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SINO-PAK RELATIONS : PAST AND PRESENT

Introduction

The Sino-Pakistani friendship began soon after the 1962 Sino-Indian border conflict, and it has therefore been interpreted as based on the old adage—an enemy's enemy is a friend. China's objectives in developing good relations with Pakistan were alleged to include undoing CENTO and SEATO, gradually integrating Pakistan with a Chinese sphere of influence, further humiliating India, and obtaining access to the Muslim world. Whatever the interpretation of China's special link with Pakistan, it has grown both in depth and in warmth since it began in the mid-1960s.

Z. A. Bhutto in his book *The Myth of Independence* says, "Sino-Pakistani relations are not primarily based on the differences of the two countries with India. That factor forms only a part, important though it be, of the rationale. China is Pakistan's neighbour and it is essential for us to maintain good relations with all our neighbours on the basis of friendship and equality."¹

It has been insinuated that the ideologies of Pakistan and China are incompatible and that a friendly working arrangement cannot therefore be sustained between them. It is further argued that Pakistan's friendly relations with China, being of a subjective character, will be unable to withstand the stress of time. These, however, appear to be

1. Z. A. Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence*; Oxford University Press, London, 1969, p. 131.

fallacious arguments. States deal with states not merely out of convergence in their social systems or ideologies. If such an argument were carried to its logical conclusion, Pakistan should have friendly relations only with Muslim States and isolate itself from the rest of the world.² As a matter of fact, India's hostility toward Pakistan and China gave them a fundamental common interest so that it was in Pakistan's national interest to seek China's friendship and in China's national interest to support Pakistan. Security consideration and the compulsions of power politics have always been a vital factor in the development of Sino-Pak relations.

The present paper will analyse the relationship between China and Pakistan—the former a big power in Asia and the latter a South Asian big power. The objective of the paper is to bring into focus: what prompted both Pakistan and China to come closer in the sixties and led to their eventual strengthening of relationship? Can the India factor alone explain Pakistan-China relation or are there other factors? What is their understanding of the geopolitical reality in South Asian and the international political context? What are the limits of cooperation between the two particularly in terms of Chinese response to Pakistan's need in periods of crises? In the process of analysis four important events will receive special consideration—the Sino-Pak border accord of 1963, Indo-Pak war of 1965, the Bangladesh liberation war of 1971 and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

I

Pakistan recognized the Communist government of China on January 4, 1950 and became the first Muslim state to do so. Pakistan went even further and criticized those governments that refused to recognize Mao Zedong's regime, calling for the PRC to be represented in the UN to take the China seat in the UN Security Council.³ Pakis-

2. *ibid.*, p. 132.

3. Yaacov Vertzberger, "The Enduring Entente: Sino-Pakistani Relations 1960-1980" *The Washington Papers/95*, Vol. X, Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Georgetown University, Washington D.C. 1983, p. 2.

tan's attitude stemmed primarily from realpolitik calculations. Pakistan did not want to stand on the sidelines and allow India the leading role in the China question, where Nehru had taken it upon himself to defend the cause of Communist China in the UN and win legitimacy for the Communist regime. If the PRC were to fill the China seat in the Security Council where the issue of the disputed Kashmir region was bound to come up, China's attitude would count.

Looking back at the spectrum of Sino-Pakistani relations between 1950 and 1961, one will notice three distinct phases. There is the pre-Bandung period, 1950-54, when these relations followed a pattern of humdrum routine: a modest amount of trade and occasional exchange of visits exhausted the interest of Pakistan and China in each other. During the two years following Bandung one could see a great deal of cultural exchange and talk, especially from the Chinese side, about peace, goodwill, cooperation, Afro-Asian solidarity, and colonialism. In this chorus, Pakistanis also joined but with much less enthusiasm. Beginning with Suhrawardy's visit to Washington in the summer of 1957 until shortly after Ayub Khan's meeting with Kennedy in the summer of 1961, Sino-Pakistan relations remained in low key.⁴

During the Korean War Pakistan did not contribute any armed forces to the United Nations Command and refrained from voting on the resolution branding the People's Republic of China as an aggressor in Korea. On the whole, however, Pakistan was sympathetic to the United States policy towards Korea, and China could very well have taken exception to certain aspects of Pakistani policy, but China was remarkably patient towards Pakistan. All in all, it seems fairly clear that Communist China had coolly calculated from the very beginning that in the long run it would be with India that her

