

## **China – Pakistan Future Prospects and their Strategic Compulsions**

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### **Abstract**

*Pakistan and China are known to be strange bed fellows who found themselves in opposite camps in their genesis, Pakistan being a Muslim majority state much dependent on western capitalist powers for her security while China was communist naturally backed by Soviet Russia. Subsequent events clearly imposed strategic compulsions forcing both states to come closer. It took less time for leadership of both countries to realize ground realities and soon a new epoch of mutual understanding and cooperation ensued. Pakistan's disenchantment with the western block and rising Indian security threats compelled her to seek Chinese assistance. China, on her turn was parting her ways with Soviet Union while seriously concerned about Indian hegemonic designs. Pakistan proved to be strategic asset for China when she played a pivotal role in bridging gaps between China and U.S. the proverbial friendship between the two states has entered into a new phase in the post cold war era. Afghanistan issue and the U.S-India growing ties coupled with Pakistan's security and energy problems are the issues around which future Sino-Pak relations would revolve.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, China, India, security, strategic

### **A Prudent Beginning**

Strategic and political consideration have played vital role in shaping and defining Pak – China relations. China has a strong cultural heritage and a history marked by foreign oppressions and Chinese struggle against them. In 1949, the communists emerged out of chaos and internal political turmoil as a strong united force that finally succeeded in establishing a state of their own. Pakistan, in pursuance of her friendly policy towards her neighbors officially extended her recognition to the communist China under the leadership of Mao Zedong. Pakistan's recognition of China was in stark contrast to American policy towards communist bloc. Americans viewed communist ideology as a threat to democracy and individual liberty and hence discouraged any move that could strengthen the prospects of spreading it. Another such move was made in 1951, when China got involved in the Korean War. Pakistan, much against American stance opted to abstain from voting in a U.N resolution that called China an aggressor. Pakistan provided China with comparatively cheap raw material like cotton and jute which was of high military importance during the war and thus helped China in times of her economic crises. Pakistan's chief interests in pursuing a friendly policy towards China was aimed at

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countering growing Indian influence in the region. Meanwhile, India violated Tibet agreement which compelled China to go to war with her. In case of Pakistan, the boundary issue between the two states was peacefully resolved. Speaking before the political committee at Bandung Conference, Prime Minister Chu En-Lai said, "we (Pakistan and China) have reached mutual understanding."(Ahsen, 1986: 17)

It is worth mentioning that Chinese relations with both India and USSR were getting strained. USSR's massive military and economic aid to India was a serious threat to Chinese security and interest in the region. Even at one time, Pakistan offered India to join a joint defense pact, a move that had serious implications for China (**Cohen, 2001:14**) But Pakistan's offer could not be materialized because India showed no interest in that. Meanwhile, India was being obliged by America and her allies without considering Pakistan's protests and concerns. The inability and lack of interest showed by Americans in resolving the Kashmir issue, growing Indian military capabilities owing to the massive military and economic support extended by USSR and later on by America without considering Pakistan's security concerns disappointed Pakistan. Growing ties between Afghanistan and USSR resulted in strained relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thus Pakistan feared encirclement by hostile neighbors. Interestingly, China was also experiencing the threats of international isolation. Her relations with India and USSR were deteriorating day by day while America was strongly opposing her admission to U.N.O. Thus these factors compelled Pakistan and China to join hands if they wanted to avert regional and international isolation. Common interests and common foes brought the two countries closer. When the Sino-Indian war of 1962 ended in cease fire, China amicably resolved her territorial issues with Pakistan impressing upon the world that China wanted peaceful neighbors. The peaceful resolution of Pakistan China boundary settlement was reached much according to the wishes of Pakistan that resulted Chinese withdrawal from 750 square miles of territory, containing grazing lands and salt mines. The Indo-Pak war of 1965 further cemented the relations between China and Pakistan. Pakistan had joined the western camp by signing SEATO and CENTO under American leadership. Thus she naturally pleaded for American help invoking the two defense pact. America refused to intervene and blocked military aid to both countries. USSR on the other hand continued her support for India. In such a situation, China extended her support to Pakistan and condemned Indian aggression. Thus, in the initial years both countries showed great maturity and understanding in dealing with each other. It is worth mentioning that without prudence and maturity shown by leaders of both countries, the relations between the two countries could have turned into a bitter account. There were many factors like Pakistan's adherence to Islamic ideology as opposed to China's communist state system and Pakistan's tilt

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towards capitalist bloc and her entry into western backed security arrangements as against Chinese dependence on socialist Russia were potential threats in setting a common ground for mutual cooperation. There were a number of factors the interplay of which helped both countries in overcoming the hurdles in the path of a friendly neighborhood.

