

Pak-China-US Triangle vis-à-vis Soviet Union in Afghan War

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Abstract

A triangular alliance was made among Pakistan, China and the United States to oppose the Soviet's presence in Afghanistan. Common interest brought together these states to form a united front in 1980s and to help the anti-Soviet resistance forces in Afghanistan. The paper discusses and discovers the reasons of triangular joint front, their concerns and objectives. Pakistan was concerned about its western border with Afghanistan which was directly threatened. The eastern border was also not safe, as India had backing of the Moscow. Indian Ocean was another area under threat for which Kremlin had long been aspired to have access there. China was mainly concerned with its Muslim dominated Xinjiang region, having a common border with Wakhan area of Afghanistan. A direct threat was existing and could ignite the turbulent society of Xinjiang. Encirclement was an additional concern for China in the wake of Red Army's climbing over Kabul. The US was fighting its ideological Cold War and used the Mujahideen against the Soviets. The paper analyzes that how the three states (Pakistan, China, US) strengthened their efforts against the Soviet and trained the Mujahideen. A descriptive-analytical and qualitative method is used for research.

Keywords: Pakistan, China, United States, Defence, CIA, Aid

1. Introduction

In the atmosphere of war clouds on their doorstep, Chinese and Pakistan's sovereignty were threatened while the United States was worried about the likelihood of her minimizing influence in the region and spread of the Soviet hegemony. The US was willing to use military force for the purpose to secure its access to oil wells of the Middle East. President Carter organized the world community to boycott the Moscow Olympics of 1980 as a counter move of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan (Kegley and Wittkopf, 2006, p.116). The Carter administration was successful in this regard that many Western nations boycotted to participate in the Olympics. Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) boycotted as well against the hegemony and in defense of the Olympic principles. However India participated in the Olympic Games and was cooperating with the illegitimate communist government of Afghanistan (Shah, 2001). America hinted China for maximum collaboration. The Sino-American improvement took place when the Soviet-American relations deteriorated. The United States formally recognized the P. R. China in early 1979 and then Washington used its "China card" to contain the Soviet Union and Beijing used its "America card" (Paterson et al., 2000, p.428). The prompt response of the United States by mobilizing the regional states and its allies assured China about the anti-Soviet US policy (Ross, 1972, p. 272). While the Sino-Pakistan cordiality was the direct result of the Indian factor. The both states' rivalry continued at the time of Soviet interference in Afghan land.

"Both China and Pakistan had a common fear of pro-India Soviet influence in the region" (Singh, 2003, p.194). China was anxious over the Indo-Soviet cooperation and strategy for its encirclement. As was disclosed by India when she recognized the Marxist regime in Kabul, being among the first countries to do it. It was furthered by another Indian diplomatic move when Indira Gandhi succeeded in election as a Prime Minister in 1980 and "gave diplomatic recognition

to the Vietnamese-backed Kampuchean regime following the fall of Pol Pot. Close relations between India and Vietnam – cemented by the common concerns over China – complemented Soviet-Vietnamese links' (Hewitt, 1997, p.101). As Pakistan had served like a bridge in the normalization of relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, now it "was the key partner in the struggle against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s" (Wisner et al., 2003, p.43).

China "vigorously" condemned the hegemonistic action of the Soviet Union" and firmly demanded "the cessation of this aggression and intervention in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of all Soviet armed forces". China expressed that the USSR had "long planned for this military invasion of Afghanistan" for the purpose to access to the Indian Ocean and sea lanes and also seizing oil-rich areas" (Jinqi, 2003). The common border between China and Pakistan geo-strategically played an important role for a common front against the Soviet invasion. Because, geography shapes the perception of a state about the military threat. In this sense the factor of distance is crucial that a far threat is easier to defend than the nearer one. Most of the states dare to attack or pose a threat against their immediate neighbors (Buzan et al., 1998, p.59). The Western and Northwestern borders of Pakistan were vulnerable to the Soviet naked aggression. The geo-proximity of the Wakhan Salient and Xinjiang region forced the two countries for a combine action. Ataur Rahman commented: "Underlying threats to Pakistan's security from India and the Soviet Union via Afghanistan have made Pakistan seriously concerned to bolster its military capability. Pakistan's security concerns are shared by China, which has had very good relations with Pakistan over the last two decades. China is unlikely to accept a further extension of Soviet influence along the Chinese border in Pakistan, as indicated by the fact that China has already condemned the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the strongest possible terms. For these names, China would seem to have a vital stake in Pakistan's territorial integrity. Although China's capacity to come to the aid of Pakistan physically is limited, it has been extending military assistance to Pakistan" (Rahman, 1982, p.107). A destabilized and disintegrated Pakistan was not in the interest of the Beijing Regime and vice versa.

