

CHINA'S INTERESTS IN PAKISTAN-OCCUPIED KASHMIR-STRATEGIC CONCERNS FOR INDIA

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ABSTRACT

The Kashmir conflict, originally a two-sided struggle between India and Pakistan, has now transformed into a triangular geopolitical dispute over the course of several decades. The clashes between Indian and Chinese soldiers in eastern region of Ladakh in Kashmir have led to India becoming engaged in a military conflict on two separate fronts. The Chinese incursions into the territory under India's administration will bolster Pakistan's determination to enhance its support for Kashmiri insurgents, so escalating the confrontation over the contested region. From the perspective of the United States, there is an opportunity to establish a strategic partnership with India in order to gain a competitive advantage against China, which has increasingly become a more formidable adversary. However, there are possible risks associated with increased susceptibility and uncertainty in region. The relationship among China and India is marked by a blend of military conflicts, diplomatic negotiations, and vigorous commercial interactions, all taking place alongside participation in multiple international forums. Their capacity for growth and their aspirations for the future drive them towards extreme competition. Moreover, China's continuous growth as a prominent player in global arena poses several strategic difficulties to India's narrative of economic success. The main problem is that China's rapidly expanding military capabilities provide a direct military threat to India, combined with the history of violent territorial disputes between the two countries. Moreover, China's burgeoning economic might enables it to exert influence over global public sentiment in a manner that is advantageous to itself and detrimental to India. This issue is made

worse by China's influence over international organizations like the United Nations and financial institutes like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which might possibly intrude onto India's national interests. Furthermore, the ongoing expansion of Chinese influence in South Asia significantly affects India's dominant position in this region.

KEYWORD: *Confrontations, Prevailing, Territorial, Conflicts, Vulnerability*

1. INTRODUCTION

Succeeding partition of J&K in 1947, it required a span of two years for the Communists to triumph over the Nationalists and establish dominance over Beijing. People's Republic of China (PRC) developed an interest in Kashmir after taking control of Tibet in 1950. They asserted territorial claims in Aksai Chin in Ladakh, which is located on Indian side of J&K, as well as in Shaksgam and Hunza Valleys in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK).

Succeeding confrontation with India in 1962, China began supporting the idea of "self-determination" in Kashmir and even provided actual aid through Pakistan for a brief period. After 1965 conflict between Pakistan and India, the supply of assistance was halted, while political support continued until Deng Xiaoping modified approach to embrace a more impartial stance in late 1970s. Nevertheless, Pakistan continued to hold importance in China's strategic considerations inside the South Asian region. During the 1980s and 1990s, Beijing constantly offered military assistance to Pakistan by providing both conventional and nuclear weaponry. This military collaboration persisted even amid notable occurrences like Kargil crisis in 1999 and year-long military buildup near Indo-Pak border in 2002, referred to as "Operation Parakram" in India. Although some may argue that assisting Pakistan has strengthened its position in this dispute of Kashmir, it is tough to establish a direct link amid intricacies of the Kashmir situation and China's sale of arms to Pakistan. Furthermore, China has consistently promoted a peaceful resolution of Kashmir issue for over two decades, characterizing it as an unresolved historical problem. China abstained from endorsing the Pakistani position or raising the matter at the United Nations, both during Operation Parakram and Kargil conflict. Due to rise in trade and continuous border discussions between India and China, there is a growing sense of hope in India that the Chinese will no longer exploit the Kashmir problem as a tool for imposing pressure.

1.1 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

August 15th, 1947 saw India win its freedom from British colonial domination. Nevertheless, as a result of religious and sectarian differences, the kingdom underwent partition, leading to the formation of two distinct nations: India and Pakistan. Maharaja Hari Singh, the sovereign of the self-governing territory recognized as the "Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir," chose not to form an alliance with either India or Pakistan. Pakistan was deeply concerned by this fact and launched a military campaign against Jammu and Kashmir with the aim of annexing it to their own territory. Ultimately, the Maharaja formally requested aid from the Indian Government and consented to integrate with India, leading to the eruption of hostilities between India and Pakistan.