4. Anwar Husain Syed, *China and Pakistan: Diplomacy of an Entente Cordiale*; University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1974, p. 78.

national interests would clash and that forbearance with Pakistan in the meantime might ultimately pay a useful dividend.⁵

Since 1953, Pakistan had changed its voting pattern on China's admission to the United Nations and had tuned its position with that of the US. Pakistan joined the Western system of alliances, signing a Treaty for Mutual Defence Assistance with the United States in May 1954. It also joined SEATO in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact in February 1955. Nevertheless, the deterioration of relations between the two was limited, because Pakistan strongly affirmed that its membership in these alliances was not in any way directed against China.⁶

The 1955 Bandung Conference was a milestone in the history of Pakistan-China relations as Pakistan and China supported each other's stand in Bandung. It was there that Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra clarified Pakistan's position in the SEATO, saying that Pakistan would not be involved in USA-China conflict and that Pakistan has no fears from China. Premier Chou En-lai accepted Pakistan's assurances. During this conference Premier Chou En-lai extended an invitation to Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra to visit China, which was finally availed of by Prime Minister Suhrawardy in 1956. Three months later, Premier Chou En-lai paid a return visit to Pakistan and was accorded an unprecedented welcome by the people of Pakistan.⁷

When Pakistan joined SEATO, China did not register even a formal protest with Pakistan. In the fifties Pakistan was of peripheral importance to China. China's main concern was India with whom it had a major border dispute. China also saw in India its main competitor in this region. Thus friendship between China and Pakistan was inspired by common hostility towards India. This similarity of interests

5. S.M. Burke, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis*; Oxford University Press, London, 1973, p. 108.

6. Yaacov Vertzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 4

7. A. R. Khan Abbasi, "Thirtyfive Years of Pakistan-China relations" *Strategic Studies*, Vol. IX, No. 4, 1986, p. 25.

vis-a-vis India led the Chinese to support even Pakistan's suppression to the popular movement in its eastern half.⁸

By 1958, Sino-Pakistani relations suffered some setbacks. China's foreign policy became generally more radical. Pakistan's relationship with China was complicated by four factors: the coming to power of the Pakistani military under the leadership of Ayub Khan, who was known for his pro-Western, anti-Communist sentiments; Pakistan's signing of a bilateral agreement of cooperation with the United States; Pakistan's sympathy for the revolt in Tibet; and Ayub's plan for the defence of the subcontinent.

In 1969 Ayub Khan offered to sign a Pakistani-Indian mutual defence agreement. He believed that a breakthrough from the north, from the USSR and China toward the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, was likely. He contended that the sub-continent was one geographical unit and that its defence was indivisible. India, however, turned down Ayub's proposal because he had made it conditional on a solution of the Kashmir problem favourable to Pakistan and also because India did not view the threat from the north as critical. Believing this rejection meant an end to the possibility of co-operation with India, Ayub Khan then turned to China and readopted its pre-1953 position on the seating of the PRC representatives in the UN and voted in favour of a draft resolution to that effect.⁹

Pakistan believed that both her friendship with People's China and the latter's menacing attitude toward India were factors which were

For geopolitical reasons, particularly for the India factor, it was in Peking's interest to try to support Pakistan's independence and territorial integrity.

likely to weaken India's position internally and externally, since India would increasingly have to depend on foreign economic and military

8. V.K. Tyagi, "China's Bangladesh Policy", *China Report*, Vol. XVI, No. 4, 1980, p. 20-1.

9. Yaacov Vertzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 6-7.

aid.¹⁰ For geo-political reasons it was in Peking's interest to try to maintain Pakistan's independence and territorial integrity. The continuance of Pakistan as a free and sovereign State was to China's advantage because if India ever succeeded in grabbing Pakistan, it would give India tremendous political prestige and boost its military strength in its tussle with China for domination in Asia. It was, therefore, transparently clear that so long as Sino-Indian rivalries continued Peking would be opposed to any Indian attempt at humbling Pakistan.¹¹

At the outset of Ayub's rule, China was still inclined to support neutralist India over Pakistan, which was considered an important link in America's anti-Communist containment policy in that part of the world. As already mentioned, however, at the Bandung Conference in April 1955, Pakistan had been successful in reassuring the Chinese Communist that its alliance with the United States and United Kingdom were motivated primarily by fear of Indian revisionism, and not by animosity toward them.¹²

