



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Communist China's Foreign Policy towards South Asian Region during the Cold War and Post-Cold War Era**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper analyzes the foreign policy of Communist China towards Capitalist South Asia via analyzing the PRC's foreign policy towards two central states of South Asia, i-e. India and Pakistan. While China is one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Traditionally, it has had good and bad relationships with the Subcontinent of India, which was later divided into two states, India and Pakistan. From the beginning, all these states (PRC, India, and Pakistan) have some territorial issues. China and Pakistan resolved these issues and have friendly relationships with each other. But India and china still have unresolved territorial issues. These territorial issues made china the important part of the politics of South Asia. The analysis of secondary data and interviews of diplomats and policymakers are used in this research. So, China is not the only factor in the politics of South Asia; the USA also has a special bond with this region. For this research, analytical and descriptive research used.

**Keywords:** China, Cold War, Foreign Policy, South Asia

**Introduction**

Golam Wahed Choudhury was, a diplomat from East Pakistan describes China's approach towards South Asia in the initial years as dominated by doctrinaire and ideological considerations. "Mao Zedong followed Soviet policy, treating the newly independent Asian states, like India and Pakistan, as stooges of Anglo-American imperialism" (Choudhury G. W., 1990). Chinese leaders pursued an independent foreign policy despite China's total economic and political dependence on the Soviet Union. Over time, China changes its stance on South Asian states when India and Burma refuse to sign the US-British draft peace treaty with Japan. Mao Zedong stated, "The forces of the whole system of imperialism have been very much weakened" (Yahuda, 1978, p. 57).

The number of developments increased the confidence of Beijing's leadership to act freely, like its role in Korean War and established trade agreements with smaller states of South Asia. Like with Sri Lanka, Pakistan and with other Western states, interestingly, whereas, Moscow tried to minimize China's role at regional and at the world level at large. In South Asian affairs, Tibet was the central question for both China and India. China stood on its uncompromising principle on the Tibet issue, and India recalled that certain British rule rights and arrangements should have prevailed. In 1952 India changed its standpoint on Tibet problem and recognized its supremacy and signed an agreement with China in 1954. Meanwhile, the Chinese Premier visited India, and warm speeches were exchanged. Then, India felt closer to China due to its support for Beijing's in United Nations.

In 1954, Pakistan entered into the Western military pacts for its security compulsions, namely Baghdad Pact and South East Asian Treaty Organization and. China's reaction towards these defensive military pacts was remorseful. China did not formally protest Pakistan on joining these military alliances. Jen-min Jih-Pao said that, "U.S. decision-makers have been trying to drag Pakistan into planned U.S. Middle East and Southeast Asian aggressive blocs and convert it into a vital war base for Washington in the region" (Yasmeen, 1985, p. 17).

On the other side, Pakistan's staunch rival, India, strongly protested; when Nehru stated in 1954, "SEATO was a step not only towards war but one that will bring it right up to our doors" (Siddiqi, 1960). Before signing SEATO and Baghdad Pact, the Soviet Union had opened the option for Pakistan to establish friendly relations. Still, after that, the Soviets also strongly condemned Pakistan for joining the West. They changed their stance on Kashmir and supported India out rightly on this critical issue at every stage after 1954. Not alone weakening Pakistan's case on Kashmir, the Soviets also declared the partitioning of India in 1947 as illogical and a conspiracy of the Western imperialist powers likes Britain and the United States. China assumed SEATO, particularly as a hostile military alliance of the USA against China itself. Still, the Chinese leaders did not publicly criticize Pakistan. They only condemn the alliance as aggressive and unfriendly. Hence, Chou-en-lai stated that, "one could not strengthen one's country by getting foreign aid, the real strength should arise from within and internal strength of a country it is essential to get rid of foreign elements" (Choudhury, 1975, p. 160).