Although political engagement in PoK is restricted, the rise of pro-democratic movements has provided an opportunity for local residents to voice their feelings and find some relief. These nationalists have shown the oppression perpetrated by Pakistan and its policies in PoK. Of late, citizens of PoK who have moved to Western nations such as and US and UK are actively and enthusiastically involved in tackling the challenges and issues concerning their hometown.

India has full legal jurisdiction over the whole region of Jammu & Kashmir, including the portions that are now under occupation. Nevertheless, Pakistan and China also exert control over substantial parts of this region.

The coexistence of three nuclear powers facing each other in a relatively small area is unquestionably unsettling. Over the years, India and Pakistan have participated in three major conflicts, which have heightened the prevailing dread due to the deployment of advanced technology. The prevailing political instability and lack of a conclusive conclusion have led to a fragmented and apprehensive citizenry in Kashmir over their future prospects.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM It is highly probable that India would substantially enhance its engagement with regards to POK in the next twenty years. This is evident not only from recent statements released by the Ministry of External Affairs, but also from the ongoing developments related to China. China's growing dominance in India's bordering region is expected to compel India to establish its sovereignty over its disputed territory in the near future.

The latest confrontation between India and Pakistan took place in 1999 during the Kargil War. This conflict represents Pakistan's failed attempt to assert dominance over the region of

Kashmir. The terrorist attack in Mumbai on 26 November 2008 was a momentous incident, marked by an impending state of warfare. However, India demonstrated restraint and prioritized the improvement of its own counter-terrorism system. Engaging in a similar incident may incite retaliation from the Indian party. The repeated failure of diplomatic efforts over Pakistan has provoked anti-Pakistan sentiments among Indians. In the event of a change in public sentiment favoring the support of a military campaign against Pakistan, the administration would be left with few viable options.

Any alteration in the present dynamics of China-Pakistan ties would greatly influence the geo-strategic environment of South Asia. As the United States gains greater awareness of the terrorist network in Pakistan and adopts a more resolute approach in its dealings with Pakistan, it is probable that Pakistan will experience estrangement from its closest allies. These allies may develop antagonistic attitudes towards Pakistan's stance of endorsing extremist actions within its territory, despite their differing objectives.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To recognize significance of China's strategic benefits in relation to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), South and Central Asia, along with its future intentions regarding defense and energy in this area.
2. To analyze and highlight newly formed economic, diplomatic, and military ties between China and Pakistan, and their possible effect on India's national security, economy, and sovereignty.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher has examined various aspects related to the strategic issues for India arising from Chinese ambitions in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. The research activity employs a theoretical and analytical research technique.

Collecting material for this study was not challenging as it is closely linked to the pertinent literature, which encompasses diverse perspectives from numerous philosophers and scholars, along with contemporary empirical evidence. The information and publications have been collected from primary and secondary data sources. I had to collect information from a multitude of books, journals, articles, publications, and prominent National Dailies. This study

is a synthesis of analytical, comparative, descriptive, historical, and critical techniques, as it draws from literature, journals, articles, magazines, and many prominent national newspapers.

3.1 SOURCES OF INFORMATION COLLECTION

Literature serves as the fundamental basis for exploring Chinese involvement in Pakistan-administered Kashmir. Consequently, I employed both literary sources and recent academic publications throughout this inquiry. We were required to collect data and resources for our study from a diverse range of sources.

Original documents or firsthand accounts: Due to the literary nature of our project, we had to evaluate several lectures, speeches, and interviews delivered by leaders and think tanks from India, the US, and Russia. These sources served as our major means of collecting data. The perspectives of many leaders were an essential means of collecting information. These sources are available online on website of Ministry of External Affairs, in the records of Parliament House, and in open source.

