

The Role of China in Pakistan's Post-Cold War Security Challenges (1990 and 2001)

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Abstract

One of the difficulties that nations face frequently is securing political independence and territorial integrity from adversaries. Enhancing national defence both from internal and foreign sources is an important approach to accomplish national security goals. Internally, states rely on non-traditional elements such as nuclear weapons development, while externally; states seek military and economic assistance from friendly nations. Throughout its history, Pakistan's security elites have been preoccupied with the difficult task of trying to ensure its political and economic security from neighbouring but powerful India. Consequently, Pakistani officials have sought diplomatic and military assistance from beyond the region of South Asia in order to balance and control India. Nevertheless, Pakistani security concerns have persisted even after the end of the Cold War. Apart from the conventional threat from India, Pakistan suffered military related sanctions from the US. Thus, the purpose of this inquiry is to look into China's role in bolstering Pakistani security in the post-Cold War era. It seeks answers to questions, what security challenges/problems did Pakistan face after the Cold War, what options Pakistan had and what supporting role China played in addressing Pakistan's security challenges? This study seeks to address the aforementioned research questions utilising a technique that includes analytical and historical research, as well as primary and secondary materials.

Key words: **Security, Pakistan, China, India and United States**

Introduction

Sandy Gordon stated in 1995 that in the post-Cold War era, India had won and Pakistan had lost in South Asia. Gordon also predicted that India will become a significant force in the Indian Ocean area by the early twenty-first century, and that it would be a big power by the end of the century. In stark contrast, Gordon came to a conclusion that "Pakistan has lost out seriously as a result of cold-war, while India suffers from internal stability; Pakistan's problems are potentially far more serious (Gordon, 1995, 894-95). Gordon may have overestimated India's regional/major power potential mainly because internal conflicts, separatist movements, poverty, diseases, environmental issues, a lack of social services, and India's rapid population growth rate remain important challenges for the country to this day, nonetheless, Gordon statements about Pakistan appeared accurate to a larger extent. Pakistan's post-Cold War security environment provided challenges and dilemmas as serious as any it had confronted since its creation in August 1947.

Pakistan's Security Predicament in the Post-Cold War Era

Pakistan's post-cold war security concerns were a mash-up of old and new. Some obstacles had existed since Pakistan's founding, while others were the result of a change in the

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international environment brought about by the finish of the cold war. These difficulties are explored in the following sections.

The withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan created massive security vacuums. On the one hand, the Russians did not finish the job; rather, they withdrew in a hurry, and there was no inclusive government capable of uniting Afghanistan. Pakistan could not afford to rely on other nations to fill the void, such as India. Following the withdrawal, Pakistani security officials concentrated their efforts on building a friendly regime in Afghanistan in order to restrict Indian influence. A stable and pro-Pakistan government in Kabul looked to satisfy Islamabad dual purposes: It would contribute to the long-awaited strategic depth against India and access to oil-rich Central Asia. Wirsing argues Islamabad aimed to gain strategic depth and access to the oil-rich Central Asian States was thwarted by the ensuing civil war in Afghanistan (Wirsing, 1996). As a result, while Pakistan had accomplished its short-term goal in Afghanistan with the removal of Soviet occupation forces, her long-term goal remained a distant dream since the Soviets had placed the Najubullah administration.

Pakistan long term goalshave been seeking pro-Pakistan government in Kabul mainly because Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are a tale of mistrust, interference in each other matters and extreme hostility since the beginning of relation in 1947 (Hussain and Latif, 2012, Hussain, et.al 2020). Until 1979, according to Marvin Weinbaum, Afghanistan has largely appeared a “political irritant for Pakistan, a petulant and resentful neighbour” (Weinbaum, 1994.13). It was the only Muslim country which refused to accept Pakistan UN membership in 1947 and rejected Pakistan's sovereignty over North-West Frontier Province and Baluchistan (Hasan Askari Rizvi, 2004, 10). Historically, Afghanistan has collaborated with Islamabad's adversaries to pose security dangers to Pakistan. The long-serving Pakistan's security expert Hassan Askari Rizvi said that in retribution for Pakistan's involvement in US-sponsored defence treaties, India recognised Afghanistan's disputed claims to Pashtunistan, and the Soviet Union gave similar support to Afghanistan in the mid-1950s. (Hasan Askari Rizvi, 2004, 10).