In the mid-1950s, the Afro-Asian Bandung conference was held in Indonesia. At this conference, the Premier Chou-En-Lai and Prime Minister Muhammad Ali Bogra had their first meeting. In response to Nehru's criticism of Pakistan's joining the Western pacts, Chou-en-lai of China refrained from accusing Pakistan. Prime Minister Bogra guaranteed his Chinese counterpart that it was not against China; and that Pakistan would not be a party to any belligerent action of the USA. He stated that his meeting with the Chinese Premier would not affect Pakistan's foreign policy except that our relations with China would be friendlier (Dawn, April 29, 1955, as cited in Burke, 1990, p. 180). The meeting of the two prime ministers at Bandung was nonetheless was a landmark in the Sino-Pak relations. It uncovered the Indian designs to malign Pakistan and cleavage in the Sino-Pakistan ties. However, China used the Bandung conference as a launching pad to establish international contacts with Afro-Asian states.

Rob Johnson stated that the fundamental problem with the Indian position regarding the frontiers was that it refused to negotiate any changes to what it had inherited from the British era (Johnson, 2006, p. 120). In the meantime, Dalai Lama left Lhasa and took refuge in 1959 in India. India welcomes Dalai Lama's presence on its soil. At the Chinese National Congress, India was condemned for aiding the rebels, walking in the footsteps of the British imperialists' and harboring expansionist ambitions towards Tibet (Johnson, 2006, p. 123). In the meantime, tension also escalated on the boundary issues; India claimed its position on the McMahon line and asserted it inherited from the British government. In reply, China refused to recognize the agreement. In 1958 India realized that China had built a road between Xinxiang and Tibet. She formally protested with China on that issue. However, Premier Zhou-En-Lai pointed out that no formal agreement was concluded, and the friendship honeymoon came to an end.

In 1959, India stuck to its aggressive attitude towards the Tibet issue and adopted the Forward Policy approach against Red China. The Indian strategy of putting pressure on her military, diplomatic means, and public opinion would never succeed but would only impair the relationship between the two countries (Maxwell, 1970, p. 123). Premier Zhou-En-Lai stressed the resolution of border issues through dialogue rather than confrontation. In that connection, the Chinese Premier visited India in April 1960 to defuse the tension, but this visit bore no fruit, and both were stuck to their positions in Tibet. Afterward, India

adopted the Forward Policy approach, but it was not materialized until 1961. In the meanwhile, China settles its border issue with Burma. This settlement issue taught other South Asian states how to resolve their border issues peacefully. In 1961, India occupied the Portuguese ruled territory of Goa by a military intervention which gave India a boost to launch its Forward Policy against China. However, the worsening Sino-Indian relations allowed Pakistan and China to come closer.

In 1962, Sino-Indian relations were at stake. In September, the Indian leaders took a hard stance on China's claim on Tibet. They asserted that the Chinese must be 'kicking out' by force. China showed a flexible posture and reiterated the negotiation patterns for the settlement of the issue. Nehru took a one-way stance and decided not to negotiate with hostile China. He ordered his forces to attack the Chinese territory. In the meantime, India also approached the West to instigate an overall attack on China. In response, China decided to reply with a counterattack. Lastly, in October, Chinese forces attacked India, and in these border clashes, Indian troops were severely defeated and humiliated. The Sunday Telegraph reported on October 21 that India made a secret high-level approach to the West for support before launching her offensive against the Chinese on the Himalayan borders (Choudhury, 1975, p. 173).

Indian leaders were rushed towards the West for military aid because India was perturbed by the Chinese military might and its advancement into its territory. After that, Western powers rescued India and gave massive military support to counter China. When Western powers poured massive assistance into India, they did not confer with Pakistan about the aid given to her rival. In Pakistan, the reaction to the American military aid to India was outraged because she believed it was infidelity against her.

On the contrary, the United States had its interests in giving aid to India because she counteracted Communist China for its containment policy. However, this incident was a golden opportunity for the Americans to push India into its orbit of influence. On military assistance to both Pakistan and India, the U.S. policymakers argued that military aid to Pakistan since 1954 altered the South Asian balance in favour of her, then assistance to New Delhi in 1962 and after will tip the balance in India's favor. It was a mistake to provide such assistance to Pakistan; will it also be regarded as a mistake (Aziz Q. D., 1964).