Secondary sources, including both private and public papers, have played a crucial role in collecting credible information. Public documents are highly valuable sources of information for doing this study. The following official records were our primary sources for collecting data, information, and material.

- Books
- Journals
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- Internet-based data
- Theses and research reports

Other notable reports from other organizations can serve as supplementary sources of information on this topic.

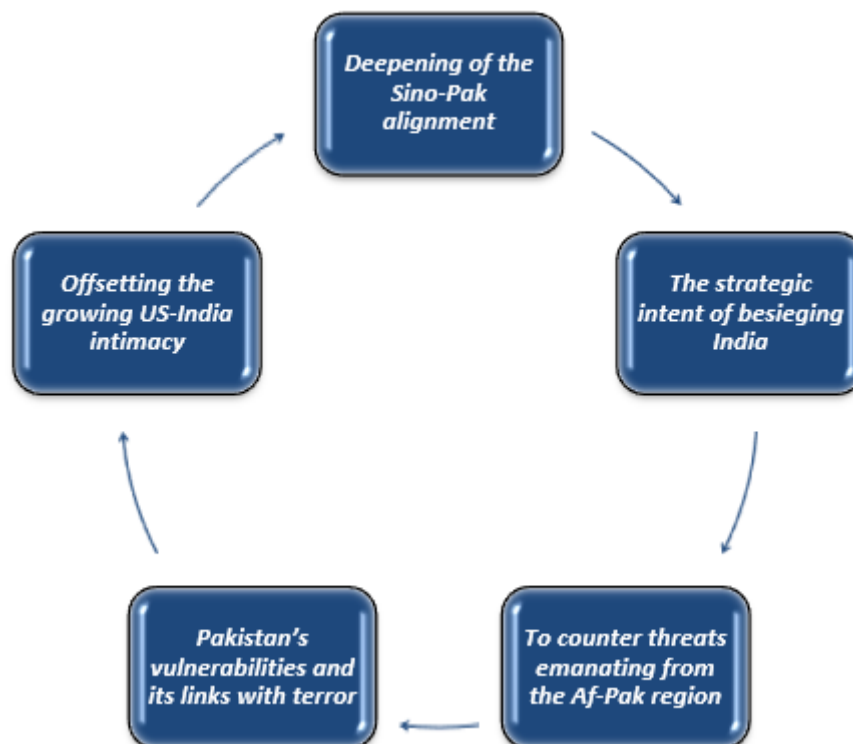
The study's selected bibliography includes journals, magazines, books, and newspapers.

4. DISCUSSION

The Karakoram Highway (KKH) connecting Kashgar with Gilgit has functioned as a crucial strategic lifeline for the diplomatic ties between China and Pakistan. Despite ongoing trade

restrictions, the Chinese government has made a significant commitment to support the expansion and maintenance of the KKH and integrate it into Pakistan's current network of highways. This will enhance access to the Pakistani shore. Disregarding any altruistic intentions, Chinese objective to decrease dependence on oil deliveries across Malacca Straits and redirect them via alternate routes such as Gwadar involves the vital challenge of ensuring the continuous operation of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) throughout the whole year. China is probably aiming to establish connections with the planned road networks that would link Afghanistan and Pakistan, and eventually expand to Central Asia. This aligns with their endeavors to broaden their strategic influence in Central and South Asia and to oversee regional occurrences.

4.1 SINO-PAK ACTIONS IN POK: CONCERNS FOR INDIA



4.2 CHINA AND JAMMU & KASHMIR

The main driving forces behind India's anti-China faction are memory of India's loss to China in conflict of 1962, Chinese takeover of Aksai Chin in Ladakh, and territorial claims over

Arunachal Pradesh in eastern India. Over the years, the Chinese have considered Arunachal to be more strategically important than Aksai Chin. It might be argued that ongoing Sino-Indian border conflict makes it unlikely for any meaningful changes to happen. However, it is essential to determine whether simply waiting for significant progress towards a solution is enough. Ladakh, under these circumstances, provides an appropriate environment for conducting experiments on enhancing Sino-Indian relations and exploring novel approaches to ultimately resolve the boundary problem.