### **Towards Fomenting a Natural Alliance**

Pakistan's surge for a security umbrella had compelled her to join SEATO and CENTO which were aimed at containing communist threats. These arrangements proved to be irrelevant when seen in the context of Pakistan's security threats that were mainly posed by India. American refusal to assist Pakistan as per the agreements of SEATO and CENTO in the latter's war with India left a deep sense of betrayal on the minds of Pakistani people (**Sattar, 2007: 48**) Meanwhile, USSR kept assisting India much against Chinese reservations owing to the fact that China viewed India as a serious threat in the region. Resultantly, serious rifts begin to develop between USSR and China. India had already gone to war with her on border issue. Thus, China feared isolation and needed friendly relations with Pakistan. The train of events naturally brought China and Pakistan closer. Soon a new chapter of cooperation and mutual trust between China and Pakistan opened that resulted in a number of agreements in almost all areas. In 1966 leadership of both countries agreed to sign a defense Agreement worth \$ 120 (M). Within next two years, China agreed to supply 100 – T – 59 Tanks, 80 Mig – 19s, F – 6 and 10 Ilyshin – 28 Bombers. A Defense analysis said, "The tanks supplied by China already constituted 25% of the entire tanks – force at Pakistan's disposal. The aircraft supplied by China constituted 33% of the Pakistani Air Force's 270 planes, 65% of all interceptor – bombers and 99% of its first line modern fighter planes" (**Ahsen, 1986**). In 1968 USSR attacked Czechoslovakia which was strongly condemned by China. Chinese condemnation of USSR was something unexpected in Washington. America appreciated Chinese response and denounced the policy of isolating China. At this juncture, Pakistan played a vital role in bringing America and China closer, a development that was highly important for China. Pakistan arranged secret visit of Henry Kissinger, the then U.S secretary of the state to China to resolve mutual distrust and chalk out a plan for establishing diplomatic relations. In 1971, Pakistan received, tanks, guns, nine Shanghai – Class motorboats, which could be converted into firing missiles purpose. In 1986 at Hattar, Haripur in KPK, Chinese provided financial assistance to produce energy and attached 500 Kv Power transformer. Besides this, 55 mm anti tanks field guns, 100 mm and 130 mm field guns, 107 mm multiple rocket system, 60 mm and 87 mm motors and a limited number of surface-to-air missiles had been provided to Pakistan. In 1979, China condemned Soviet

invasion into Afghanistan and extended her full diplomatic support to conference of O.I.C. China stated that Pakistan had legitimate right to support Afghan Mujahideen to counter Soviet threats in the region. China's assistance to Pakistan in nuclear field generated much suspicion and objections from U.S. In February 1983 former US secretary of state, George Shultz clearly stated that cordial relations and bilateral cooperation between U.S and China depended on shared principles of nonproliferation. The statement came amidst reports alleging Chinese support to Pakistan in building her nuclear weapons programme (NYT, 1984). Despite this, Pakistan was offered the option of developing a "bomb – in – the basement" by China to avoid US' economic restriction. Commenting on Pakistan's nuclear programme issue, former Pakistani Prime Minister, Khan Muhammad Khan Junejo said, "Pakistan will see all developments in context of her needs for socio – economic development". He further said that Pakistan had already proposed a 'Nuclear – Weapon – Free – Zone' in South Asia Region, which was endorsed by China but not welcomed by India (**vertzberger, 1983: 649**). On 29<sup>th</sup> July 1983, Foreign Minister of China, Wu Xuequian said that Soviet invasion into Afghanistan compelled majority of the Afghans to leave their homeland putting heavy economic burden over Pakistan's economy. It's the responsibility of the international community to tie the bell around cat's neck. China's relations with Pakistan stand for understanding common interests and promotion of regional stability, a progressive society and world peace.

