CHAPTER – VIII

SINO-PAKISTAN RELATIONS – THE INDIAN FACTOR
China Pakistan and India form a triangle with convoluted relationships. Security in the region is shaped by the intertwining policies of all three powers. The policies adopted by one country have an immediate impact on and response from the other two. A review of the history of these turbulent relations reveals that, in the period following the establishment of diplomatic ties, China and India were on friendly terms. The first decade of their relations was based on the myth of *Hindi Chini bhai bhai* (Indians and Chinese are brothers), while Pakistan, with its pro-west orientation, tilted towards the US-led capitalist bloc. There was, therefore, limited co-operation between China and Pakistan during the 1950s. This pattern of relations changed drastically with the advent of the 1960s. The heydays of Sino-Indian friendship turned into open rivalry, which led to severe border clashes in November 1962. Pakistan, whose relations with India had never been cordial, was disappointed when its Western allies began aiming India on a scale it thought was unjustified. However, it found in China, with its new anti-Indian sentiments, a potential ally. Thus in the wake of the Sino-Indian border clashes, relations between China and Pakistan improved remarkably. In the post–Mao era (i.e. since 1978), the new Chinese leadership of Deng Xiaoping wrought drastic changes in the
country's economic and foreign policies. These changes had a considerable effect on the nature of the triangular relations.¹ China paid due attention to improving its relations with India, relations that had been frozen for the last two decades. At the same time, Beijing moderated its stance on the Kashmir issue, abandoning its erstwhile support for the right of self-determination in the disputed territory, and instead emphasized the need for a peaceful solution of the issue. This attitude was further reflected in China's response to the Kargil crisis and to the Indo-Pakistan stand-off in mid-2002.

Some scholars view these changes as a significant development in the triangular relationship and argue that the friendship between China and Pakistan developed in the backdrop of their common enmity towards India. Once Sino-Indian relations started improving, the traditional warmth between China and Pakistan began to cool somewhat. In this chapter an attempt is made to study how far the Indian factor played a role in bringing China and Pakistan closer, and whether it led to a strengthening of ties between the two: and what the future impact might be.

The Sino-Indian and Sino-Soviet rifts contributed to the forging of close military, political and economic links between India and the Soviet Union on the one hand, and ushered in a new era in friendly relations between China and Pakistan on the other. China accused India of
becoming part of the Soviet “strategy of encircling and containing China”. To counter this nexus, China encouraged anti-Indian sentiments in neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan, and paid special attention to promoting relations with Pakistan. Consequently China and Pakistan signed a Boundary Agreement in March 1963, followed by an Air Service agreement, which had the effect of ending China’s isolation through the extension of the services of Pakistan International Airlines to its territory. China also became a reliable source of military hardware during a period that saw growing western restrictions and embargoes on Pakistan.

The soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 opened a new chapter of consultation and collaboration between China and Pakistan. Naturally, the Indian missile and nuclear build up has alarmed China. Pakistan likewise lives in fear of Indian missiles, most of which were deployed along the Pakistani border during the indo-Pakistan standoff in mid-2002.

The Indian Ocean is of strategic importance in international politics. New Delhi adheres to the flawed perception that it is the custodian of the Indian Ocean. This self-assumed domination syndrome in the Indian mindset can breed conflict with China and Pakistan, as both those countries have enduring interests in the region too.
Nuclearisation of South Asia:

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s justification that the perceived nuclear threat from China in particular and from China’s ally, Pakistan, compelled the Indian government to conduct nuclear tests in May 1998.4

After the tests, the Indian leaders issued a tirade of irresponsible and threatening statements, targeting both China and Pakistan. The Indian Minister of External Affairs, Jaswanth Singh, expressed India’s nervousness about the rising power of China; he said India considered itself a victim of “nuclear apartheid". He further remarked that China was the source of all Indian troubles, as Pakistan could be handled easily.5 Other Indian leaders made similar remarks, stating that India’s development of nuclear weapons was not focused solely on Pakistan. Rather, India was more concerned about its rivalry with China, its desire to be seen as China’s equal in Asia and its aspirations to become a great power on the world stage.6 These statements amply conveyed Indian perceptions of China and Pakistan as enemies of India.