In the Sino-Indian border conflict, China surprisingly acknowledged unilateral truce. The main intention of the ceasefire was to tell India and the world at large that she had the potential to occupy its legitimate territory and safeguard its borders from foreign aggression. Chih-Yu-Shih stated that "the war was an attempt to manage the environment by using force not to eliminate the source of a challenge but to signal China's serious attitude towards what it had claimed to be rightful" (Shih, 1990, p. 184). Pakistan's pro-China posture on this border conflict lambasted India as an aggressor. Muhammad Ahsen Choudhari stated that Beijing was compelled to go to war with India to prevent Indian territorial encroachments on its territory. Pakistan could have taken advantage of this situation and grabbed Kashmir, but the American influence on Pakistan's foreign policy prevented her prudently (Choudhari, 1987).

In January 1963, China signed the first formal trade agreement with Pakistan. During this period, Pakistan's economy was in dearth because some Western powers repudiated to take its cotton. This caused a serious blow to Pakistan's economy, and then Pakistan was looking for an alternative for its products. At that time, China was also interested in trade with Pakistan. Both the countries promised to enhance their trade level to ten times more than the actual trade between them. Through this trade agreement, Pakistan found an alternative for its exports to China rather than the Western powers. Thus, China also offered Pakistan for setting up the medium and small industries through a trade agreement. This trade agreement furthers strong the relationship among Pakistan and China. On the Pak-China border settlement issue, Pakistan's former Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto visited

China to sign the border settlement. In March 1963 border agreement was signed among these two states. "Pakistan has gained more than 750 square miles of the strategic watershed area under the physical control of forces and administrative personnel. China's area conceded to Pakistan is in the Oprang valley and the Darwaza pocket, including its salt mines to the East of Shimshal pass" (Butt, 1966, p. 52).

This border agreement detached the dangers of conflict between these two signatories' states. Hence China accepted Kashmir as a disputed area and focused on the peaceful solution of an undecided issue between India and Pakistan. Consequently, China entered into a border agreement with Pakistan to tell the world that China could settle issues by adopting peaceful means and showed the world the fallacy of the McMahon line. It was on the same historical conditions on which the Pak-China border issue was settled. New Delhi, on the other hand, criticized the border agreement. India claimed that Pakistan ceded the disputed part of Kashmir's territory to China, but the world community did not accept Indian irrational logic. This border agreement was according to the United Nations rules and regulations. Therefore, the border agreement was a milestone in bolstering Pakistan and China's bilateral relations.

The year 1965 was a crucial period in which decisive developments took place. At the outset, Pak-India relations were worsened due to Indo-Pak all-out war. On the contrary, Pak-China relations were touching the limits of the sky because Red China supported Pakistan at every front in this war. In March, the President of Pakistan visited China; both Mao-Tse-Tung and Ayub Khan focused on strengthening the bilateral relationship. President Ayub Khan illustrated great concerns over Indian hostilities towards theirs. They were also concerned about the Superpowers' support for India's containment policy. Thus, China explained the Soviet Union's position on giving India aid because Chinese leadership claimed that due to the competition between the Superpowers, both tried to hold India into its orbit to exercise their influence. Therefore, Ayub Khan's trip to China signified a change in Pakistan's foreign policy standpoint and illustrated a harsh tone towards America.

India-Pakistan had an all-out war in 1965. One of the causes of this war was the clashes in the Run of Kutch sector. When conflict is heading towards a general war, both the states criticized Washington for delivering military aid against each other. The British Prime Minister played the mediator's role in settling the issue between these two adversary states. However, in the Gibraltar operation, it was planned that with the help of Pakistan Paramilitary forces, regular soldiers, and Azad Kashmir guerillas to instigate an uprising in Indian Kashmir for freedom. More importantly, Pakistan's top leadership was involved in this operation like Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Aziz Ahmed, and many others. Yet President Ayub Khan was reluctant to get this operation underway due to its bad effects. In this situation, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto convinced Ayub Khan about this plan and assured him that this plan was not led to full-scale war. Still, this operation failed due to a lack of communication between Pakistani and Indian-held Kashmir people.