2. Triangle Strengthened

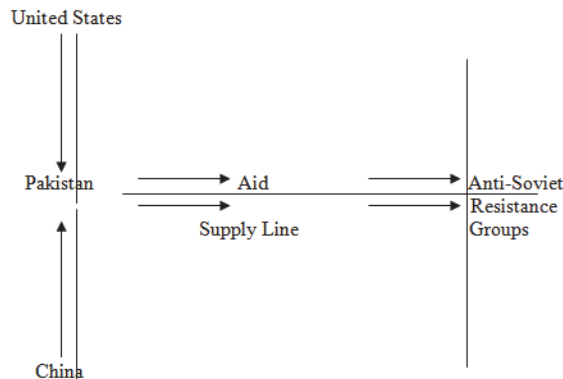
Soviet Union was a major challenge to both the United States and China. To deter the Soviet's new challenge the US needed Chinese support. China was also not in a position to cope with the Red Army's danger on her borders. "China therefore needed the American connections to face up to the Soviet's challenge" (Pradhan, 1983, p.183). Also the Pakistan's position demanded quick aid and support from the two countries as well. "The Afghan crisis and the Soviet military intervention, more than anything else, once again brought into sharper focus the US-China-Pakistan alignment, as was reflected in the US pronouncements for their military aid policies for this region. The latter took the form of the US proposal for joint US-Chinese military aid to Pakistan, as initially announced by the Carter administration in early 1980" (Achuthan, 1988, p.95).

The US-Pakistan relations were at low ebb following the martial law in Pakistan, the latter's struggle for nuclear weapons and the burning of the United States' embassy in Islamabad in September 1979. However upon the Soviet invasion in December in the same year, America focused on Pakistan as a front line state in the war. It was due to the Pakistan's pivotal role in this part of the world (Rocca, 2001). The US Government persuaded Islamabad to act as a channel for supply of arms to Afghan resistance groups of mujahideen and promised with economic and military assistance. Carter offered for Pakistan a 400 million dollars package in February 1980 but the Pakistan Government rejected it as small as "peanuts". "By 1985, Pakistan became the fourth largest recipient of U.S. bilateral military assistance, behind Israel, Egypt, and Turkey. With the approval of the \$4.02 billion military and economic aid package in 1987, Pakistan emerged as the second largest recipient of American aid, after Israel" (Paul, 1992). Pakistan successfully supplied the weapons to the Afghan warriors throughout eighties. "In 1986, a fresh six-year aid program of \$ 4.04 billion was announced by US for Pakistan" (Koithara, 2004). Pakistan desired for the acquisition of F-16 aircrafts from the US. "The United States agreed to deliver the first batch of six F-16's from European production lines by December 1982, while the remaining 34 were to be delivered beginning in April 1984" (Alam, 2001, p.77). Apart from this there were established camps to train the mujahideen in the border areas. Three traditionalist resistance groups; Milli Islami Mahaz of Pir Ahmad Gilani, Jabha Nijat-i-Milli of Sibghatullah Mujaddidi and Harkat-i-Islami of Nabi Mohammad Mohammadi were formed in 1978 in Pakistani city of Peshawar" (Amin, 1984, p.381). The United States also ignored the Pakistan's ongoing nuclear program, not to hinder the supply of arms to Afghan fighters.

The fast changing security scenario in Afghanistan was an alarming factor for causing turmoil in neighboring Pakistan and Iran which were the close allies of the United States. Beijing too assessed the transformation of the Kabul politics in the disadvantage of China where the Soviet threat in the form of encouraging the minorities in Xinjiang on the Soviet border was present. "Thus the policies of the USA and China converged in their opposition to the growing strength

of the anti-imperialist democratic revolutions and increasing Soviet influence in the region" (Chaudhuri, 1982, p.108). To deal with the Soviet policies in Afghanistan, "China provided covertly through Pakistan, military supplies of US \$ 200 million annually to the Afghan resistance. China also agreed to provide the US with listening posts to monitor Soviet Central Asia through secret stations established in the western Chinese Province of Xinjiang. During this decade, US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI), and the Chinese Intelligence services developed a close collaborative relationship based on convergent perceptions of Soviet Union and exchange of information" (Rahman, 1999, p.180). From 1979 to 1987 Pakistan received 12.73 billion dollars (Khan, 2009).