During the Sino-Indian conflict of 1962 there was a popular upsurge of feeling for China and its cause, so much so that in two National Assembly sessions and in the media of Pakistan, there was a popular uproar for China and its fair stand on the border issue. After the Sino-Indian conflict, Pakistan and China reached an agreement over their disputed border in 1963. China in its first categorical announcement soon after the Sino-Pak border accord stated that China had never accepted without any reservation, the position that Jammu and Kashmir were under Indian sovereignty. This was in response to the protest note by the Indian government. Thus, China accorded de facto recognition of Pakistan's claim on Jammu and Kashmir.¹³

10. Azizul Huq, *Trends in Pakistan's External Policy, 1947-1971*, Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, Dhaka, 1985, p. 129.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 133.

12. George J. Lerski, "The Foreign Policy of Ayub Khan" *Asian Affairs*, March-April, 1974, p. 260.

13. A.R. Khan Abbasi, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

The friendship, nourished by the Sino-Indian conflict and boosted by the Pak-China border agreement, steadily grew during 1963-1965 owing to a number of formal agreements, exchange of several official visits and cultural delegations. The Pak-China border accord which was Peking's one "diplomatic slap on India's mangled face",¹⁴ opened a new era in Pak-China relations. It served both the immediate and the far-reaching objectives of both Pakistan and People's China. It removed the danger of conflicts which undemarcated frontiers usually lead to. The agreement made the Karakoram in Chou's words, "the bonds of friendship between the Chinese and Pakistan peoples".

The Karakoram highway for the first time made the great mineral wealth of the Karakoram mountains accessible to Pakistan. Traditionally, the area north of Gilgit traded far more with Xinjiang than with the plains of Pakistan. Now the Karakoram highway carries Pakistan's manufactures and, perhaps more importantly, the Pakistan government's administration to this remote area. The mineral deposits of the area are also travelling down to manufacturing centres in Pakistan. The Karakoram highway thus serves important economic and political purposes for Pakistan.¹⁵

Evaluating the China-Pakistan border agreement in retrospect, Ayub Khan said: "This agreement on border demarcation was the first step in the evolution of relations between Pakistan and China. Its sole purpose was to eliminate a possible cause of conflict in the future. But as a result of this agreement, the Chinese began to have trust in us and we also felt that if one was frank and straightforward, one could do honest business with them."¹⁶ One of the reasons for Pakistan's signing the Sino-Pak border agreement was her awakened fears after the Sino-Indian war that failure to settle the border issue with China might bring about a similar confrontation. For Pakistan, the agreement meant it secured at least a de facto recognition of its control over Azad

14. Azizul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

15. G.D. Deshingkar, "India-China: The Security Dimension" *China Report*, Vol XV, No. 2, 1979, p. 73.

16. M. Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters: A Political Autobiography*; Oxford University Press, London, 1967, p. 164.

Kashmir from a regional power. On China's side, the agreement was intended to improve and secure communications with the region, for China was apprehensive about the USSR's subversive activities in Sinkiang.¹⁷

II

The Pak-China friendship reached its peak during the Indo-Pak war of 1965. Peking condemned India for escalating armed conflict, and gave full support to Islamabad. The Chinese ultimatum to India and the threatening postures of the Chinese on the Sino-Indian borders forced India to confine the conflict to the western front and to seek for an early cease-fire. In a statement on the Indo-Pak war of 1965 the Chinese Government maintained, "The Indian Government's armed attack on Pakistan is an act of naked aggression. It not only is a crude violation of all principles guiding international relations, but also constitutes a grave threat to peace in this part of Asia. The Chinese Government sternly condemns India for its criminal aggression and expresses firm support for Pakistan in its just struggle against aggression and solemnly warns the Indian Government that it must bear the responsibility for all the consequences of its criminal and extended aggression."¹⁹ This condemnation was repeatedly expressed in several such official pronouncements during and after the war.