Thus, the hostilities were thinning out at the end of August. Indian forces captured some part of Pakistan's territory, creating a war-like situation between the adversaries. Lastly, war broke out on September 6, 1965; Indian forces had full force on Lahore and Sialkot sectors. On this occasion, President Ayub Khan asked the people of Pakistan in a nationalistic tone that we are at war and fight vigorously and courageously against India. He invoked Article 51 of the United Nations charter and declared that Pakistan would exercise the right of self-defence against the Indian hostility (Hasan, 1965). The war was also escalated on Air and Ground levels. From Pakistan's point of view, this war was fought only for limited political gains and liberation of Indian-held Kashmir, while India claimed that Pakistan first attacked Indian soil.

However, the major powers played their crucial role in the Indo-Pakistan conflict. It was a time for friends and allies to play their active role in this all-out war. On the part of

Red China, she backed Pakistan throughout this crisis. It assured her that it would come to help her if a war broke out. China also assured that it would also protect East Pakistan from Indian aggression and criticized India for its aggression. The Chinese government stated that, "India's armed attack on Pakistan was an act of naked aggression. It is crude violence of all principles guiding international relations and constitutes a grave threat to peace in this part of Asia. In this regard, the Chinese government sternly condemned New Delhi for its aggression, expressed firm support for Pakistan in its just struggle against aggression, and solemnly warned the Indian government that it must bear all the consequences" (The Pakistan Times, 1965).

On September 8, the Chinese government warned India to stop its aggressive activities in the region of Sikkim. In response, India denied the Chinese accusation and paid no heed to the ultimatum. The Chinese officials gave another ultimatum to dismantle its military check posts on the Chinese border. The Indian Prime Minister replied that "the might of China would not deter us from defending our territorial integrity" (The Pakistan Times, 1965). Superpowers warned China that this war could lead to broader conflict on the Chinese ultimatum. Therefore, India consulted Western powers and the Soviet Union, particularly about this injunction. They were all assured that they would come to help India if China took part and criticized China for its intervention in this war.

In this war, China stood with Pakistan at every front, and it was the leading supporter of Pakistan throughout this period. When the Soviet Union, United States of America, and United Nations pressured Pakistan for a ceasefire, it first consulted with China and took them into confidence for a truce. Chinese accepted Ayub Khan's proposal for a ceasefire among India and Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan accepted the armistice without hurting China. In the second Indo-Pak war of 1971, China played a supportive role in the East Pakistan crisis but not with the same intensity of the 1965 War. China adopted a realistic approach to these crises. It supported the military government in West Pakistan but did not criticize its alleged atrocities in East Pakistan. It battered the Indian and Soviet serious crimes in East Pakistan. Red China also condemned Podgorny's letter to Yahya Khan. In a message, Chou-en-lai stated, "what was happening in Pakistan at present is purely the internal affair of Pakistan. In our opinion, the unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees for Pakistan to attain prosperity and strength" (Choudhury, 1975, p. 211).

Consequently, with the eruption of the crisis in November, Bhutto visited China to solicit Beijing's support. But Chinese offered diplomatic support alone and stressed a reasonable solution through a peaceful political settlement between East and West Pakistan. Yet the initial Chinese reaction to the entry of Indian forces into East Pakistan was restrained, but this soon gave way to expressions of support for Pakistan and denunciations of the Indian action. Li Xiannian, a Deputy Premier, declared on Nov.29, 1971, that, "the Indian government was supported and encouraged by the Soviet Union. They carried out subversive activities and military provocations against East Pakistan" (Day, 1985, p. 158). Upon such assurance, Bhutto, on his return, expressed his confidence that China would stand by Pakistan in case of Indian aggression.

Consequently, China did support Pakistan diplomatically, specifically when it applied its veto against the Soviet-sponsored resolution in the Security Council for a political settlement rather than condemnation of aggression. On Dec.16, 1971, the Chinese government issued a new statement strongly condemning Indian and Soviet policies. After accusing the Indian forces of the most brutal atrocities in East Pakistan, the statement remarked that India was planning to "swallow up" the province and destroy Pakistan as a whole (Day, 1985, p. 159). China did not materialize its intervention in the Indo-Pak war. The reasons were manifold. For instance, India could not have aggressed against Pakistan without the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty. The Soviet involvement was, thus, a deterrent for China.