Pakistan served as a meeting place of weapons supply to mujahideen from different countries. The CIA was busy in "taking weapons and ammunition from China and flying over sensitive areas of Kashmir". The contributions were being brought to the port of Karachi, from where the ISI was responsible for delivering them to Afghan warriors (Hilali, 2005, p.167). The process can be more understandable from the following figure.



3. US-Pakistan-China Support for Anti-Soviet Resistance Groups

Beijing had close contacts with the Afghan groups like Shola-E-Javed, Sorha and Moslem Brothers. During the China's visit of the US Defense Secretary Harold Brown, Beijing and Washington discussed the consequences of the April Revolution in Kabul. Later, the Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua paid a visit to Pakistan for the same matter (Chaudhuri, a 1982, p.121). "Also during the Brown visit a plan was devised to carry on an anti-Soviet campaign in a coordinated way. And for the first time an American representative admitted the possibility of concluding an anti-Soviet military alliance between the USA and the People's Republic of China" (Chaudhuri, b 1982, p.123). Zbigniew Brzezinski visited Pakistan in February 1980 to examine the situation resulted from war.

Although there were some efforts between China and the Soviet Union to normalize the relations after the Afghan crisis but the mutual suspicions were still there. Commenting on the visit of the Soviet First Deputy Minister Ivan V. Arkhipov to China, Yan Mei noted that "in May 1984 China was deeply distressed when the Arkhipov visit was abruptly called off only 24 hours before it was scheduled to take place. Speculation about the visit's cancellation centered on Soviet unhappiness with the Reagan visit to China in April 1984 and on Sino-Vietnamese border clashes that occurred about the same time" (Mei, 1985). The Kabul and Moscow regimes had complained that the Islamabad Government in collusion with the United States, China and some other Muslim countries were encouraging and supporting the mujahideen to 'bleeding the Soviets white'. Therefore one of the many reasons of the Soviets military failure in Afghanistan was their inability to stop the supply of the arms to the Afghan resistance forces through the Pakistan and Iran borders (Grau, 1996, p.75).

The New Delhi Government was also in a position to off set the Islamabad-Beijing-Washington axis. "The Indo-Soviet relationship by now, of course, acquired a life of its own because of common Indo-Soviet concerns about China and the United States" (Ayub, 1985, p.169) which were helping Pakistan. The Soviet Union has long before had given all possible support to India in the latter's border conflict with Pakistan. This time too, the USSR was giving economic and military support to India against the United States and China's aid and help to Pakistan (Saikal, 1985, p.116). "By the end of 1980-81, Soviet-aided projects had produced 48 million tonnes of pig iron, 40 million tonnes of steel and more than 30 million tonnes of rolled iron; 70 million tonnes of oil were drilled; about 430,000 tonnes of metallurgical and other machinery for mining shafts and power stations worth more than 280 crore rupees, plus a large quantity of drugs and

pharmaceutical preparations, instruments, etc" (Sharma, 1982, p.13). The Soviet Union had emerged as a big supplier of weapons to India since the sixties when both of them had conflicts with the PRC. This flow of arms was continued till the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. It is evident from the fact that "nearly 70 percent of India's military imports came from the USSR" (Mann, 2000, p.27).

4. Sino-Pakistan Defence Cooperation

Apart from the common concern about the Soviet policies, as usual, China and Pakistan increased their cooperation in different fields. The Chinese position was important as one of the most reliable and generous supporter to Pakistan's economic, security and other issues. China was second to United States in supply of weapons to Pakistan. However, in some parts it exceeded the United States later. China has acquired an important position as one of the largest suppliers of arms to Pakistan, next to the United States. By 1982 Chinese weapon systems formed the backbone of Pakistan's military arsenal. 75 per cent of Pakistan's tank force and 68 per cent of Pakistan's Air Force were Chinese supplied. Pakistan navy is significantly equipped with Chinese naval crafts, which include submarine chasers, Huchwan class Torpedo boats, Shanghai class gunboats and missile boats. According to Vertzberger China supplied "under the most convenient terms, this aid included over the years from 1970 to 1982 almost 800 tanks, more than 25 naval vessels, approximately 300 planes, surface-to-air missile batteries, light weapons, and ammunition. Pakistan usually received the most modern weapons systems produced by China" (Vertzberger, 1983, p.647).