### **Nuclear India, A Push Factor in Bilateral Ties**

Post Cold war scenario introduced tremendous changes in global politics. Heydays of Pak – America relations had gone into past. Pakistan's military and financial assistance was banned by imposing Pressler Amendment. US decision to withhold Pakistan's military equipment contracted prior to 1990 worth \$ 1.2 billion, even though Pakistan had clearly paid for this became a serious hurdle in Pak-U.S bilateral relations. In fact, this was expected because Soviet forces had left Afghanistan and U.S saw no point in continuing military and financial aid to Pakistan, which was then the most allied ally of U.S. Islamabad government showed disappointment, blamed America for being biased in treating Pakistan. She openly declared U.S sanctions to be selective and discriminatory. Bilateral relations were distorted and Islamabad had to face additional sanctions in 1993, imposed over Pakistan under MTCR (Missile Technology Control Regime) affecting China as well (**VOA, 1992**). In 1998, India tested nuclear weapons, which generated strategic imbalance within region. Pakistan had engaged herself with India on "conventional war status" but now had to maintain strategic deterrence. Although, Islamabad was not interested to go to nuclear race yet the Indian aggression forced it to test nuclear weapon. Besides this the domestic public pressure was at peak

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level to counter India on nuclear front. Finally, Islamabad had to succumb to the mounting pressure and successfully tested her nuclear capability in the Chaggi Mountains. Nuclear issue has broad meaning in the context of Pakistan -India relations. It directly affects China-U.S relations and is considered an important determinant in shaping India-Pakistan relation equation with the former two. It is an established fact that India was responsible for starting conventional war weapons race against Pakistan and generated security threats. India exploded its first atomic nuclear bomb in 1974 at Pokhran, labeled as 'Peaceful weapon experimental phase.' In 1950, US administration arranged 'low level exchange programme' in nuclear field with India, and finally India got Thorium Nitrate. In addition, India was supplied Van Graff accelerator. It is on the record that US was mainly responsible in launching and facilitating Indian nuclear research programme by supplying technical and material assistance. In 1956, Canadian government supplied a 40 – Megawatt Thermal Research reactor to India, known as CIRUS programme. It was believed that Washington had supplied 'Heavy Water for the reactor. IAEA stated that Canadian government had legally bounded India by restricting the technology to civilian sector. Later on Indian government interpreted the said deal in a quiet different way and accordingly assumed that 'the reactor will not be used for non – peaceful purpose but the Plutonium, extracted from CIRUS could be used in nuclear explosions (**Leventhal, 2005**). More than 1000 Indian scientists had been provided training in the field of nuclear research and development of the nuclear programme in American laboratories and research institutions. Finally, all these developments culminated in the Pokhran nuclear explosion. Canadian government was not pleased with Indian nuclear experiment and finally imposed sanctions over India. On the contrary, Washington's response was 'decidedly mild'. Henry Kissinger is reported to have advocated a very calculated response in order not to antagonize India. (**Kux, 1992: 315**) Indian nuclear explosion was no less than a shock for Pakistan and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto called Indian Atomic experiment a fateful development, and further stated forcefully that Pakistan could not be blackmailed, it will see Indian bomb not as a device but as a serious security threat. (NYT, 1974) it's a known fact that contrary to General Ayub Khan, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto always focused on acquiring nuclear capability since 1965 War. Once, he stated rhetorically "Pakistan would eat grass; if necessary to match any nuclear capability that now India had developed" (**Baxter, 1991: 139**). Later on, when Z.A Bhutto became prime minister of Pakistan, he vigorously focused on developing Pakistan's nuclear arsenal in order to settle the scores with India. He scaled all measurement and gathered a meeting of the Pakistani nuclear scientists in Multan, promised to ensure security against Indian aggression. In his famous book, 'The Myth of Independence' Mr. Bhutto stated that nuclear capability for Pakistan should be considered essential to counter Indian hegemony in the region. Bhutto said, "If

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security interests are satisfied, if people feel secure and if they feel they will not be subject to aggression, they will not want to squander away limited resources in the nuclear direction". It is interesting to note that Pakistan – India had to face Lyndon B. Johnson's economic / military embargo since 1965 War but India responded with Pokhran episode showing sheer indifference to American concerns. On the other side, Pakistan blamed Washington of being biased in treating Pakistan viz-a-viz India. Now new US Administration decided to uplift embargo, Washington Post commented "a maturing in American dealings" Within South Asia Region. On request of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Washington assisted four hundred thousand tons of wheat worth \$ 65 (M) and \$ 78 (M) of development loans.