In the post-Cold War era, Pakistan's Afghan policy remained intertwined with its previous interactions with that nation and Afghanistan's future. It appeared to Pakistani security elite that a friendly government in Afghanistan was necessary to achieve political and strategic aims; it would not only give access to central Asia but also keep India at the bay (Marvin G. Weinbaum et.al, 25-27) Pakistan top brass pursued this objective during 1990s in support of friendly but fundamentalist groups in Afghanistan (Ayesha Siddiq, 2001, 15-16). Help to such elements continued to shift, suiting Islamabad's convenience, from Gulbuddin Hikmatyar to the Taliban.

Secondly, Pakistan's policy of opposing Soviets adventures in Afghanistan during the 1980s converged with the strategic objectives of the US (Weinbaum, 1994, 497). Islamabad assumed the role of strategic ally and kept cultivated the US to modernize her armed forces by acquiring modern weaponry. Nevertheless once Afghan war had come to an end, Islamabad's connections with the world's major powers (particularly the US) had become dangerously frayed, and no big nations looked willing to come to its aid in the case of a catastrophe. The US cut their yearly military supplies and implemented sanctions in October 1990. The United States invoked the Pressler amendment and halted military aid. It halted the shipment of F-16 fighter jets for which Pakistan had already paid (Samina Yasmeen, 1994, 124).

Thirdly, India remained Pakistan's primary security worry. Policymakers' primary focus since 1947 has been to find ways to frustrate India's hegemonic aspirations or intentions to achieve a dominant position in the region's geopolitics. The distrust and acrimony that developed between the two countries during their early years of independence, reinforced by later developments, instilled fear in Pakistan's security establishment that India wished to dominate and reduce her to a small size by utilising her large size, resources, military and technological advancement (Rizvi, 1993, 9) The veteran-watcher of Pakistan's security policy, K.B. Sayeed maintained that almost every action of Pakistan could be interpreted as motivated by fear of India. (Sayeed, 1964, 746)

Besides, the long-running Kashmir conflict and the weapons race (both conventional and nuclear) were the two biggest irritants between the two nations. An indigenous Kashmir insurgency has arisen, introducing a new dimension to the India-Pakistan rivalry. Islamabad's ability to resist India militarily and diplomatically had deteriorated as a result of the unipolar world. As stated above, due to the Afghan conflict in the 1980s, Pakistan got a huge amount of American help in the shape of military weaponry and fighter planes. It improved Pakistan's military and air force capabilities in comparison to India. The unipolar international system all of a sudden limited Pakistan's ability to sway the major nations to its side.

Finally, Pakistan suffered from a numbers of security handicaps. Fukuyama pointed out that except a few hundred-mile border in Azad (Independent) Kashmir with "India is mountainous and does not permit mechanized warfare, but from there down to the Arabian Sea, there are no natural obstacles between the two countries" (Fukuyama, 1980, 6). Pakistan territory required strategic depth and main communication lines run equivalent to the Indian border. The centre point made by Pakistan defence and security establishment is that "an army crossing the Khyber pass/the Punjab border could seek to cut the right across Pakistan, disrupting the whole communication system and thus bringing about a political and economic chaos in which survival of Pakistan would hang in a precarious balance" (Rizvi, 9-10). This was this lack of strategic depth in Pakistan's territory which made her security elites to seek flawed strategic depth in Afghanistan.

Essentially, between 1971 and 1990, Pakistan's security elite had demonstrated a considerable amount of prudence in tailoring foreign policy. They managed to escape major war especially with India, but also, they had resisted international pressure to move further up the ladder of nuclear weapons (Wirsing, 1996, 102). Pakistan successfully repelled great power USSR with the help of another major power: the United States. Despite these advantages, Pakistan had experienced stunning strong reversals in the post-cold war era in its geostrategic environment and fundamental restructuring in its regional and global security environment. The end of cold-war reduced Islamabad's geostrategic importance for the major power due to the end of global conflict. The demise of the Soviet Union abruptly ruptured the Pakistan-US alliance. Wirsing argues "the swift, severe, and parallel deterioration in the country's relations" with India and Afghanistan during the 1990s produced continued, "Excessive preoccupation with national security and, potentially heightened risk of war". (Wirsing, 1996, 102)

Why this Study

There is a noteworthy rationale for investigating this research. To begin, the authors were drawn to this research to examine Pakistan-China security interactions at a time when both countries' relationships are expanding and new dimensions, such as economic, are being

introduced. During the early 1990s, Pakistan desperately needed a reliable partner like China to bolster her security in the wake of post-cold war period, as it had been Pakistan's policy to seek outside help to augment her security via-a-via India. China, conversely, appeared to be pragmatic and seeking rapprochement with India, in such a scenario, Pakistan-China relations experienced some stress. Although the strain time has passed, the study of challenges in Pakistan-China relations still has a place in the scholarly literature.