In the 1970s, Sino-US Détente materialized with the help of Pakistan. President Yahya Khan's role was significant in Sino-US détente. Henry Kissinger visited China in July secretly, and President Nixon stunned the world leaders when he announced his upcoming trip to China. Masuma Hasan says that "the role played by Pakistan in bringing China and the United States together was appreciated by the Chinese leaders who have throughout tried to impress upon the United States the desirability of strengthening Pakistan so that it can be a factor of stability in South Asia" (Hasan, 1978, p. 110).

China's approach during these years was benign as South Asian states were perceived. India blamed China for supporting Naxalites against the anti-government protest in that period. Though Beijing blamed New Delhi for her annexation of Sikkim in 1975 and also critical to its nuclear test. In that period, political transformation has been observed in form the induction of new leadership in both China and India. Mao Zedong's death in 1976 facilitated China to adopt a pragmatic approach internally and externally. In India, the Janata government took charge and tried to end the mistrust between the two countries for cooperation. The drive of modernization in Deng Xiaoping opened the gates for China to the outside world to benefit from foreign technology.

The convergence of insight among China and the U.S. over the Soviet Union defined the direction of Chinese diplomacy. Furthermore, China realized the Soviet Union's plan of collective security system, which was against China to isolate her. Therefore, China adopted a more pragmatic approach towards South Asian states to improve its security situation. Though, China also tries to regulate her with New Delhi and other neighboring states.

In 1980s, China focus on minimizing hostility and encourage economic development with South Asian countries. On the other hand, Moscow tried to isolate her in the world community. However, China's special relationship with Pakistan reached new heights during the Afghan crisis. China appreciated Pakistan's leadership firm stand against the Soviet Union's moves into Afghanistan. While, "China was constantly consulted on the course of the struggle in Afghanistan and the diplomatic actions launched in support of the struggle" (Bhatty D. , 1996, p. 176).

India backed Soviet's military action in Afghanistan under Indra Gandhi government. Though, India's support to the Soviet Union in Afghanistan crisis affects its relationship with China. China continued its conciliatory policy towards India and offered a package deal to India. "China was offering India a package deal on June 21, 1980, under which China would accept McMahon Line as the border in the eastern sector if India, in turn, accepted Aksai Chin as Chinese territory. China would thereby forego 90000 sq. km if India gave up its claim to 38000 sq. km". Indian leadership refused that pro (Bhatty D. , 1996, p. 172) proposal to settle the border dispute peacefully. Maqbool Ahmad Bhatty stated that, "India's uncompromising stand on the border led it to reject all offers for accommodation, as reflected in the Chinese Package Deal proposal" (Bhatty D. , 1996, p. 173). China's reconciliatory policy towards the South Asian region, especially with India, was its regional and global perspective and important for its modernization programme.

On the other hand, Sino-Soviet relations were moving towards normalization due to the change of leadership in the Soviet Union. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev took charge of the Soviet Union. The change in leadership and realization of Soviet fault lines in internal and external policies leads towards reforms and its relations with China back on track.

### **Communist China's Emerging Role in the Post-Cold War Era**

International politics has been altered after the drawdown of USSR in the decade of 1990s. This incident transforms the behavior of international system. Collapse of the Soviet Union allowed regional powers like China to lead the world in a meaningful way. In this phase, she continued its economic liberalization policies, but on the political front, it faced

many difficulties in the early 1990s. In China, democratic forces like workers and students stood against the communist regime, but its government suppressed that demonstration by show of force. That political disturbance would affect its economic modernization, which was started after Mao's period.

China's post-cold war foreign policy was a strong resolution against the hegemony of any state in world affairs. To pursue a peaceful security environment, China adopted a new concept of security arrangement, which is based on cooperation, mutual trust, mutual benefit, and equality. In the post-Cold war era, this new concept of security arrangement is the keystone of its policy. Beijing's believe that Shanghai Cooperation Organization is the real practitioner of this new security concept. It emphasizes this new security concept in South Asia to maintain peace between them. Furthermore, she stressed on Pakistan and India to solve their outstanding issue based on this new security arrangement.