There can be no doubt that Chinese threats had a significant impact on the political-diplomatic front. Both the United States and the Soviet Union would have preferred to come down strongly on India's side. Had they been unencumbered by the Chinese factor, they would have felt free not only to aid India but also to put a great deal more pressure on Pakistan than they were actually able to do. In that event, Pakistan would have lost face, and, beyond that, she might have had

17. Yaacov Vertzberger, *op. cit.*, p. 18-20

18. Azizul Huq, *op. cit.* p. XI.

19. Statement of the Chinese Government, 7 September, 1965, on the Indo-Pak war, cited in Azizul Huq, *op. cit.*, 233.

to settle, in territorial terms, for something less than the *status quo ante bellum*. As it turned out, the two great powers, loath to see Pakistan drift closer to China, found themselves inhibited.²⁰

In late 1965 China stepped up its arms deliveries when the United States cut its military assistance to Pakistan thereby leaving Pakistan in a weak position vis-a-vis India. Chinese leaders hoped to strengthen Pakistan militarily in order to offset Indian dominance on the subcontinent and to keep the India-Pakistan conflict alive²¹ so as to undermine India's leadership of the nonaligned movement.²¹ Since 1965 Indo-Pak war, China, was the major source of arms supplies to Pakistan. As of July 1971, Pakistan had 1611-28 light bombers and 64 MIG-19 interceptors out of a total of 285 combat aircraft. She had 50 T-55 and 225 T-59 medium tanks in a total tank force of 870. In the spring of 1972 she received an additional 60 MIG-195 and 100 T-59 tanks, an undisclosed number of surface-to-air missiles, patrol boats, and other weapons.²²

The actual dimensions of Chinese assistance to Pakistan—military, economic or technical—are difficult to ascertain, partly because of the secrecy surrounding some of its components, and partly because of a propagandistic element in the Pakistani and Chinese advertisement of others. At the economic level, Sino-Pakistani relations have pursued uniformly smooth course. In addition to the loan of \$60 million given to Pakistan in 1965, and another loan of \$40.50 million advanced in 1969, China gave \$6.90 million to Pakistan for the purchase of food. During President Yahya Khan's visit to Peking in 1970, China pledged a further over \$200 million for Pakistan's Fourth Five-Year Plan, thus doubling the amount of assistance given towards the previous plan.²³

It may be mentioned that after the 1965 Indo-Pak war the two countries reached an agreement in Tashkent. The Chinese did not

20. Anwar Hasain Syed *op. cit.*, p. 122.

21. John F. Copper, and Daniel S. Papp, *Communist Nations' Military Assistance*; Westview Press, Colorado, p. 109.

22. Anwar Hasain Syed, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

23. S. M. Burke; *op. cit.*, p. 363.

criticize the terms of the Tashkent agreement, for to do so would necessarily imply a condemnation of Ayub Khan. It would also mean supporting anti-Tashkent Pakistanis against their government. Yet, they did not wish to remain completely silent. Preferring an indirect reproach, they found occasion to characterize the agreement as a product of Soviet-American "plotting" to weaken the united struggle for Afro-Asians against imperialism. The United States and the Soviet Union, they said, had backed India against Pakistan and made common cause against China in pursuing their interventionist policy in Asia.²⁴ In 1969, Ayub Khan was turned out of office, and Yahya Khan was appointed President in his stead. Yahya Khan visited China in November 1970 and met with Mao and Zhou Enlai. The visit concluded with a joint declaration voicing Chinese support for Pakistan on the Kashmir question and Pakistani reaffirmation of support for a one-China policy.

By 1970, the United States, under President Nixon felt the geostrategic compulsion of establishing a new superpower equilibrium in Asia and turned to Pakistan for cooperation and assistance in establishing rapprochement with China. This decision by US was personally carried and conveyed to China's leadership by President Yahya Khan of Pakistan in November 1970, who persuaded Chairman Mao Tse Tung and Premier Chou En-lai to open a new chapter in their relations with US and avail of the benefits in economic and technological terms that would accrue therefrom. Pakistan takes pride that in a way it provided bridge between a superpower and an emerging superpower of Asia, in this manner.²⁵

III

The Bangladesh liberation struggle of 1971 was regarded by China as purely an internal matter of the then Pakistan. Its power politics

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24. Anwar Hasain Syed, *op. cit.* p. 131.
 25. "Text of Henry Kissinger's White House Years," Published in *'India Today'*, October, 1979, p. 27.

appeared to take precedence over its ideological interests and objectives. The most striking feature of this was the rapprochement between China and the United States and the former's support to West Pakistan's war against what was then East Pakistan. The Chinese probably realized the strategic and diplomatic importance of keeping Pakistan united against the Soviet Union and India. The geographical spread of Pakistan was of special advantage to China. Since the mainland of India lies between the two wings of Pakistan, China could create trouble for India in the West as well as in the East. In their long-term policy planning towards South Asia, the Chinese had visualized the importance of Pakistan right from the beginning.²⁶

