

Pakistan Factor in India-China Relations : An Overview

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India's suspicions of China's relations with Pakistan, over last 68 years, are more than justified. In fact propping-up of Pakistan against India is a 'low cost option' for India's containment which serves China's long term geo-strategic interest. China considered India as an obstacle in her intention to expand boundary. China wants India staying-up in her surrounding. Her intention is to remain India grounded in south Asia. India's Pak centric obsession gives china a greater freedom of action in Asia and helps her in achieving strategic aims better without any competition from India. China believes it is a big power and in foreign relations particularly in Asia, it behaves as such. China knows that Pakistan can be used against India.

Understanding well the geopolitical realities of the post-Cold War world, China and India adopted a reconciling attitude towards each other in order to seek out a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship. The two neighbours, amidst the rivalry and disagreement on a number of issues, moved towards normalization to achieve their long-term goals of socio-economic development. The changing dynamics of Sino-Indian relations have caused serious concerns regarding the status and future of China-Pakistan strategic relationship. In this context there are certain questions and apprehensions, which need to be answered.

As far as Pakistan factor in Sino-Indian relations is concerned, it is quite evident that despite all the pressure posed by external factors, friendly relations with each other remain cornerstone of both countries' foreign policies. Despite the fact that in the Post-Cold War era, Pakistan-China relations did undergo a slight shift, but the overall content and strategic relevance has not been affected. Reason being the geopolitical significance of Pakistan for China is hard to be ignored for anyone. Pakistan's friendship with China has been termed as "higher than the Himalayas and deeper than

the oceans.” It was in fact the deterioration in Sino-Indian relations following the 1962 war that Pakistan and China came closer to forge common strategic understanding.¹

The American and Soviet aid to India during the war, made China realize Pakistan’s significance in counterbalancing the regional and global power configurations. Realizing Pakistan’s geo-political importance and its historic enmity with India, China sought to cultivate and consolidate its friendly ties with Pakistan to balance off New Delhi. Moreover, the geographical proximity of Kashmir to the disputed India-China boundary has brought Pakistan into the strategic centre stage of China’s South Asia policy. With this started a steady phase of Pakistan-China friendship.²

As regards the implications of Sino-Indian rapprochement for Pakistan, Pakistan being a mature member of the comity of nations, believes that improving Sino-Indian relations would be conducive for achieving the goal of establishing regional peace and stability, and it would open new avenues of cooperation for all the South Asian countries. However, at the same time, looking at the antagonistic attitude of India towards her throughout, Pakistan has its own concerns. Some analysts have opined that the growing Sino- Indian relationship would shift the balance of power in Asia and this may raise serious concerns for Pakistan. Now the question arises that how would Pakistan figure in this configuration of growing India-China relations and will this weaken Pakistan’s traditional links with China?

Different people analyse it differently. One view is that over the long term, a growing Sino-Indian relationship would inevitably have an effect on the Pakistan-China ties. The other more dominant view is that the improvement in Sino-Indian relations cannot overwhelm the geopolitical value of Pakistan to China, as a local balancer against India, a gateway to the Islamic world, and a valuable partner in a volatile region where China has many strategic interests.³

Despite the fact that India continues to raise serious concerns over China-Pakistan relations, China has maintained convivial relations with Pakistan. Cooperation between Pakistan and China continues to deepen day by day. Both have a commonality of views on international and regional issues. They are committed to combat all forms and manifestation of

terrorism and to adopt comprehensive measures. They are committed to cooperate and coordinate to work especially at the United Nations and in other multilateral area to promote global peace, stability and for the just resolution of conflicts and disputes in various parts of the world.⁴

Pakistan is quite confident that China, its all-weather friend, will never further relations with India at the expense of its traditional friendship with Pakistan. In this regard, the Prime Minister of China-Wen Jiabao, while addressing the parliament of Pakistan in 11th December 2010, had said that “the steadfastness of the pine tree is shown in the frigid winter; the strength of the horse is tested in a long journey”. Pakistan and China no doubt enjoy the friendly and cordial relations. Throughout the decades of their “all weather and time tested friendship”, they almost have lived up to their expectations. The Chinese help, encouragement and support: security, economic, technological, human, infrastructure development, etc. have all along been worthy of praise.⁵