Second rationale of the study is found in the importance of the region where both Pakistan and China are situated. The US President Bill Clinton once remarked that "South Asia is most dangerous place on earth". (BBC, 2000) In geostrategic term, Clinton's assertion strikes the reality. Both Pakistan and India own the stockpile of nuclear weapons and advanced means to deliver them. In the North lies Pakistan's close ally China, who fought a brief war with India in 1962 and is believed to have assisted Pakistan to develop its defence apparatus. (BBC, 2000) India is tipped to be regional if not yet major power of the region. There is a significant power, the United States, which retains interests and presence in the area and seeks a tight relationship with India. In such a setting, it is critical to examine Pakistan-China ties in the past and make predictions for the future.

At the turn of the century, the South Asian area is experiencing a growing Indo-US strategic alliance, which has consequences for US ties with other regional nations as well as regional dynamics. Beijing and Islamabad policymakers are among those who are attentively monitoring the progress of a US-India "global partnership" to see how it affects their own geopolitical status. (IPS, 2011). Both Pakistan-China follow the developments in the rear closely and are expected to counter the Indo-US strategic partnership with their own version of close partnership. The security elite in Pakistan feel that the Indo-US strategic relationship would not only increase the asymmetry in the balance of power in South Asia, it will also drag China-Pakistan into a new arms race with India (IPS, 2011). So, under such a context, the 1990s were critically crucial in Pakistan-China ties, and we are curious to see if similar condition would reoccur, and how both nations will react if it does.

Similarly, in the aftermath of the US exit from Afghanistan in 2021, Afghanistan is a significant area in which both countries would wish to collaborate. Given the country's insecurity, Afghanistan is critical to Pakistan and China's security interests. New Delhi is using Afghan soil to support secessions movement and foment unrest in Pakistan (Council on foreign relations, 2010). These are the pressing question which the analyst and strategist are endeavouring to find answer. There is no denying the fact that Pakistan and China is two important stakeholders in this new great game. The mood in Pakistan is that South Asia could go back to 1960s, which brought closer Pakistan-China against India and Soviet Union. In the 21st century, it is India, with the support of a new major power, which could bring closer Pakistan-China again.

Third, in this new great game, if Pakistan is to acquire security in the long run, it is China not the US, which could help her in the region. It is logically effortless to comprehend that the US preference is always India not Pakistan. The US has never been perceived a reliable partner in Pakistan, but China did. The veteran follower of Pakistan's politics and military, Stephen Cohen says that Beijing is regarded as "reliable, tactful, and steadfast" in Pakistan. (Cohen, 1998, 17) Owing to this it is vital to study past challenges in their relations to analyse those factors which triggered challenges in their bilateral relations.

The study importance/significance further increases with the fact that Pakistan provides a springboard for China's access to the oil-rich Middle East. China's hydrocarbon consumption has doubled in the last two decades and is expected to double again in the coming decade. On its way to China's Pacific Ocean ports, up to 85% of that oil and natural gas will transit across the Indian Ocean and the Malacca Strait. (Beckley, 2002, 15) This is what Chinese President Hu Jintao refers to as China's "Malacca Dilemma", "the fear that China's dependence on the flow of energy resources through narrow transport sea lines is a weakness that adversaries can exploit". (Beckley, 2002, 15)

Pakistan's proximity to China is a considerable solution in mitigating Chinese Malacca dilemma. In this regard, China is developing Gwadar deep-sea port and connecting its western area to the Indian Ocean via the \$60 billion CPEC, which runs through Pakistani territory. Lisa Curtis believed that there is an increasing concern that Beijing may turn its investment in Gwadar Port into access for its warships (Curtis, 2009). Although at this moment it is too early to speculate such developments but if both Pakistan-China decides to take such positions the infrastructure has been developed for such happening. Furthermore, China plans to develop its western region/Xinxiang which is close to Pakistan Gwadar port, than to Chinese main sea port in the East. China can link Gwadar to Xinjiang over land with railways and oil pipelines. Therefore, Pakistan-China security relations deserve special attention.