Though China would rather see the issue of Bangladesh movement peacefully resolved between the disputants at the initial stage, and therefore took no sides in the domestic scene in Pakistan, Peking was rendering strong verbal support to Islamabad. While support was being given as against India, at another level the Chinese were urging negotiations. The Chinese kept a low profile till India's intervention abruptly negated the prospects of a prolonged struggle and the emergence of a Bangladesh under Indo-Soviet assistance seemed to be in the offing. China's decision to lie low is evidenced by the fact that no arms were sent to Pakistan until October, i.e., until after the Indo-Soviet treaty. Also, the failure of Bhutto's military mission to China in November 1971 supports this. In return banquet given by Bhutto which Chou also attended, the Chinese Prime Minister dwelt on Sino-Pakistan bilateral relations and made no mention of external threats to Pakistan. Bhutto was so disappointed that he later admitted to a journalist that 'Pakistan can hope for little real help from China.'²⁷

China opposed the membership of Bangladesh at the U.N. until early 1974. If the Chinese opposed the Bangladesh's membership, why

26. V.K. Tyagi, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1

27. Iftexhar A. Chowdhury, "Bangladesh's External Relations: The Strategy of a Small Power in a Subsystem;" Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Australian National University, 1980, pp. 200-1.

was not their verbal support to Pakistan backed militarily? The reasons can be analysed as under: Firstly, there was the possibility of a Soviet counteraction. China was militarily simply not strong enough to take on India and the Soviet Union simultaneously. Secondly, China was herself passing through a series of political crises that involved the purging of Lin Piao, Huang Yang-shem (Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces), Wu Fa Hsien (the Air Force Commander) and forty other top military men that precluded serious military engagement at that point in time. Thirdly, at a tactical level, winter was most inconvenient season for military manoeuvres in the Himalayas as passes were likely to remain snowed in. Finally, the Chinese may have simply given up on Yahya who had adamantly paid no heed to their counsel for moderation.²⁸

The Chinese were caught in the problem in making a choice between Islamabad and its friends in the then East Pakistan. Islamabad approached the Chinese for an open declaration of support for its action. Pakistan was too important to China to be offended. China came down strongly in favour of Pakistan condemning the Soviet Union and the Indians and assuring that "should the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan, the Chinese Government and people, will, as always, firmly support the Pakistan Government and people in their just struggle to safeguard State sovereignty and national independence."²⁹ Though China limited its support to Pakistan to diplomacy only and to supplies of some military equipment across the Karakoram as a result of Soviet warnings, it compensated by providing strong diplomatic and economic support to Pakistan after the dismemberment of the latter and the reduction of tensions.

Pakistan did not seem happy over Peking's role during the 14-day war. Pakistan was misled by repeated Chinese assertions of 'resolute

28. *Ibid*, p. 203.

29. Ataur R. Khan, *India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*: Sindbad, Dhaka, 1976, p. 93.

support for Pakistan' into trying a diversionary conflict in Kashmir much as Nasser was emboldened by Moscow to take on Israel in 1967. It was too late when Yahya, like Nasser, discovered that the promised 'resolute' support for the 'final defeat' of India failed to materialise. Peking refused to go beyond the diplomatic noises, both inside and outside the UN.³⁰

China's relatively mild reaction to the war of 1971 in comparison with the ultimatum it served India in 1965 raises a question. When we compare the two wars, we see that the war of 1971 had potentially far more dangerous consequences for China than did the earlier Indo-Pakistani war of 1965. From China's perspective, the stakes were much higher than in 1965, yet China adopted a much milder position. Why? Briefly, the balance between the stakes and the danger of military intervention made intervention a highrisk policy. China probably would have resorted to military intervention only in the most extreme circumstances—either those involving a high stake to China's credibility as a world power and particularly as an Asian power or those leading to the occupation, disintegration, or dismemberment of the heart of Pakistan, its western wing. East Pakistan itself was of little importance to China. It did not border on China, and its main value was the significance it had for Pakistan's leadership. Once keeping East Pakistan became too expensive, China was unwilling to pay the price. West Pakistan, however, was a completely different matter, it was the USSR's gateway to India.³¹