In 1962, Ladakh, which had significant historical links with Tibet and Xinjiang, ended these relations and steadily lost its prominence in the Indian mind. Leh, the capital of Ladakh, previously served as the focal point for the Silk Route trade in the united region.

As a result of British favoring Gilgit as hub of Sino-Indian trade and subsequent conflicts between China and India, Ladakh lost its previous significance and became heavily dependent on financial aid from the Indian central government and seasonal tourists for economic sustenance.

Future prospects of Ladakh primarily hinge on two crucial factors: substantial improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, coupled with a significant increase in tourist influx. In recent times, the Indian government has initiated more resolute measures. Nevertheless, the tourism sector continues to be affected by obsolete Inner Line permits. Access to places near Line of Actual Control (LAC) still requires permissions, which limit the majority of Ladakh to a small number of local population and Indian Army. Despite Indian government's initial reluctance, it is now making progress in building roads along LAC. However, it is encountering significant opposition from the Chinese. Concurrently, the Chinese have been enlarging and updating their infrastructure on their portion of the Line of Actual Control (LAC). This has impeded Indian efforts, but it is also important to investigate whether Inner Line permits, which essentially grant exclusive usage to Indian military personnel, contribute to the Chinese complaints. Enhancing the region's accessibility to tourists may perhaps alleviate Chinese resistance to Indian road expansion efforts.

Presently, overseas travelers have a higher level of importance for the tourism industry in Ladakh when compared to Indian tourists. Nevertheless, in the event if the Leh-Manasarovar pilgrim route were to be reopened, it is anticipated that this situation would see a significant

change. The road from Ladakh to Mt. Kailash and Lake Manasarovar is a revered pilgrimage trail for Hindus.

Buddhists travel through the disputed territory by passing through Demchok, the last Indian stronghold. So far, the Chinese have shown reluctance in giving clearance for the route, likely because to the few economic advantages it provides to them. The Chinese are cautious about redirecting tourists away from Kailash-Manasarovar, as it plays a crucial role in boosting the local economies during the entire route from Lhasa. Smuggling is a significant factor in the local economy on both sides of LAC. In Ladakh, thermos flasks and blankets are illicitly smuggled in from Tibet, while Indian tea is illegally trafficked in the opposite direction.

An argument can be made in favor of reinstating border trade via the Karakoram Pass, which acts as the main access point from Ladakh to Xinjiang. Although there are difficulties in building roads along this path, it is worth contemplating. This route, known as the Silk Route, encompasses Nubra Valley and Indian outpost of Daulat Beg Oldi. It serves as important pathways to Kashgar and has the obvious appeal of drawing tourists.

4.3 CHINA'S INTERESTS IN DISPUTE OF KASHMIR

China, although currently asserting its neutrality, maintains a consistent interest in resolving the dispute for multiple reasons. According to the conditions of Sino-Pakistan Frontier Agreement of 1963, status of over 2,000 square miles of territory that Pakistan ceded to China would be open to renegotiation. If Pakistan and India were to resolve their dispute over Kashmir and India were to acquire control of the region that was ceded to China, this scenario would unfold. In addition, if a settlement is achieved and India regains control over Northern Areas, it would effectively cut off all land connections amid Pakistan and China, resulting in the Karakoram Highway (KKH) becoming under Indian jurisdiction. This suggests possible obstacles or at least a need for careful consideration for China in several crucial domains, including its aspirations to create energy transportation pathways from West Asia to Gwadar. Moreover, if the Kashmir dispute is settled by acknowledging existing status quo, even with minor or "insignificant" adjustments to the borders as currently suggested, India will undoubtedly request better access to Northern Areas (and possibly entire territory of Pakistan), beginning with economic access. This has the potential to present a challenge to Chinese ambitions in the region. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that achieving a

settlement, even if it preserves the existing state of affairs, could potentially generate further prospects for business interactions between India and China. As previously mentioned, these connections may provide more benefits for China in comparison to its engagements with Pakistan. Furthermore, there may be an extra motivating factor for resolution of Sino-Indian boundary conflict.