Pakistan holds immense geo-strategic significance for China. Pakistan is situated at the cross road of three regions that are South, Central and West Asia and the Middle East. It provides a secure access to Gwadar which is route to Persian Gulf and Central Asia. It provides the shortest route to Chinese goods through Gawadar, Port Qasim, and Indus highway and KKH providing an easy trade access to Central and Western Asia. The Gawadar deep sea port is situated in Pakistan’s Baluchistan. It is being considered as the 3rd deepest sea port in the world. The strategic and economic importance of the port has attracted the attention of the great powers of the region. Moreover, it holds a centre stage in fishing and industrialization purpose for the indigenous people of Baluchistan. No doubt, it is capable to carry out and handle international shipping vessels, and entails big potential to transfer oil from one place to another. It links itself with the strategic choke point of the Gulf of Oman, Straits of Hormuz, Central Asian countries (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan), Afghanistan and Middle East.⁶

There are three major stakeholders of this deep sea port: P.S.A (Port of Singapore Authority), N.L.C (National Logistic Cell), and A.K.D (Group of Karachi). Pakistan had made contract with PSA in order to manage

the Gawadar port for about 40 years. Notwithstanding, the management of the port could remain even a decade for one reason or the other.

The regional players are taking keen interest in the development of the Gawadar deep sea port. China the emerging economic power is too much interested in developing this port. China is investing 80% on development of the port. Even it is ready to take risks in this part of the volatile region. In 2002, Gawadar port was inaugurated by China. The development of the Gawadar port is considered to be instrumental in the PakChina friendship. According to analysts, Indians believe that China is having the similar interest like developing the String of Pearls Policy in the region. The Indian Express, while quoting Wang Shida, a profound scholar at the Beijing-based ICIR (Institute of Contemporary International Relations), said that that the Gawadar port is expected to be instrumental in the development of economies on both the sides.

It offers win-win advantages for China and Pakistan. Thus, he believes that Pakistan will reap fruits of the Chinese mega project and act like a catalyst for exports from Pakistan. For China, the expert said, that it will enable China to import oil from the Middle East in cheaper terms.

Broadly speaking, the Chinese interests and objectives are to extend its networking either through railway or roads in South Asian region. They intend to import oil and timber through this port. It will also be beneficial for the Chinese to import and export not only from Afghanistan but also from Central Asian countries. Chinese engineers are going to develop an airport in the vicinity of Gawadar and Dry port near the Pakistan-China border. The port of Karachi and other sources of supply like Gulf Sea, by Chinese are going to be risky, costly and lengthy. While comparing Pakistan's Gawader port with Iraninan Chahbahar port, Pakistani expert, Abdul Qayyum Kundi, opined that the port of Gawader invariably offers more strategic and economic dividends to China than Chahbahar.⁸

In addition to that, the Chinese fear for its supplies pass through the Straits of Malacca and this part of the region is under the American influence. However, the Gawadar provides China with easy access, safer, cheaper and shorter route to the West of China. After the development of the Gawadar port, China will be able to influence in the Middle East. Similarly,

with the rise of China and development of a deep sea port, Pakistan will reap its fruits. Pakistan will remain to be the hub of economic activities in this region. For Pakistan lacks technology and strategy to explore and attract foreign direct investment, the Chinese cooperation and partnership will leave a great impact, not only on Pakistan economy, but also image and stability. They both can fight and neutralize the forces of anti-development in this region.

The early 1970s saw numerous changes in geopolitical dynamics of Sino-Pak relations. Among the major changes, change of leadership in China was prominent. The policies and approaches of the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping were largely aimed at economic development. They gave top priority to the economic development. The desire for development rendered them to keep themselves away from the spirit of nationalism and nationalistic tendencies.