From the outset, China advised caution and stressed the need to reach a political settlement. Zhou En-Lai preached moderation and voiced strong opposition to the widespread use of violence and bloody repression. Peking was, however, unwilling to support the mistakes of Yahya's blundering regime, unless China's own vital interest such as the survival of West Pakistan was threatened. Unlike the situation

30. Azizul Huq, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

31. Yaacov Vertzberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-1.

in 1965, China could see no possible benefits to be gained if war broke out; the risks were high from both the military and diplomatic points of view. But China had to balance these risks delicately against a possible loss of credibility as an ally and the possible implications of this for the hard-won Chinese standing in the Third World.³²

At regional level, future relations with India had to be taken into account. A rapprochement that had begun between China and India in 1969 on the latter's initiative was frozen by the crisis in Paksitan. China was reluctant to ruin the prospects of this rapprochement, especially because there was little to gain from continued confrontation with India. One of the main conflicts of interest between China and India had been their rivalry over leadership in Asia; and this had already been decided in favour of China, finding formal expression in its new role as one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council. Relatively speaking, India was of secondary importance. The existing status quo on the territorial question was to China's satisfaction. But the main reason of China's wish to promote rapprochement with India was its desire to draw India away from the USSR, thereby limiting Soviet penetration of South Asia and disrupting the possibility of establishing a Soviet-inspired collective security system in Asia.³³

China continued its policy of even closer cooperation with Pakistan in the post-1971 era. This policy found an expression in explicit Chinese support for Pak istan in the Shanghai Communique of February 27, 1972 issued at the end of President Nixon's visit to China which upheld the Pakistan's position on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir and sovereignty and integrity of Pakistan. This was followed by Chinese first ever veto barring the admission of Bangladesh to the United Nations on August 25, 1972. While justifying the stand, Huang Hua, permanent representative of the PRC to the UN maintained that refusal of Bangladesh to implement the UN resolution

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7.

regarding the release of Pakistan POWs had rendered it difficult for the Security Council to make the arbitrary judgement that Bangladesh was able and willing to carry out the obligation contained in UN Charter. Chinese persistent stance was a tremendous help in the release of 90,000 Pakistani POWs.³⁴

In February 1972, in order to regain its influence with Pakistan, China wrote off a \$110 million loan and deferred payment of the 1970 \$200 million loan for twenty years. Beijing also promised additional military assistance, and in June delivered sixty MiG-19 fighter planes, 100 tanks, and an unspecified number of small arms. China was obviously committed to maintaining its ties with Pakistan and preventing India from assuming a position of dominance on the subcontinent. Since 1972, China has continued to provide military assistance to Pakistan. In 1976 China agreed to help Pakistan build a munition factory. Also that year it was reported that China had agreed to provide Pakistan with sixty more Shenyang F-6 fighter planes. In 1977 China sent three fast patrol boats to Pakistan.

IV

Two months after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, China promised more military assistance to Pakistan. Foreign Minister Huang Hua visited Islamabad and pledged to aid Pakistan "in various ways"—taken by foreign observers to mean more military assistance. Later in the year an Indian source reported that China had delivered 65 Fantam jet fighters (an improved version of the MiG-19), a sizable number of SAM-2 missiles and other arms in accordance with an agreement signed earlier in the year. Both Pakistan and China, however, denied this report as well charges concerning the presence of Chinese troops and nuclear rockets in Pakistan.³⁵

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-1

35. John F. Copper, and Daniel S. Papp, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110.

During 1979 and 1980, China provided additional arms assistance to Pakistan designed primarily to strengthen Pakistan in the face of the Soviet threat from Afghanistan, and to encourage Pakistan to build staging areas to aid Afghan rebels. Interestingly, there is some evidence that China placed conditions on this assistance to force the Pakistani government to change its attitude toward the United States and to accept US military aid. In any event, in late 1980 and early 1981, observers noted that China was still sending large amounts of military assistance to Pakistan. In November a repair facility for Chinese-built MiG-19 aircraft was completed. In early 1981 India again claimed to have evidence that China was helping to build airfields in Pakistan for military use.

Neither China nor Pakistan has given any indication of the amount of military assistance Beijing has provided to Islamabad. Obviously it is considerable, and apparently most has been given either free or on very favourable terms. One source put the total value at \$2 billion through the beginning of 1980.³⁶ Clearly Chinese leaders have been committed to seeing that Pakistan continues to resist India's efforts to dominate the region militarily. Also, Beijing wants to keep Pakistan from falling into the Soviet orbit. In view of the Afghanistan and Iran situations Pakistan is now more important than ever, suggesting that Chinese military assistance will continue.

