

# PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS IN 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## **Introduction**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States have changed the intercourse of international relations, and the US strategy of ousting Taliban with Pakistan's help has also introduced changes in South Asian region.

Pakistan joined American hands in the war against terrorism, therefore became one of the frontline allies of the United States in combating terrorism.

With this changing regional scenario how China and Pakistan resettled their bilateral relationship? Are the two states still very close allies? That is what I have tried to answer in my paper.

Pakistan and China relationship is considered as one of the strongest in the world. The relationship that often called 'deeper than the oceans, higher than the mountains'.<sup>1</sup> In April 2005 in a meeting with his Pakistani counterpart Khurshed Kasuri the Chinese foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said, "The only country in the world with which we describe our relationship as all weather friendship is Pakistan".<sup>2</sup>

## **Traditional China-Pakistan Relations**

Though Pakistan during the Korean War neither sent its military personnel to the UN command nor participated on the resolution designed to consider People's Republic of China as an aggressor in the war but China still relied on India as its main ally in the region and avoided alienating Pakistan despite the latter's participation in

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the US alliance system, but the 1960s altered the situation.

China in the early 1960s was facing big hostility from regional as well as from global powers. US was hostile to China in the context of Cold War while Soviet Union due to Beijing's refusal to accept Moscow's hegemony in the communist bloc. China also had a boundary dispute with India which caused military conflict in 1962. In the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War (1962), changing US policies towards the region, and a perceived fear of joint US and USSR encirclement, China saw Pakistan as the only reliable partner in South Asian region. Similarities of interests forced both countries to come close to each other and a bilateral relationship was established. A complex dominant bilateral relationship in which not only Pakistan was ensured for Chinese political, economic and military support, but Beijing in return was also guaranteed a foothold in the sub-continent and also a promise of linkages with the Islamic world west of Pakistan.

When Prime Ministers of the two countries Chou-Enlai and Mohammad Ali Bogra met on the sidelines of Bandung Conference of Afro Asian Nations in 1955, Pakistan assured China that Pakistan's involvement in SEATO and CENTO and its strategic attachment with the West is due to its security needs against India not against China.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile President Ayub Khan declared in the United States in July 1961 that Pakistan would vote for the seating of China in the United Nations and it did so in the spring session of the UN General Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

Though at the end of 1960s China's relations with India began to improve but it did not affect its relations with Pakistan. The classic example of that was 1971 Indo-Pak War when China fully supported Pakistan both during and after the war. However, as soon as the post-War situation began to normalize, Beijing slowly and gradually began to experiment with its new South Asia Policy. While keeping

its tide links with Islamabad, Beijing also moved towards a policy of improving relations with New Delhi.

### **Historical Perspective**

China's role and view of the World has to be seen in the historical perspective, as the seat of one of the oldest civilizations, with a recorded history of 5000 years. Until three centuries ago, China, which regarded itself as the centre of the world, was affluent and prosperous, with an advanced culture, and referred to the rest of the world as "barbarians". However, being in virtual isolation, it missed the industrial revolution, and suffered from western colonization and exploitation, as nearly all the industrialized countries proceeded to take advantage of its weakness

The discredited ruling dynasty was overthrown by a revolution in 1911, led by Sun Yat Sen but China continued to experience instability and civil war, with warlords in control of different parts. The communist movement was born in the 1920s and derived its support from the countryside where peasants faced exploitation by landlords. The Japanese aggression in 1937 compounded the problems, with the nationalist regime of Chiang Kaishek showing greater concern with communist threat than with Japanese invasion. Ultimately, the communist party, led by Mao Zedong, prevailed in 1949, and the Nationalists sought refuge in the island of Taiwan.

Since the Revolution of 1949, China is embarked on a course of internal reform and development, and of safeguarding China's sovereignty and independence. During the first quarter century after the Revolution China faced the hostility not only of the US, but later also that of the Soviet Union from 1959 onwards. India sought to take advantage of the situation by pushing for a military solution of the border dispute with China. Under these circumstances, the emergence of friendly relations between China and Pakistan assumed great importance and this friendship has flourished since

1963, when they signed a Boundary Agreement.

China had launched a drive for modernization even under Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1960s but turbulence created by the Cultural Revolution held up real progress. It was the passing away of the old leadership in 1976 that brought a more pragmatic leadership headed by Deng Xiaoping into Power. From 1978, China has been launched on a course in which the primary goal is to achieve economic modernization and development.

