities of Pakistan, nuclear and otherwise. These created a lot of discomfort in New Delhi. Beijing was cognizant of these difficulties and tried to address them. Most of the times, Chinese foreign ministry officials briefed Indian Embassy officials at Beijing on military exchanges with Pakistan in an effort to develop a mechanism to exchange information regarding interactions between China and India's South Asian neighbours, thereby minimizing misunderstanding. China wants to assure New Delhi of the defensive intent of its military relations with India's neighbours, thus maximizing chances that China will be able to improve relations with India without sacrificing its close relations with Pakistan.

Conclusion:

China's primary concern in South Asia has been to maintain a balance of power favourable to itself. This basically means continuation of Pakistan, its ally in South Asia as a force to be reckoned with, independent of India hegemony in South Asia and confronting India's defence planners with likelihood of Pakistani entry into a major war between China and India. A strong independent Pakistan will confront India with a two-front threat, forcing India to tie down some of its forces along Pakistan border instead of amassing all its military muscle along Sino-Indian border. Moreover handing over of South Asian region to India also does not augur well for Chinese interests. If it abjures military links with the countries of the region, it will stunt its role and stature as a leading power of Asia and limit its role to only East and South Asia. The best way of preventing India to become a regional power of South Asia was to prop up Pakistan which could resist India's attempt to become a big brother of South Asia.

Because of the strong sense of national interests that are tied up with its friendship with Pakistan, China's new found friendship with India is not going to become a zero sum game for Sino-Pak relations. The relationship between China and Pakistan have now become more complex, subdued and more subtle in order to allow China to proceed with its rapprochement with India. This was manifest in the Kashmir crisis of 1990 when China refused to internationalise the Kashmir issue at the behest of Pakistan but however lent its deterrent support for Pakistan during the crisis.

China's continuing close military ties with Pakistan, leads credence to the view that China has no intention to sacrifice Pakistan at the altar of India. Beijing would like to cultivate friendship with India without impairing its 'all weather friendship' with Pakistan, its old ally. Beijing lauds and encourages efforts to improve Indian-Pakistan relationship primarily for two reasons; firstly, it knows that Indo-Pak conflict will present it with difficult choices between the two sub-continental powers. However, if forced to choose, Beijing would not sacrifice Islamabad. Secondly, China is focusing all its attention on becoming an economic and military power and it does not want to get its attention distracted because of Indo-Pak conflict. Moreover, China wants to be recognized as a big power in Asia. Its claims of being one will not be recognized if it can't contain military flare ups in its neighbourhood.

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