Chinese Role in Pakistan' Security in Post-Cold War Era

As elaborated above, Pakistan had serious security challenges in the post-cold war period where it needed China to be supportive of her strategies to bolster her security predicament. Beijing did come up to the expectations of Pakistan's security elite. It did assist/approve Islamabad's security policies though it stopped backing Islamabad in its disputes with India. Though China had sought rapprochement and normalization of relations with India, it remained committed and closer partner of Pakistan mainly in field of defence and security (Garver, 1996).

Since early sixties, Pakistan and China had established close relationship in a common allegiance to contain enemy India. Pakistan firstly sought security from the west during the 1950s, and then in 1960s it turned to China which became a close partner of Pakistan. Pakistan International Airlines was the first airline from outside the communist world to fly to Beijing. It gave Pakistan major economic and military aid, assisted in the establishment of an indigenous defence industrial capacity, and offered nuclear technology in the 1980s over strong US opposition. (Faruqi, 2001, 3)

Essentially, the Afghan crisis might have been a significant issue between the two countries, with Pakistan attempting to gain strategic depth, but the two countries managed the situation sensitively and sensibly. They did not allow this issue to cause schisms in their association. So despite Pakistan's policies in Afghanistan appeared inimical to China's territorial integrity, it remained closely associated with Pakistan and tried to reduce threat from Afghan territory. Pakistan equally helped to overcome Chinese anxieties emerging from Afghan soil. It arranged meeting between Chinese leaders and Afghan Taliban (Ali, 2020). The Pakistani authorities' efforts to arrange meeting between Taliban and Chinese leaders mainly to eliminate Chinese suspicions and security concerns speak volumes about the relationship's understanding and depth. In a meeting with Taliban leaders, China urged them to cease taking Muslim Uighurs into their ranks, primarily to halt separatist activity in Xinjiang region.

Furthermore, the Chinese have never publicly or privately expressed dissatisfaction with the Pakistani government's or leaders' involvement in Uighur assistance from Afghan and Pakistani tribal regions.

However Kashmir was one area where China and Pakistan have different outlook. Until 1990, China had continuously supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. After the rapprochement with India, it became neutral. During the cold war, China's objective was to pursue a classic balance of power between Pakistan and India. It supported Pakistan's position on Kashmir. But in the post-cold war era, Beijing withdrew its support for a UN plebiscite on Kashmir. This Chinese position amounted to an implicit endorsement of India's positions that conflict should be resolved bi-laterally between India and Pakistan. It did not see any logic in supporting Pakistan on Kashmir while pursuing rapprochement with India. During the 1999 Kargil war China remained neutral too, though it supported de-escalation of tension between India and Pakistan. Faruqi argues Pakistan-China relations reached to unprecedented nadir during the low-intensity Kargil war in 1999 in which India-Pakistan fought briefly over the Himalayan region (Faruqi, 2001). Nevertheless, despite Chinese neutrality on Kashmir, the importance of Pakistan for China had not diminished in the post-cold war. What Pakistan expected of China in her post-cold war security arrangements, the latter appeared interested.

Although both differed on Pakistan's strategic depth policy in Afghanistan and India-Pakistan disputes, their cooperation continued in both conventional and non-conventional military field. The enduring relationship that they had maintained throughout the history of their diplomatic relations prevented any incremental/tangible loss in their relationship. The thaw in the Sino-Indian relationship did not stop Beijing from providing military assistance to Islamabad. The rapprochement itself had certain limitation.

The Pressler amendment has severely harmed Pakistan's security. In 1990, when the United States placed sanctions on Pakistan, the country lost more than \$500 million in aid. (Munir, 2018, 25) The US funding was phased off. Nonetheless, the American sanctioned increased the intensity and closeness of Pakistan-China cooperation. The high-level visits resumed in the same manner as before. Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto conducted an official visit to Beijing in 1999, which was reciprocated by her counterpart the following year.