The basic planks of the approach are opening to the outside world, and to introduce economic reforms, giving maximum scope to foreign investment and technology. Even foreign policy is subordinated to the goal of modernization, and China seeks to promote a global environment of peace and stability, that is conducive to development. Since 1978, the progress achieved by China is truly phenomenal. It has consistently maintained an annual growth rate of around 9 percent, and the GDP has reached nearly \$ 1.6 trillion making China the fourth largest economy in the world. Economists forecast that in twenty years, China's economy will be the largest in the World.<sup>1</sup>

### **China's Trends to Post-9/11 Trends**

While eschewing any hegemonic ambitions, China continues to oppose hegemonic policies by other powers, as a matter of principle. It stresses certain principles in its foreign policy, best summed up in the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence that were agreed with India and Burma in 1954. Hegemonic ambitions are seen to be behind tensions between powers, and produced an arms race during the Cold War. China also opposes militarism and imperialism and believes in strengthening the role of the UN to resolve disputes peacefully, and to promote a more just international political and economic order. Finally, China considers itself to be a part of the developing world, and subscribes to its goals of reform.

So far as China's own response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks is concerned, China has joined the US in its war against terror, which has brought the two powers closer. However, US analysts have been seeing China as "an obvious super power candidate for the near future",<sup>2</sup> after it completed two decades of continuous growth. While China's economic reforms made a policy of "engagement" attractive to the West, the lingering concern over the communist threat remains a factor in the policies of the Bush administration that are clearly motivated by its long-term goals of containing China. The peaceful rise of China also raises fears that it may offer itself as a model for the developing countries, in competition with the capitalist model.

Ever since it launched its policies of modernization, and of opening to the outside world, China has concentrated on its goal of catching up with the developed world with single-minded devotion. It began this campaign by taking such steps as abandoning any ambition to assume the leadership of the communist movement in the world. It scrupulously followed the Five Principles, notably on non-interference into internal affairs, and respecting the equality, sovereignty and independence of countries great and small. Indeed, China has gone out of its way to reassure all countries that its development does not pose a threat, but rather "provides vast opportunities for its neighbours and other countries through cooperation and exchanges".<sup>3</sup>

### **The U.S. Factor**

China has realized since long that its most important relationship is that with the US, both to advance its development through engagement, and to threaten its security and survival in case of hostilities. China, therefore, attaches the highest importance to managing this relationship in a manner that is non-provocative, and conforms to norms of inter-state relations. At the same time, there are certain basic principles of foreign policy which it adheres to, as a

matter of national sovereignty and independence. For instance, it seeks to follow an independent foreign policy, based on the principles of the UN Charter that are summed up in the Five Principles. China also opposes hegemony, and quest for spheres of influence. China favours the peaceful settlement of disputes, and opposes use or threat of force. China believes in the rectification of historical wrongs, and in this context, seeks the restoration of its sovereignty over Taiwan. It also backs regional cooperation, and identifies itself with the developing countries.

China's management of its foreign policy in the post 9/11 scenario constitutes a deft and carefully thought out approach that encourages the US to persist in the current policy of engagement that has brought important benefits to both. China remains very careful not to be seen damaging or undermining legitimate US interests. The key element in China's policy is avoiding confrontation, and showing clue sensitivity for legitimate US interests or concerns. Even when it disapproves of any US move, its reaction is low-key, and usually muted. At the base of this strategy is the realistic appraisal of the strength and role of the United States, as the richest and the most powerful country in the world.

China has tried to maintain a policy of engagement with the US, especially in the economic field, and avoided any confrontation. Apart from joining in the war against terror, it has recognized the importance of the role the US plays in various parts of Asia, and sought to render diplomatic assistance over North Korea's nuclear ambitions. However, where its vital national interests are involved, such as in Taiwan or Tibet, it stands firm.

Is a Sino-US Cold War inevitable? China is doing all it can to avoid it.<sup>4</sup> In promoting long-term global balance through multi-polarity, it will not willingly engage in a conflict with the US. However US analysts, and war strategists appear to keep this prospect very much in mind. Their expectation is that the theatre of global confrontation

will shift to the Pacific. The US would rely on its alliance with NATO, and base facilities for its Navy in the Ask Pacific region to fight and contain China.<sup>5</sup>

### **Countervailing Relationships**

China is also developing relations with other major countries in its vicinity, such as Pakistan, India, Iran and Russia. China has also sought to develop close economic and trade links with regional organizations in its neighbourhood. It has not only joined ASEAN as a dialogue partner but also extended free trade facilities. China has played a major role in crating the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and is showing interest in joining SAARC, which could infuse new life into it.