The situation demanded close collaboration between China and Pakistan. Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary flew to China where he held an extensive exchange of views with the Chinese Foreign Minister, Tang Jiaxuan, on the developments which threatened regional security.7 The Sino-Pakistan synergy could be assessed from the press conference,
which the foreign secretary addressed on his return from a successful visit:

There is a complete identity of views between Pakistan and China on the gravity of the situation, which has resulted from India’s reckless actions, and China agreed that Indian nuclear explosions were a threat to Pakistan’s security. He further said that China has promised not to retaliate with economic sanctions against Pakistan should it explode a nuclear device and the Chinese leadership reaffirmed that the all-weather friendship between the two countries was above any political expediencies.8

China rendered significant political and moral support to Pakistan in helping it to arrive at a decision to conduct six underground nuclear tests on 28 and 30 May 1998. These tests reestablished the strategic balance in South Asia. After the Indian tests and before those conducted by Pakistan, some countries attempted to move a Pakistan specific resolution in the Security Council, calling for Iraq-like sanctions against any country testing a nuclear device in future. This was thwarted only by the threat of a Chinese veto. Had this move succeeded, an expert notes, “Pakistan, on testing a nuclear device, would have been subjected to sanctions altogether of a different category than those imposed on India”9 Had fear of such sanctions prevented Pakistan from testing its nuclear devices, it might have fallen
victim to permanent Indian pressure. The events of 9/11 changed the regional and international scenario. China thoroughly understood the prevalent circumstances in which Pakistan decided to join the international coalition against terrorism and it continued to abide by its traditional friendship with Pakistan.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{China on the Kashmir issue:}

Kashmir has vital importance for Pakistan. Its unresolved status and continued occupation by Indian forces are the root cause of conflict in South Asia. Its strategic location makes Kashmir an important part of Pakistan's foreign policy. In the initial phase of the conflict, China took a non-partisan stance on the issue as it followed a policy of Afro-Asian unity. Since both the contenders, i.e. Pakistan and India, were Asian states and neighbours, Beijing emphasized the need for a bilateral solution of the problem and advised both countries to avoid UN and Western involvement.\textsuperscript{11} It maintained this policy even when Pakistan joined the Western defence pacts. As a result of the improvement in Sino-Pakistan relations, China shifted its stance on Kashmir and voiced support for the right of self-determination of the Kashmir people. The Sino-Pakistan Border Agreement was the first occasion where China raised its deep concern at the unresolved status of the Kashmir problem. In the Joint Communiqué issued on that occasion, China expressed its appreciation of Pakistan's stand in seeking a peaceful settlement of the issue.\textsuperscript{12} From 1964 to 1980, China sided with Pakistan.
in the United Nations voting and resolutely pressed for the right of self-determination for the Kashmiri people. However, in the post-Mao period with the normalization of Sino-Indian relations China without any caveat, moderated its support for the Pakistan point of view on the issue. Since then, China has been advocating a peaceful solution of the Kashmir issue through bilateral dialogue between India and Pakistan.

During his visit to Pakistan in May 2001, the Chinese Prime Minister stated, “Kashmir is a problem left over by history. China appreciates and agrees with the position taken by Pakistan on the issue of Kashmir. We will try our utmost and spare no efforts for peaceful resolution of this issue”. The change in its stance can be understood in the context of China’s post-Mao policies of forsaking the path of leftist revolution in the interest of greater economic development.

A number of observers and diplomats in Pakistan are of the view that, despite a shift in China’s Kashmir policy, it is still inclined towards Pakistan. Their opinion is based on the fact that Kashmir remains on the agenda of most bilateral talks between the two countries. For instance, during the recent visit of Pakistan Prime Minister Zafarullah Khan Jamali to Beijing, Chinese officials once again appreciated Pakistan’s efforts for the peaceful solution of the dispute.
China and the Kargil Conflict:

China’s stand on the Kargil conflict the first serious encounter between the military forces of nuclear armed India and Pakistan which started in mid – 1999 – is termed a neutral posture.\textsuperscript{16} Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif went to Beijing in June 1999 at the height of the crisis and discussed the matter with his Chinese counterpart, Zhu Rongji, as well as with President Jiang Zemin and Foreign Minister Li Peng. The official statement issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry urged both India and Pakistan to negotiate a settlement of the issue.\textsuperscript{17} In a departure from its usual tilt towards Pakistan, an analyst commented, Beijing not only followed a scrupulously neutral path but also played the role of informal mediator by hosting separate visits of the Pakistani and Indian Foreign Ministers. The official Chinese statement neither blamed Pakistan for the crisis – a view projected by India and held by a number of other countries nor did it support Pakistan, as many in Pakistan had expected. This neutrality was perceived by India as a significant change in China’s stance on the Kashmir issue and its recognition of India as a big power. An Indian scholar commented, ‘All indications are that China regards India as a major power and a potentially important player in a putative multipolar world.\textsuperscript{18} In spite of the neutral stance taken by the Chinese Government, the coverage of the Kargil conflict in the Chinese media was generally in favour of Pakistan. The Chinese daily,
The Liberation Army, was the most strident in lashing out at India: it termed India’s kargil operation an act of expansionism.¹⁹

**China and the Indo-Pakistan Stand off:**

The events of 9/11 changed the regional security environment. Pakistan took the difficult decision of supporting the US-led coalition in its war against terrorism. This revived Pakistan’s geo-strategic importance in international politics, which India found unpalatable. It employed every method to isolate or at least marginalize Pakistani’s role in international politics.

As part of its marginalization strategy, India attempted to link the freedom struggle in Kashmir to terrorism, employing the term “Cross-border terrorism” allegedly sponsored by Pakistan. It also stepped up its policy of placing the blame for all untoward incidents within this borders on Pakistan based extremist groups.²⁰

The attack on the Indian Parliament a strange incident in January 2002 was used as a pretext for India to move its armed forces into a confrontational position along the entire stretch of the Indo-Pakistan border and the Line Of Control (LOC) in the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. This massive mobilization of troops and India’s jingoistic attitude aggravated the security environment in the region, bringing the two nuclear rivals to the brink of war.²¹ In this critical situation, Pakistan consulted with its close ally, China. President Musharaff made an
overnight stay in Beijing on 3 January 2002, en-route to Kathmandu; he
met the Chinese Premier, Zhu Rongji and the two leaders held in depth
discussions on the situation in Afghanistan and the Indian military build­
up on Pakistan's border.  

China adopted multi-channel diplomacy to defuse the tension in
South Asia and stressed the need for the international community to
take a more balanced and unprejudiced approach to the problem. When
the situation reached critical level, china expanded its diplomatic efforts
and discussed the situation with other leading powers, including the US
and Britain. A spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry Kuong
Qihuan, stated on the occasion: “This question must be settled through
a direct dialogue between India and Pakistan” and declared that, “China
and Pakistan have friendly relations, and China and India have friendly
relations too”. He added that, “China has always called on these
countries to exert restraint and solve their conflict through peaceful
means”. At the height of the tension, a section of the press in Pakistan
and India reported that Chinese President Jiang Zemin, during a
meeting with a US delegation, stated that his country would not side
with Pakistan in case of a war with India. However, Beijing denied the
report and stated that Jiang Zemin had only expressed his hope that
Pakistan and India would settle their dispute and take steps to reduce
the tension. Chinese neutrality during the India Pakistan military stand
Changing pattern of Sino-Pakistan Relations:

Despite the close understanding between the two countries of each other’s points of view and their mutual stand on various regional and international issues, the pattern of Sino-Pakistan relations has been undergoing changes since the post-Mao period, when China took the initiative in improving its relations with India. As a result of this rapprochement, the then Indian Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee visited China in 1979; the visit proved a major step towards normalization of ties between the two countries. It was at this point that China changed its stance on the Kashmir issue, stopped supporting Pakistan in its dispute with India and emphasized the need for the peaceful solution of all outstanding issues between the two archrivals.