Up lifting 'Embargo' was a good sign but still tense situation was clouded between Washington and Islamabad on nuclear issue. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was asked to sweep out plan of acquiring nuclear re-processing and heavy – water capabilities. In return, Pakistan was offered 110 A – 7 attack bombers, essential for improving air force capability, a positive indication was given by Kissinger for US Congress' approval. It was observed that China provided political and diplomatic support to Pakistan on nuclear issue. China justified Pakistan's rush for nuclear weapons by referring to the growing Indian hegemonic designs which directly posed serious security threats to Pakistan. Thus in the wake of rapidly growing Indian military power backed by USSR, Pakistan had no option except to acquire nuclear capability to deter the Indian threats. Pakistan's nuclear programme touched its final destination when Indian government once again carried out nuclear tests. It was expected that international community will understand the gravity of situation and the serious security problems that suddenly surrounded Pakistan but the contrary reaction was observed. However, China had realized that India must be countered in the region by strengthening Pakistan's military capabilities, after all, India had gone to war with her on the boundary dispute and was being backed by both USSR and America. China thus feared isolation and found Pakistan a better and reliable ally owing to the fact that both had a common foe. Thus, a strong and secure Pakistan was imperative for China to counter the Indo-Soviet influence in the region (**Naseer & Amin, 2011: 10**).

South Asian Region is covered with similarities and differences. It was understood that US had strong intention to have cordial relation with India. A nuclear armed Pakistan was serious threat to India. Apart from this, India considered China as a hurdle in her way to become the regional hegemon. China realized that India's security challenges are a reality but the growing menace of extremism and militancy equally pose a serious threat to the security of Pakistan as well as China owing to the fact that Pakistan borders China's Muslim majority province Xinxiang in the north. Besides this, Pakistan

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had potential growth to link China's trade with Middle East and the Muslim World. China assisted Pakistan on nuclear front in terms of providing nuclear technologies and technical awareness regarding missile system and nuclear weapons. In 1982, it was reported that China helped Pakistan, technically assisted to facilitate 'Uranium Enrichment Plant'. Another report was published regarding 'China's assistance to Pakistan providing Uranium Hexafluoride (Koch & Topping, 1987: 74,75). These reports pressurized China and she decided to suspend nuclear and missile assistance to Pakistan. India, after acquiring nuclear capability, moved to develop integrated Guided Missile Development Programme which again threatened Pakistan. The development once again naturally brought China and Pakistan closer and finally China had to assist Pakistan in launching two short – range ballistic missile, Hatf – 1 (80 Km) and Hatf– 2 with a range of 150 – 180 Km (Chakma, 2009: 67) . Further, Pakistan received M – 11s from China, featured as solid fuel missile 290 Km range. US reports simply stated that although China promised US to avoid missile technology assistance to Pakistan but secret affairs are still going on.

Another source said that Post 1998 test sanctions proved nothing because some states like China are still engaged in covertly supporting nuclear facilities of the states concerned. US has shown serious concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme in the post cold war phase and pressurized both states to sign nuclear proliferation treaty. India refused likewise Islamabad cleared her position counting on notorious Indian state behavior regarding nuclear arms. Historically India is Champion regarding her claims to sign NPT but its track record reflected her contrary attitude. Dr. A. Q Khan said in 1993, "Time and time again our President and Prime Minister have a hundred times told the whole world that if India signs the NPT then we will sign the NPT. If they will open their facilities today for the inspection by foreign inspectors, we will open ours. From our side there is no hesitation. We say we are willing to open our facilities, they say they are not willing to do so. So the world must judge from the action of the two countries that is willing to open up their facilities".

### **The Afghan Conundrum, A Blessing Disguise**

Pakistan China relations should be assessed in the light of Afghanistan crisis. Pakistan was viewed more effective partner in Afghanistan since 1979 when she played a crucial role in defeating the red army. Taliban government in Afghanistan was also under great influence of Pakistan. China, to a certain level, showed concerned security challenges about Taliban but Pakistan's assurance to handle Taliban government was positive indicator. Pakistan needs 'friendly' government in Afghanistan to ensure strategic depth and access to central Asian region. China focused on changing central Asia

Regional political affairs to enjoy the blessings of gas and oil resources. (**Rakisits, 2012: 2**). Although, Russian government condemned Taliban government but China agreed to give Pakistan concession for strategic and economic benefits. Situation reached at the lowest ebb when Pakistan officials were informed Taliban's involvement in Xinjiang Province, providing militant assistance to Chinese Muslim separatist elements. Meanwhile, Taliban had taken up responsibility of 9/11 Episode and all regional actors including India China, Russia and Iran supported US decision to crack down Al – Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan. It was a serious setback for Pakistan.