China's policy of opposing hegemony, and strengthening the role of the UN as the best hope for a more just economic order does create difference with the US. China also opposes ballistic Missile Defence, and the Doctrine of Preemption. Thus it opposed the US occupation of Iraq, and would like to see the WTO show greater concern for the interests of the developing countries. Its remarkable economic growth may persuade some developing countries to adopt its model. However it avoids throwing a challenge to the advanced countries, and shows realism and modesty over its achievements, maintaining that it requires half a century to achieve its goals.

### **Pakistan-China Security Relationship**

Pakistan enjoys a close and comprehensive friendship with China, based on shared principles and interests. Though Pakistan has again come to have a close alliance with the US in the war against terror, it cannot afford to compromise its all-weather friendship with China, to lake part in any containment strategy of the lone superpower.

China has extended political, moral and material support to Pakistan ever since the signing of the boundary Agreement in 1963 and this

has been critical to its independence and sovereignty. It has been a reliable friend despite major regional and global changes. In response, Pakistan has also stood by China at difficult times, particularly between 1963 and 1978, when China was isolated. As a result, successive generation of Chinese leaders have recognized Pakistan's unique role even though China has emerged on the world stage as a great power.

Until recently, Pakistan and China had no entered into a formal treaty of friendship and cooperation. The visit of Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao to Pakistan in April 2005 was marked by the signing of such a treaty, and the Chinese leader stated, "The treaty and other agreements that we have signed today mark a new stage in Sino-Pakistan friendship and it would institutionalize the spirit of friendship of the last 54 years". This treaty is unique in the sense that the two countries do not have such a treaty with any other country. Commenting on the treaty, Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said it would serve as a turning point in the already strong relationship between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> The most significant provision of the treaty was that both countries would support each other's efforts to safeguard their territorial integrity. They also pledged not to allow the use of their territory against the other.

The broad convergence on strategic and security issues continues between Pakistan and China, who are together developing some new weapon systems, such as the Al-Khalid Battle Tank, and the F-7 advanced fighter (renamed JF 17 / Thunder).

Sino-Pakistan friendship is not directed against any other power, but is a factor of security and stability in the region. The governments and the people of the two countries attach importance to this friendship and are resolved to maintain and consolidate it. They have an identity of perceptions, and while they are supporting the war on terror, they favour a multipolar order at the global level and remain opposed to hegemonic ambitions of other powers at the



regional level.

### **China-Pakistan Relations in the Changing Regional Scenario**

Suddenly Sino-Indian hostility changed into Sino-Indian rapprochement and China started to explore its new South Asia Policy. China though continued its 'all weather friendship' with Pakistan but it also treated India equally.

The improvement of India China relations introduced an element of caution in Chinese relations with Pakistan. Though the military links between China and Pakistan continued but Beijing has been keen not to favor Pakistan against India. Change in the Chinese policy on Kashmir is an indication of that caution. China previously supported Pakistan's claim that the Kashmir issue should be resolved according to UN resolutions,<sup>5</sup> but it opted for a neutral stand in the post-Cold War era and urged both Pakistan and India to settle their disputes peacefully. Such caution was obvious in the Kargil Crisis of 1999.<sup>6</sup> It has also been apparent during the post-September 11 era.

Incidentally, the Sino-Pakistan relationship has blossomed parallel to Sino-Indian rapprochement. The latter has witnessed a gradual change in China's position on disputed Kashmir. From 1964 to 1979, China supported the right of the Kashmiri people to self-determination. After 1980, Chinese officials did not endorse this position, and in fact, said that the Kashmir issue was a bilateral dispute between India and Pakistan and should be solved peacefully.

In 1990, China declined support to Islamabad's attempts at internationalizing the issue. In December 1996, during then Chinese president Jiang Zemin's visit to India and Pakistan, China explicitly expressed support for the Indian position of addressing India-Pakistan disputes through 'consultations and negotiations'. And during the Kargil Crisis of 1999, while Jiang drew attention to China's 'all weather friendship' and 'all round cooperation' with

Pakistan, China told Pakistani leaders that they would not support Islamabad's effort to raise the Kashmir issue in the UN Security Council.

China has long been involved in a triangular relationship with Pakistan and India, and is now a reluctant and silent third party to the dispute over Kashmir. Beijing has traditionally supported Pakistan against India, but now in the post-Cold War era the Chinese have distanced themselves somewhat from Pakistan in order to cultivate better relations with India.

Meanwhile, when Indian parliament was attacked on December 13, 2001 India blamed Pakistan for such kind of act. The tensions between the two countries mounted and the alarms of war on both sides were ringing. China has avoided giving the impression that it endorses Islamabad's position against New Delhi. <sup>7</sup> China also supported Russian President Putin's invitation to President Mushraf and Prime Minister Wajpae to discuss tensions between the two countries.<sup>8</sup> This Chinese policy of treating both India and Pakistan equally continued as tension declined.