They opened up the doors of their economy to the outside world. Moreover, their focus was to normalize relations with other countries, specifically what they called it as near to or adjacent to the Chinese border. In the wake of this development, relations between China and Pakistan also subjected to these sweeping changes. The most important factors behind this change were: (a) The Republic of China, given the geopolitical changes, adopted neutrality not only towards the South Asian region but also towards IndiaPakistan disputes. (b) China's support and stand on certain issues: like Kashmir, also decreased. It only maintained that Kashmir issue has to resolve peacefully and in a friendly manner. (c) On many other issues, between India and China, China tone down, its support. It was obvious from the event of the Kargil crisis of 1999, and Indo-Pak military standoff in 2001-2, in which China remained almost neutral. (d) The changing Chinese attitude left an overwhelming impact upon the defence cooperation between Pakistan and China. It also abandoned support for Pakistan during its missile and nuclear program. However, open cooperation is going on even today. e) China started normalizing its relations with Pakistan's nuclear rival India since 1988.

It is believed that after the Cold War era, China has adopted a policy of neutrality over South Asian problems. Chinese changing foreign

policy, increasing economic and military ties with India reflects Chinese changing attitude. Chinese current trade with India is 15-billion dollars and it is expected to rise to 100-billion dollars. "In spite of these military and economic ties between India and china doesn't reflect the complete change of latter's policy towards Pakistan".⁹

The Chinese changing foreign policy was due to political and geoeconomic and security changing in the region. "China's decision to reach a rapprochement with India was, in no sense, an indication of its change of stance on the disputed territories rather that it was the by-product of the changing international political environment, this changing situation ushered in the new pattern of working between nation states. The debt crisis, changing global ideological climate of the unipolar world demanded the developing countries to engage with the outside world".¹⁰

The Chinese foreign policy change was mainly due to the end of the Cold War and the simultaneous disintegration of the USSR. It created a huge gap or vacuum. And this vacuum was filled by China. It followed the non-confrontationist and non-violent policy towards its neighbours. However, closer relations between India and China obviously show that strengthening ties between two powers were changing geopolitically, economically and security dynamics of the region.

The era of 1990's have seen the fact that the Kashmir's movement of self-determination has been subject to certain ill-forces, like: extremism, religious militancy etc. The Nine-Eleven acts changed the entire climate of the region. However, the changing scenario was not favourable to the people of Kashmir. Their right of self-determination was put into a cold storage. The legitimate freedom struggle of Kashmiri's got great set back and blow".¹¹ While giving interviews to the Indian journalist, in 1980, Deng Xiaoping had said: "Kashmir is a bilateral problem between Pakistan and Indi and it should be solved by both states in an amicable manner." The issue of Jammu and Kashmir has got a wide currency in the national and international level. It is the disputed part of the land. India as well as Pakistan has fought four wars. Almost 62 years have elapsed; Kashmir has been a bone of contention between both of the nuclear rival of Asia. This disputed territory has been since long time a nuclear flash point in the South Asian region.

China, before the Cold War, supported Pakistan's stand on Kashmir. But as the time went on, it maintained its policy of neutrality after the Post Cold War era. Now the Chinese leadership holds that Kashmir is a disputed territory between India and Pakistan, therefore they themselves have to solve it in a cordial manner. Keeping in view these developments, China is now very cautious about its future relationship with India and Pakistan. These developments aside, it is also believed that China is not going to shun its Pakistani card any time soon. It has made various agreements with Pakistan that is worth billions of dollars. Huge developments in energy, security, strategic ports and overall economic infrastructure of Pakistan are clear manifestations of Chinese commitments with Pakistan in future.¹²

Conclusion

To conclude, while China is maintaining relations with India without affecting its relationship with Pakistan, India, of late is trying to convince China to distant itself from Pakistan. At the moment, China and India are cooperating in a number of areas and are major trading partners. However, one should ignore the fact that despite sharing short to medium term economic interests, both India and China view each other as long term rivals. Since its second nuclear tests in 1998 and seeking American alliance, India has been quite vocal about this fact. It is projecting itself as a balancer to the rising influence of China and that China is its major military rival and threat. Those who are of the view that with the improvement of Sino-India relations, Pakistan will be affected as China will no more act as the balancer between the two, their view fails the test of scrutiny. Even during the initial phases of improvement of relations between China and India, Pakistan continued to receive high power delegates from China; it also received important military and civilian aid and hardware during this period. Since the turn of the new century, the strategic fault lines in Southern Asia and the larger Indian Ocean region have become crystal clear. India has made a choice and is open about it. India and China are rivals whether it is in the energy and resource sector, be it in Central Asia or Africa, in the Indian Ocean and Asia.

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