But, most crucially, President Jiang Zemin's visit to Pakistan in 1996, during which he made an address to the joint sitting of Pakistani parliamentarians, went a great way toward strengthening relations between the two countries. The visiting dignitary emphasised Sino-Pakistan relations in his remarks. President Zemin explained the consequences of Sino-Indian reconciliation for Sino-Pakistan ties. He described that the nature of Sino-Pak relations "friends in need" and "brothers bound by a common fate." He further said that "it was normal to have 'disputes and differences' with neighbours". (Hussain, Qambari, 2020)

China assisted in the construction of the 330 megawatt Chashma nuclear power station in the 1990s. The visit diplomacy resumed in 2001, when Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji welcomed General Musharraf to China. Both countries reaffirmed their security and defence connections during these high-level visits. (Munir, 2018, 26) Pakistan's army's conventional capacity was bolstered. The Al-Khalid tank was sanctioned by China for a joint venture, and it is currently the backbone of Pakistan's army. (Munir, 2018, 25) In 1992, China provided Pakistan with 34 short-range ballistic M-11 missiles, which marked a significant step forward in military cooperation between the two countries.

While on the other hand, despite thaw in relations, India cited 'China threat theory' for its nuclear test in 1998. Zeb argues While India rationalized its nuclear tests in 1998 by alleging a danger from China, Pakistan undertook lengthy conversations with its partners, including China, before deciding how to react to the Indian tests. Following General Musharraf's coup in 1999, Pakistan was diplomatically isolated. While China opposes the takeover, it sees it as an internal issue in Pakistan (Rizwan Zeb, 2012, 49). So other than Kashmir there was no fluctuation in Pakistan-China relations. Indeed, one could base argument on the exchange of high-level states visit.

The limitations in Sino-Indian relation could not be totally ruled out. Although both counters had developed their economic relations to a considerable amount, the unresolved border dispute could not allow them to bring tranquillity on their border. Thus Pakistan's major defence supplier was China. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, China donated equipment and technology to Pakistan's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programmes, strengthening Pakistan's position in the South Asian strategic balance. While the United States has sanctioned Pakistan in 1990s, China persistently backed Pakistan's military modernization efforts. Despite the shift in China's policy on Kashmir, China maintained strong defence cooperation with Pakistan. Furthermore, the 1990s established strong Pakistan-China relations, the advantages of which were apparent in the post-September 11, 2001 era. The period from 2001 to 2021 is one of the most significant and powerful, owing to the amount of change that has occurred during this time. In addition, Pakistan-China ties have expanded beyond the Indian issue. Pakistan and China are far more dependant and dependable allies.

Conclusion

At the present, two things look certain: on-going antagonism from India and sustained coordination between Pakistan and China to defy regional and international pressures. This was evident in the years following 2001. Since 9/11, 2001, Pakistan and China collaboration has increased in military and economic sectors. In the field of military, Pakistan and China have collaborated to build joint weapon system, such as tanks and fighter planes. The Al-Khalid tank is a masterpiece of Pakistani and Chinese engineering, but the JF-17 thunder fighter aircraft, which now looks to be the backbone of Pakistan's air force, is the frosting on the cake. Its worth was demonstrated in the 2019 Indo-Pakistan crisis, when Pakistani pilots flying JF-17s downed an Indian fighter in a duel. Similarly, numerous countries throughout the world have expressed interest in purchasing it, demonstrating the jet's value. Aside from the Pakistani navy, China has provided considerable aid, support, and military supplies to Pakistan. China is constructing submarines for the Pakistani navy in order to protect Pakistan's blue sea from India.

It is in the field of economics that there has been noticeable and concrete improvement. The Gwadar port was built with significant Chinese funding. It's now working. But most notably, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is being hailed as a BRI flagship project and a significant transition in Pakistan-China ties from military to economic. Regional and international changes are paving the way for deeper Sino-Pakistani ties. The United States has ended its two-decade-long war in Afghanistan, a strong battle between the US and China is brewing, and a new age of new alignments and counter-alignments has begun. New developments such as the Quad (India, the United States, Australia, and Japan) and the AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) trilateral security pact would only improve rather than harm Pakistan-China relations.

Pakistan, on the other hand, cannot afford to put all of its eggs in one basket: China. CPEC is a project of national importance for Pakistan, and it should stay such; but, Pakistan must be watchful in order to avoid giving the appearance to the United States and the West that it is working against them and with China. Pakistan cannot afford to do so; instead, the country should take advantage of new advancements such as the B3W project and the global gateway. The US aims to invest more than \$40 trillion in infrastructure development in poor nations under the B3W programme, while the EU plans to promote infrastructure development throughout the world through Global Gateway (GG). Between 2021 and 2027, the European Union would use GG to raise €300 billion for connectivity initiatives, primarily in the digital, climate and energy, transportation, health, education, and research sectors. Pakistan should take advantage of these measures.

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