China later also established "in Pakistan overhauling facilities for the F-6 Shenyang fighter and the Tumansky RD-NB-8II turbojet engines with over 7,000 other spare parts. Later, China also expanded this factory to undertake the overhauling of FT-5, FT-6 and FT-7s. Then with the phasing out of the F-6s, this facility has diversified towards maintenance and overhaul of the F-7Ps. The Light Aircraft Manufacturing Factory (LAMF), another turnkey project completed by China in June 1981, was meant for producing complete airframes and eventual production of light aircraft. By September 1983, this facility started license production of SAAB Scania MF-1-17 (locally known as Mushshak) which later became the first step for Pakistan to initiate collaboration on the jet trainer Karakoram-8 with the Chinese. This also led to their collaboration on the joint development of the Super-7 fighter" (Singh, 1996). This was a joint venture between the China National Aeronotechnology Import Export Corporation (CATIC), China Nanchang Aircraft Manufacturing Company (CNAMC), and the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC).

The following table illustrates the Sino-Pakistan cooperation in naval field.

Table No 3:¹ Pakistan's Naval Procurements from China (1980-1991)

(Edited for present research)

Sl No.	Name of the Weapon System (Remark in Parentheses)	Time of Transfer	Nos
1	Romeo-class Submarines	1980	2
2	Hegu-class: Fast Attack Craft-Missile (Equipped with 2 SY-1 missiles)	1980-83	4
3	Huangfen-class: Fast Attack Craft-Missile (Equipped with 4 Hai Ying-2 missiles)	1984	4
4	Shanghai-II class: Fast Attack Craft-Gun (With Maritime Security Agency)	1986	2
5	Fuqing-class AOR (Carried on a SA319 B Alouette II helicopter)	1987	1
6	Type P58A Petrol Craft (With National Security Agency)	1990	4
7	Type 312 Drone Minesweepers (Can operate upto 5 kms with remote control)	1991	5

China has also helped Pakistan in the peaceful use of nuclear technology. In 1986, both the countries signed an agreement for cooperation in peaceful use of nuclear technology (Chandy, 2000, p.317). "Chinese President Jiang Zemin, on a visit to Pakistan in December 1996, confirmed that Chinese co-operation with Pakistan in nuclear power generation was strictly under supervision of the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)" (Nuri, 1999, p.194). Sino-Pakistan cooperation in this field was initiated in 1979 which covered health, basic sciences, geology and agriculture. "It is alleged by some quarters in the West that Pakistan owes its nuclear weapon and missile development to

¹ *Military Balance* (London: IISS), *SIPRI Yearbook* (Stockholm: SIPRI), both over the years; Anne Gilks & Gerald Segel, *China and the Arms Trade*, (London: Croom Helm, 1985) and *IDSAs Files*.

Cited in; Swaran Singh. *Sino-Pak Defence Co-operation: Joint Ventures & Weapons Procurement, Peace Initiatives*, 1999, V (III-VI): 11.

Chinese aid and assistance. This is, however, strenuously denied by the Pakistan government, which asserts that this capability was attained with indigenous effort" (Ibid).

Pakistan needed to strengthen its defense vis-à-vis India and welcomed the weapons supply from the United States and China at same time. "The Genesis of Sino-Pak defense cooperation lies in Chinese attempts at maintaining military balance in the region and its concerns about any shift being inimical to its national security concerns. Beginning as a marriage of mutual convenience, it was nourished by a common hatred for India" (Sahgal, 2003, p.173). The growing Indo-Soviet ties and continuing generous flow of the Soviet arms to India was a destabilizing factor in the region. Although the Sino-Indian relations were moving towards positive direction, the Soviet-backed India was still looming large in the minds of the Chinese and Pakistani policy makers. For Pakistan, the power parity with India was so important that she had always strived to defend its security by all possible means to make a balance in power projection and halt India from getting a position of the hegemonic leadership. "For China, the alliance with Pakistan was always largely intraregional in focus, prompted mainly by Beijing's wish to prevent India's emergence as a serious rival, in particular, to block India from any role in China's encirclement" (Wirsing, 2005, p.153). China's alignment with Pakistan had served its interests in such a way that there was no other state in South Asia which could align with India against China. The Indian neighbors had always disliked her hegemony in the region and considered India as a regional bully.²

The exchange of visits continued and there was even an increase. Almost every year high-level figures paid official visits to each other countries and signed various agreements.