China’s neutrality was amply evident during the Kargil crisis and the Indo-Pakistan standoff in 2002. Several scholars noted the shift in China’s policy and termed it an important development in the triangular relations. When the troops of the two countries were positioned on their borders, China advised Pakistan and India to defuse tensions, remarking, “China is a friend of both Pakistan and India.” This phrasing ‘friend of both’ was new in Beijing’s position on Indo-Pakistan conflicts. It signified that India was no longer a common enemy, and
that Beijing and Islamabad now had different perceptions of New Delhi. Sultan M. Khan, Formerly Pakistan’s ambassador to China commented on the changing pattern of Sino-Pakistan relations in the following words:

There is however a very different China now on the International scene. It has to take positions on a number of issues. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the economic and political confusion can be global. The emergence of the US as the sole superpower, the economic and political confusion in Russia, the future of Taiwan, world trade and other issues on that Scale, now engage China’s main interests. Regionally, China will continue to support Pakistan but much depends upon how Pakistan itself manages to come out of its current problems. The old intimacy and warmth, which once were the hallmark of Sino-Pakistan friendship, is part of history.29

Another, scholar with a similar point of view stated that the post Mao Chinese policy towards Pakistan had changed considerably and the warmth that prevailed during the 1960s and the 1970s has started to recede.30 Beijing had traditionally supported Pakistan against India, but in the post-Cold war era, the Chinese have distanced themselves somewhat from Pakistan in order to cultivate better relations with India, states a UK based scholar.31

Correlation between Sino-Pak and Sino-Indian Ties:
In the early 1950s China and India were closer to each other than were China and Pakistan. This pattern of relations existed till the late 1950s when palpable differences emerged in Sino-Indian relations leading to severe border clashes in November 1962. China’s relations with the USA and the USSR were already hostile; the addition of India as a new enemy increased its trepidation, as Beijing felt more isolated and encircled. In these conditions both China and Pakistan realized the need for close co-operation to protect their mutual relation in the region. Negotiations to demarcate the undefined Sino-Pakistan boundary were proceeding very slowly, mainly due to China’s cautious attitude; these were accelerated after the Sino-India border conflict and soon after, the two countries signed a border agreement. Thus, along with the Indian threat faced by both China and Pakistan the other factors like China’s fear of isolation and encirclement and Pakistan’s disappointment in its western allies, equally played a role in bringing the two countries closer to each other.

Links between the two countries remained strong throughout the Mao era. The post-Mao leadership, as mentioned earlier embarked upon drastic changes in its internal and external policies, aiming at comprehensive economic development and diversification in the realm of foreign policy. China opened up towards the West and concentrated on normalizing its relations with all countries, including India, and the two countries reached a considerable level of understanding. After
Vajpayee’s visit to Beijing in 1979, China took a modified stand on the Kashmir issue exhorting Pakistan and India to resolve the problem peacefully. Some analysts link China’s moderated stance on the Kashmir issue to the thaw in Sino-Indian relations and argue that the improvement in Beijing New Delhi ties could affect the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan. To further strengthen their argument, they cite China’s neutrality during the Kargil crisis and the Indo-Pakistan stand-off in mid 2002. Certain political circles in Pakistan were—rather optimistically—expecting China to intervene directly in support of Pakistan. However, this researcher presents a different conclusion also and does not find the Indian factor responsible for the change in China’s policy. The following arguments are presented in support of his different viewpoint, put forwarded otherwise.

❖ The normalization of Sino-Indian relations was the sequel of a restructuring of China’s policy that started under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping and was not an independent move towards India. Beijing improved its relations not just with New Delhi but also with a number of other countries, the most important among them being the United States.34

❖ The reduction in Beijing’s support is not confined to the freedom struggle in Kashmir, China’s post-Mao Policy has considerably reduced support to revolutionary movements around the world.35
China has uncoupled its relations with Pakistan from those with India. As one writer aptly comments; "Better relations between India and China have not led to a weakening of the Sino-Pakistan entente. China has been fairly effective in pursuing these two relationships simultaneously". China therefore encourages moves for improvement in the relationship between Pakistan and India, this being a new element in its policy towards the subcontinent.36

In the contemporary international context, it is dangerously unwise if Pakistan expects China's direct involvement in any dispute that might erupt between Pakistan and India particularly when Islamabad partly responsible for such "misadventures".