China's ties with New Delhi in this era were improving because India used the 'China threat' to get military aid from the Soviet Union. Similarly, the USSR used her to counter China in the past. In the changing situation, both China and India embraced a pragmatic approach in improving their bilateral relationship in trade and economics, despite their unresolved border issues. In the decade of 1990's series of exchange, visits were held between the two Asian giants. They also promoted their relationship by signing the Confidence Building Measures and Line of Actual Control (LAC). The Chinese President Jiang Zamin's visit to India in 1996 strengthened their bilateral relationship. Consequently, in May 1998, Sino-Indian relations got set back because China showed severe concerns about the Indian Nuclear Tests. Former Indian Defence Minister, "George Fernandes' statements call China a 'bigger potential threat' than Pakistan and describe how his country was being 'encircled' by Chinese military activities in Tibet and military alliances with Pakistan and Burma" (Malik, 2001, p. 78).

Former Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan Zhang Ghengli expressed his view that, "Pakistan and China have supported each other in the struggle against hegemonism and power politics. Both the states have similar historical experiences of colonialist plunder and exploitation" (Ghengli, 1996). After the withdrawal of Soviet Union forces from Afghanistan, the United States put a blind eye on Pakistan and put sanctions on it to develop a secret nuclear program. Then, China rescued Pakistan by giving technological support for the nuclear development program. Furthermore, China also supported Pakistan's nuclear and missile program. This strategic assistance by China to its friend was a constant source of irritation in Sino-US and Sino-Indian relations in that period. Under immense pressure from the U.S., China stood steadfast in its commitments with Pakistan to strengthen its military capability.

Indian Nuclear Tests in 1998 perturbed the distribution of power concept in South Asia. Both Pakistan and China showed severe concerns, but New Delhi justified her Nuclear Tests by describing China as a threat to its security. The deterioration of this relationship again reinforced Islamabad's prominence in Beijing's South Asia policy. However, Pakistan got support from her to conduct its Nuclear Tests in May 1998 and to reestablish the balance in South Asia. Moreover in Kargil conflict of 1999, both India and Pakistan appreciated China's unbiased perspective. Pakistan understands China's position on improving relations with India is growing Indo-US strategic cooperation. However, in the post-cold war era, Pak-China relations had a diversion on one issue, particularly on the Kashmir issue. China changed its stance from pro-Pakistan to neutrality because adopts a policy to avoid conflict and give other South Asian states goodwill for a peaceful environment.

## **Conclusion**

The Subcontinent of India and China have been connected with each other for centuries. With the rise of the international arena in the last century, both regions have their

own politics, foreign policy, and issues. The subcontinent is divided into two different states, so now china has to deal with two different states instead of one and has two different foreign policies with India and Pakistan.

Under the context of the Cold War, the international arena was divided into two parts, such as during the cold war and post cold war. India, Pakistan, and the PRC (People's Republic of China) gained independence before the Cold war or after World War II. From the beginning, China tried to get involved with the politics of South Asia and make friendly relationships with the region's major states. But the ideology of China was quite different from that of the newborn states. China is a Communist state, and India and Pakistan were struggling to identify their ideology. United States of America (USA) benefited from this situation and penetrated the politics of South Asia. As a result, Pakistan followed the Capitalist World, and India founded the NAM (Non-Alignment Movement). But eventually, India also followed in the footsteps of the Capitalist world. Despite all these ideological clashes, China and Pakistan always had friendly and brotherly relationships and resolved territorial issues in the 1960s. On the other hand, India and China has bilateral trade relations, but their territorial and ideological issues are still not resolved.

After the Cold War and War on Terror, China supported Pakistan, invested billions of dollars in Pakistan, and initiated the CPEC. On the other hand, China also adopts the trade base policy for India. The India and Chinese bilateral trade relationships are on the peak from the last decade. And it creates nontraditional security threat for Pakistan.



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