Table No. 4:³ Sino-Pakistan Bilateral Visits (1980 to 1991)

S. No.	Year	Personality
1	May 1980	Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haque
2	June 1981	Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang
3	October 1982	Pakistan's President Zia-ul-Haque
4	March 1984	Chinese President Li Xiannian
5	November 1985	Pakistan's Prime Minsiter Muhammad Khan Junejo
6	June 1987	Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang
7	May 1988	Pakistan's Prime Minsiter Muhammad Khan Junejo
8	February 1989	Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto
9	November 1989	Chinese Premier Li Peng
10	May 1990	Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, Wan Li
11	September 1990	Pakistan's President Ghulam Ishaq Khan
12	February 1991	Pakistan's Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif
13	October 1991	Chinese President Yang Shangqun

It is evident from the above table that the China's rapprochement with India did not leave any adverse effect on the exchange of visits between China and Pakistan. However, their normalization of relations affected the China's view on Kashmir which turned Pakistan's support to neutral position. "In August 1982, the two countries signed the protocol on opening Khunjerab Pass on the Sino-Pakistani border" (MOFA China, 2003) of Karakoram Highway which some circles called it the Eight Wonder of the world.

The Karakoram Highway has had the strategic value for both China and Pakistan. Pakistan had welcomed the Chinese desire to use it for trade with the Middle East and Africa and also to do investment in Pakistan. Along with the defense infrastructure, Chinese trade with Pakistan was significant in 1970s and 1980s, both in exports to it and import from it. The tables show the data of Chinese exports and imports with South Asia.

² Interview with Ye Hailin, Expert on Sino-Pakistan relations at Asia-Pacific Center, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, (17 December, 2008).

³ Re viewing the Bilateral Political Relations, Ministry of foreign affairs of the People's Republic of China, 23-10-2003. <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjw/zjg/yzs/gjlb/2757/>

Table No. 5:⁴ China's exports to Pakistan and South Asia

(In million dollars) (Edited for present research)

Year	1977	1979	1982	1985	1989	1991
China's Total Export (\$Bn)	7.6	13.7	22.0	27.4	52.6	72.0
Pakistan	49	122	203	185	368	597
India	1	-	101	84	169	144
Bangladesh	17	-	90	76	192	204
Sri Lanka	28	95	37	61	69	118
Nepal	-	-	21	17	27	32

Table No. 6:⁵ China's Imports from Pakistan and South Asia

(In million dollars) (Edited for present research)

Year	1977	1979	1982	1985	1989	1991
China's Total Import (\$Bn)	7.2	15.7	18.9	42.3	59.1	63.8
Pakistan	19	30	143	58	224	89
India	1	-	81	39	102	120
Bangladesh	17	-	22	12	35	9
Sri Lanka	52	62	7	13	4	5
Nepal	-	-	4	2	5	1

It is clear here that within the Chinese exports to South Asia, Pakistan was the biggest importer of Chinese goods. The trend was similar to Pakistan's favor in Chinese imports from South Asia where as a whole, Pakistan stood first, except the years of 1977 and 1979 when Sri Lanka exceeded Pakistan. In this regard, today's data is different where India is number one in trade relations with China in South Asia.

5. Conclusion

As history repeats itself, like the Bangladesh Crisis a quasi alliance among Islamabad, Beijing and Washington emerged once again. The war brought about a change in international system which turned into a balancing game. "States nearer the threat are more likely to engage in balancing than or more distant states" (Kaufman et al., 2007, p.18). The Sino-Pakistan common interest coincided with the US interest of halting the Red Army from further advancement. Throughout the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, the three states with addition of some other Muslim states made strategies and worked together against the Moscow's attack. Concluding the Pakistan, China and United States strategies, throughout the Soviet presence in Afghanistan, the three countries aligned together to get out the Red Army from Kabul. With varying degrees of threat and objectives, their common interest played a crucial role. The Indo-Soviet axis tried to balance the game effectively but in vain. The increased resistance led to the signing of the Geneva Accord in April 1988 and the Soviet agreed to pull out its 115,000 army from Afghanistan by February 1989.

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⁴ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Statistical Yearbook for Asia and Pacific (1989, 1993, 2003), Bangkok. And International Monetary Fund, Direction of Trade Statistics Yearbook 2001, Washington. Cited in; Atul Kumar, China-Pakistan Economic Relations, IPCS Special Report 30, September 2006: 3 <http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=47&fileID=7E801130-A7C7-9725-573B-65A6ADDA2E6E&lng=en>

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