The Chinese political analysts argued that US attacking strategy in Afghanistan will be beneficiary for China because it has serious reservations regarding disturbed law and order situation in Xinjiang. The US – Counter strategy was welcomed in China but American stay in the region on long term basis is not acceptable for China. (**Dumbaugh, 2010: 2**). Pakistan – China relations are no doubt acknowledged on good terms but are being gradually disturbed because of influential terrorist organizations. On Afghanistan issue, China moved India and same was happened when Pakistan was asked to settle down the Kargil episode. Still, China showed its strategic interests in IPI and Gawadar Project. China's first option to join IPIs to access Iran's South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf through the Pakistani city of Khuzdar. This pipeline will export (150 million) metric standard cubic meters per day and had been approximately estimated to cost \$ 7.5 billion (**Khan, 2012: 103**). Likewise, China's Vice – premier of the state Council and now Chairman National People's Congress delivered important speech regarding strategic importance of Gwader. China agreed to contribute \$ 200 (M) as initial investment in Said project (**Swanström, 2002: 15**).

Pakistan – China has to develop a common understanding on Afghanistan issue. China, shares a 50 miles long border with Afghanistan, Wakhan corridor separating Pakistan – Turkmenistan. On 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 2009 Chairman of Spending committee of the National People's Congress (NPC) Wu Bangguo said, "We are ready to work with Afghanistan to jointly combat terrorism and drug – related crimes and to expand economic and trade co-operation in a bid to benefit the two people" (**People's Daily Online, 2009**). It should be noted that Pakistan's strategic importance cannot be ignored by the Chinese leadership, which still has strong influential thinking in Afghanistan. China had to realize that Afghanistan's instability and in security will leave uncomfortable impact over bordering situation. Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan (TAP) Gas Pipeline Project is another important strategic project, China not only showed its interest but also intended to expand it across the region. China has launched few projects in Afghanistan e.g. reconstruction of public hospitals in Kabul and Kandhar and Irrigation Restoration project in Power sector



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(**Michael, 2009**). Chinese telecommunication and Hawar Company are operating in Afghanistan. Pakistan welcomed China's business involvements in Afghanistan; the future collaboration will promote common economic and trading sectors. Thus, Chinese interest in the Afghan reconstruction process is a positive development for Pakistan. The Chinese involvement in Afghanistan will not only counter the rising Indian influence, a development that has serious security implications for Pakistan, it will also enhance the prospects of durable peace in the region. Chinese involvement in Afghan issue is an inevitable strategic asset for Pakistan and cautious policy responses of both the states can open a new chapter of cooperation and understanding.

### **Reinvigorating Pakistan's Energy Sector, One Step Ahead**

Pakistan has immense natural resources to meet her hovering energy needs. At present, five major hydropower generation projects are operational namely Tarbela with 3,478 MW, Mangla with 1,000 MW, Warsak with 240 MW, Chashma with 187 MW and Ghazi Barotha with 1,450 MW. Pakistan's hydro power capacity generation is 34% but still it has enough water resources to generate 25,000 mw to meet energy crisis. The DiamirBasha Dam is another mega project in the pipeline. It is good that Chinese company CWE is the main company responsible for taking up the said project. The Neelum – Jehelum Hydro power project is located in Muzafarabad and its installed capacity is 969 MW. Pakistan signed contract with M/S. CGGC – CMEC Construction Company, owned by China (**Haqqani, 2008**). On energy co-operation, an agreement was signed on Feb 20, 2006 between Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources of Pakistan, including National development Reform Commission of China. A joint meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> April 2006, issued a policy declaration to build up a proper mechanism and to attract the both sides investor to participate in energy co-operation. China and Islamabad promised to frame a complimentary strategy (**China embassy Pakistan, 2006**) and the former had provided millions of dollars in loans, grants and capital aid. Trade momentum was increased on both sides, Pakistan enjoyed second largest trading partnership in 2009.

It's a known reality that China signed an agreement titled civil nuclear cooperation with Pakistan in 1986. Pakistan's Chashma I and Chashma II Power projects, having capacity of 325 MW are the results of this agreement. Both government agreed to expand the projects and informed IAEA regarding future developments. ((**Zafar, 2008**) It is understood reality that Pakistan's economic development is on declining path due to severe energy crisis. In his last two visits Mr. Zardari, President of Pakistan discussed power generation matters with Chinese leadership (**Farhan, 2008**) and future energy

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cooperation with China is pivotal in defining the extent of Pak-China friendship.

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