A number of complicated issues bedevil relations between China and India; the boundary dispute, the tibetan issue and continued Indian hospitality to the Dalai Lama, and the rivalry between the two countries for regional supremacy. These are problems that cannot be resolved in a short span of time. However, even if Sino-Indian relations improve, Sino-Pakistan relations will continue to flourish. First China has reiterated, time and again that the improvement in its ties with India would not in any way affect the traditional friendship between China and Pakistan, a friendship that has withstood the vicissitudes and vagaries of time. Second, China will be in a better position to exhort India to moderate its policy towards Pakistan. Third, the non-existence of any political or territorial dispute and the strict adherence by China and
Pakistan to the five principles of peaceful coexistence has cemented their friendship. Fourth, besides many other factors contributing towards the sustainability in their relations, the identical perception of the obtaining regional and international milieu is an important binding force between them. Fifth, there has been continuity in the military structures of the two countries, which has a direct bearing on the continuity in their bilateral relations.

It seems logical to conclude that the India factor might well have adopted a role in strengthening Sino-Pakistan relations, though other forces were also immense importance in bringing the two countries closer to each other. In future as well, their relations are likely to continue to progress, independent of the Indian factor. And that is the reason why despite their divergent socio-political systems and ideologies, Sino-Pakistan relations are considered a "unique example in modern history".

**Future Scenario:**

In the light of this study the likely policy behaviour of the triangular countries in relation to one another can be determined to a certain degree. It is expected that India's China policy will be based on contradictions. India might engage with China and resume negotiations on the border issue as well as in the Joint Working Group (JWG). Economic cooperation and the exchange of official visits between
Beijing and New Delhi are likely to increase. India will probably ask China to demonstrate its sincerity by ending its support to Pakistan in the field of defence technology, particularly nuclear and missile technology. India might also press China to endorse Indian occupation of Sikkim and Arunachal Pradesh. Parallel to these moves for thawing relations, India will continue to project China as an undesirable emerging power, one that poses a serious threat to its security, thus seeking justification for advancing its nuclear and missile programme. This could trigger an arms race in the region as Pakistan naturally feels insecure if it lags behind India in arms procurement. India is well aware of the US obsession with the great - power potential of China, and it could cajole Washington into a strategic understanding to counter the Chinese threat. In this context, Indo – US cooperation is likely to expand further, while the Indo – Israel nexus has already acquired considerable strength.

The traditional friendship between China and Pakistan will probably continue to exist in the same spirit seen now. Bilateral economic co-operation and cultural exchange are likely to increase. China, under heavy US pressure, may reduce its assistance to Pakistan in key areas, such as development of its missile and nuclear programmes. Beijing will most likely pursue its policy of peaceful co – existence, reduction of tension, and peaceful resolutions of all disputes, including the thorny issue of Kashmir, for greater economic
co-operation. Chinese intervention in any confrontation between India and Pakistan is therefore, unlikely.

It also seems reasonable to conclude that in its relations with China, Pakistan is living in the past, cherishing memories of the 1960s and 1970s, whereas the regional and international environment has changed drastically. It must reorient its China policy in the light of Beijing's new outlook on world affairs, if it wishes to maintain the traditional warmth, which has been the hallmark of Sino-Pakistan relations. Both countries should further the spirit of seeking common ground, while shelving differences and promoting frankness and mutual trust. There are several areas where Pakistan can avail Chinese knowledge and expertise, such as agriculture, infrastructure development and information technology. Both countries should also work towards expansion of mutual trade and cementing ties based on people to people contact.
REFERENCES:

1) The term "triangular" is used in the subsequent part of this paper and refers to the tripartite relations between China, Pakistan and India.


7) “China Pakistan discuss India’s nuclear tests”.


9) Rehman, “Pakistan’s Relations with China”, p.79.

10) Pakistan stand against terror is clear: China”, Frontier Post (Peshawar), 2nd August 2002.


26) Rehman, “Pakistan-China Relations”, p.2.


33) Ibid, p.163.


37) Mr. Lin Shanglin, Consul General of the People’s Republic of China, stated that both countries adhered to the five principles of mutual respect of sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other’s internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful co-existence. It is due to the observance of these five principles that both sides have remained long-term friends. See Lin Shanglin, “Pakistan-China Relations”, Pakistan Horizon (Karachi), Vol.54, No.3 (July 2001), p.14.

38) Rehman, “Pakistan's Relations with China”, pp.59-60.


40) Ibid.

41) From 1997 onwards, China under US pressure, has been consistently trying to distance itself from Pakistan's weapons programme. See Chandy, “India, China and Pakistan”, pp.316-326.