Again in August 2002, when President Mushraf visited China on his way back from Bangladesh and Srilanka, the Chinese president Jiang Zemin expressed hope that India and Pakistan could resolve their disputes peacefully through dialogue.<sup>9</sup> This is another example of an equal treatment for the two South Asian states.

From Pakistan's end China still is treated as Pakistan's best friend in the region. At the very same visit of President Mushraf Chinese President Jiang Zemin addressed the question of support from some Pakistani islamists in Xinjiang, the Pakistani government has responded by taking steps to control the Uighur separatists operating from Pakistan.

Though the introduction of such kind of caution does not mean that China has completely downgraded its relationship with Pakistan

.According to reports, Pakistan remains one of the major importers of Chinese weapons.<sup>10</sup> Beijing has reportedly supplied Pakistan with missile related technologies required for missile manufacturing. China has also supplied Pakistan some naval surface to air missile systems (CSA- N-2).<sup>11</sup> The two countries Pakistan and China have also signed Memorandum of Understanding to institutionalize their annual defense and security talks.<sup>12</sup> An indication of the growing defense ties between the two countries is the \$12.08 million interest free loan extended by Beijing for Pakistan's armed forces and for training Pakistani personnel in China.<sup>13</sup>

Despite US opposition China continued to support Pakistan. The United States showed concerns especially on the issues of supply of M-11 missiles. During his visit to the United States in November 1997 Chinese President Jiang Zemin stated that China would not compromise on its commitments to Pakistan regarding transfer of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes.<sup>14</sup> China also morally supported Pakistan when it conducted its nuclear tests in May 1998.

The military relationship between Pakistan and China is decades old. Chinese fighter aircraft, tanks and heavy artillery are a major component of Pakistan's armory. In addition to military purchases and supplies, China has helped Pakistan set up many defense – oriented projects, including the heavy forge and foundry plant at Texila.

Despite these changing attitudes in Beijing's policy toward Islamabad, Pakistan still consider China a reliable partner. This view emanates from a history of Chinese political and the military support for Pakistan during and after the Indo-Pakistan Wars of 1965 and 1971. That support remains part of the historical memory now.

It is frequently acknowledged that Washington is likely to engage and then abandon Pakistan in line with its changing regional and global interests. In marked contrast, China's reliability is seen as emanating from the reality of Geography: it is part of the region and

therefore, even if willing, cannot extricate itself from the limits imposed by its physical location. Added to this geographical reality are the history of Sino-Indian relations and the possibility of continuing competition, if not animosity between New Delhi and Beijing. China, therefore, is seen as being prompted by the logic of realism that necessitates its support for Pakistan to balance the present or future challenges from India.

The second reason relates to Pakistan's geographic location. Situated on the eastern flank of the Middle East/Gulf region, Pakistan remains important for China's Middle Eastern / Gulf Policy. This significance is no longer limited merely to a symbolic level where support for Islamabad could be showcased for other Muslim states as an evidence of Beijing's reliability. Instead as the US moves into the region, and especially after its attack on Iraq, the regional balance of power west of Pakistan will gain more significance for China. Concerned at the future implications of the US long term presence in the region, China is unlikely to reduce its support for Pakistan to a level where the latter is forced to align itself completely with Washington without any reference to Beijing's views. Doing so would run the risk of denying Beijing access to the only state straddling both South Asia and the Middle East. For the next decade, therefore, China and Pakistan will continue to operate as partners.

## **Conclusion**

Though the improvement of Sino-Indian relations resulted in China's new South Asia Policy, China also changed its position on Kashmir as well but China still needs Pakistan as a strategic partner. Keeping in view the regional and global scenario, one can say that this all weather friendship looks still very strong. Only China currently is posing any threat to the global hegemonic power of the United States. The Ballistic Missile Defense, the strategic partnership developing between the United States and India and the US security umbrella's to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan all aimed at containing

China. In this whole scenario China cannot afford to loose Pakistan, the only Chinese neighbor on whom China can rely in its diplomacy against encirclement. No doubt Pakistan also needs China as a friend for coming long period

In the present century, as the global centre of gravity shifts to Asia, the reliance on military power for influence is likely to give way to a different order, based on peace and international cooperation. China is already showing the way by concentrating on development to improve the life of its people. For this purpose, its adherence to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence points to its assuming a greater world role in the coming age of geo-economics. Both geography and history would continue to play their role in the maintenance of the many-sided friendship between Pakistan and China, which serves their security and economic interests.

## **References**

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