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was considered by Pakistan to be an immediate threat to its interests and by the PRC, to be a more remote but nonetheless serious threat. The cordial China-Pakistan relationship and Pakistan's geostrategic importance commit China both for moral reasons and to uphold its credibility to a responsibility for Pakistan's defence. China feels compelled to participate in Pakistan's defence because it fears that Pakistan could become a stepping stone to further Soviet expansion toward the Gulf and the Middle East or toward South and Southeast Asia. Control of Pakistan would give the Soviet Union a venue of attack into Sinkiang and Tibet from the

36. Ibid.

South, using the connecting road system built by China and Pakistan, tightening the encirclement of China by the Soviet Union and the USSR's allies, Vietnam and India, who have territorial disputes with China.³⁷

A speculative but likely possibility is that Pakistan and China are in the process of giving an extensive strategic significance to their relationship; probably with the blessing of the United States. This might involve joint planning in case there is a direct Soviet or Soviet-Indian military threat to Pakistan. It could include joint planning for the defence of the Indo-Pakistani border, relieving Pakistan's troops for the Afghan border. This has been made viable by the completion of the Karakoram Highway and its planned link with Pakistani-held Kashmir, giving China direct access to the actual line of control between India and Pakistan in Kashmir.³⁸

But, as W. Howard Wriggins argues, should Pakistan come into conflict with Soviet forces on the Afghan border, could it really depend on China? Would the latter risk engaging the Soviet Union in Sinkiang in order to divert Soviet resources from Afghanistan and the Pakistan frontier? Very likely, not. In any such confrontation, China, being the weaker power, would probably play a cautious hand. Some have noted that both the Chinese and Russians usually make threatening noises on behalf of their respective South Asian clients, only when the danger of involvement has manifestly passed.³⁹

From China, therefore, Pakistan could expect quiet support, with a continuing flow of military resources commensurate with China's technological and productive capabilities. Since China's leadership do not need to win public support from an elected Congress, they might be steadier than the US in a crisis. And it would no doubt continue to

37. Yaacov Vertzberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-4.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 73-4.

39. W. Howard Wriggins, "Pakistan's Search for a Foreign Policy After the Invasion of Afghanistan" *Pacific Affairs*. Vol. 57, No. 2, 1984, pp. 294-5.

stand by Pakistan at the UN and in other diplomatic arena. By itself, however, China would not be likely to initiate the use of force against the Soviet Union, even in the face of possible Soviet intrusions into the Northwest Frontier Province, Gilgit or Hunza.⁴⁰

Conclusion

The imperatives that drove China and Pakistan toward each other in the early 1960s are still very much in existence: the India factor, the Soviet threat, their mutual insecurity, and their congruent interests in the Third World. If anything, the importance of these factors gained even higher priority after Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, which brought

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the Red Army to the borders of Pakistan and within the reach of the Indian Ocean. It reemphasized to both States how much they still need each other's cooperation. This makes the political and strategic interdependence between China and Pakistan a durable factor in a restive region.

China proved to be generous in its military and economic aid, considering its scarce resources and pressing needs for modernization. Pakistani requests were almost never turned down, especially in times of national crisis and relative international isolation. Always treating Pakistan as its equal, not posing any conditions for its aid, nor using it for any *quid pro quo*, China avoided intervening in Pakistan's domestic affairs, even when the architect of Sino-Pakistani relations, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, was sentenced to death and hanged. This may have been Machiavellian, but for any new Pakistani regime it is

40. *Ibid.*

reassuring to know that the relationship will be isolated from domestic politics, representing continuity even amidst political change.

In the geopolitics of today neither Pakistan nor China can afford to lose the other's goodwill. Pakistanis are fully conscious that China is the only big power which supports Pakistan on the crucial Kashmir issue and seems likely to continue to uphold them in other confrontations with India. China, too, can hardly disregard the fact that Pakistan is a neighbour of high strategic significance. And as Deng Xiaoping, the Chinese leader, said that China considered Pakistan as one of its closest friends and added that China would stand by Pakistan steadfastly and as in the past, this would be done regardless of development of China's relations with other countries.⁴¹

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14. Dawn, April 25, 1982.