The outcome of the current scenario is indeterminate, as it is unclear if there will be a resolution or a stalemate. Concurrently, Kashmiris residing on both sides of the division have made pleas for Chinese intervention in the Kashmir war. Abdul Majeed Mallick, the leader of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation League and the ex-Chief Justice of the High Court of Azad Kashmir, asserts that Chinese ambassador to Pakistan made a commitment to him, confirming that China will relinquish its control over Aksai Chin in the event of Kashmir gaining independence. During the 2006 World Social Forum in Karachi, Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, a prominent Indian Kashmiri leader and Chairman of the Hurriyat, expressed support for China's participation in settling the Kashmir dispute. The reason for this is that China not only has control over a part of Kashmir, but also wields considerable sway as a prominent force in the area. Pakistani Foreign Department unequivocally denied China's involvement, stating that the conflict is purely between India and Pakistan, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions. Chinese President Hu Jintao refrained from discussing China's involvement in resolving the Kashmir dispute during his visit to Pakistan in November 2006. He recently voiced his endorsement for India and Pakistan to address this issue through diplomatic discussions. Nevertheless, in December 2006, Umer Farooq reiterated his request for China's participation and announced that his organization was contemplating a trip to Beijing to discuss this matter.

5. CONCLUSION

The Chinese interest in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) is motivated by their objective to safeguard crucial natural resources essential for their economic progress, establish a pathway to the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean through PoK, expand their sphere of influence in the region, and closely observe the overall developments in the area, with a specific emphasis on India. Furthermore, China is concerned about the possibility of terrorists from the Afghanistan-Pakistan region entering its volatile province of Xinjiang, which is primarily inhabited by

Muslims. China intends to monitor and control such actions by establishing a presence in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

China's energy consumption, specifically its need of crude oil imported from Middle East, is consistently rising. However, the United States navy exercises substantial authority over the waters encompassing the Malacca Strait and Middle Eastern oil fields, which functions as the predominant shipping pathway for virtually all of China's oil. An alternative route connecting the Gwadar seaport to Xinjiang in Western China, via Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK), would enable the PRC to fulfill its energy requirements and reduce its dependence on United States' favor. China's illegal seizure of the Shaksgam valley in PoK, its dominance over the Chabahar and Bandar Abbas ports in Iran, and its growing influence in the strategically vital region of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), have crucial strategic implications for India.

It is essential to further examine the previously mentioned aspects about the heightened economic engagement between the three countries, particularly between India and China. Not only is this crucial for resolving the Kashmir problem, but it is also essential for cultivating enhanced relationships among all three nations.

PRC intends to establish stability in its neighboring region and enhance influence of its marketplace in Southern Asia. Therefore, it deems stability in Kashmir and stable relations between India and Pakistan to be of utmost importance.

China's implementation of the Western Development Strategy (WDS) in its interior provinces, such as Xinjiang and Tibet, requires the maintenance of stability and peace along boundaries of these areas. It is essential to promote the expansion of foreign trade and develop these provinces into important commercial centers for China's western neighbors.

In the context of India, although there was an initial enhancement in diplomatic ties with China thirty years ago and the signing of border accords in 1993 and 1996, there has been minimal progress in settling the boundary dispute. Both nations must now prioritize and actively pursue a thorough and ambitious examination of economic cooperation. The advancement of cross-border commerce at Nathu La, located on Tibet- Sikkim border in eastern India, has been impeded by inadequate infrastructure and a lack of political resolve in New Delhi to accelerate the procedure. Given the potential linkages discussed earlier in Ladakh, it is conceivable that Beijing might be the party exhibiting greater reluctance.

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