

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN-V

## South Asian Security: The China-Pakistan-India Tangle

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India has emerged over the last four decades as an autonomous centre of power in the global system, this in spite of irredentist problems like Punjab that continue to plague its polity. Pakistan's complicity with the terrorists in the Punjab further exacerbates India's insecurity. For this reason, Pakistan remains the *bete noire* in India's security planning.

China is often cited as a threat by India but this threat remains largely an ephemeral one and one that is invoked largely because of Pakistan's strategic relationship with China. China, no doubt, aims to weaken India by playing on the fears of the smaller neighbours such as Nepal and Bhutan, but Pakistan remains India's only military competitor in South Asia, because of the military aid that it receives from the United States and China. The retrofitting of the Chinese aircraft F-7 with the American GE-404 engine and avionics adds another dimension to the Sino-American military coordination in South Asia. Pakistan, because of its strategic contiguity to the oil wells of West Asia, is an important lynchpin on which the United States and China can base their foreign policy in West Asia. It is conceivable that as and when the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan diminishes, relations between Moscow and Islamabad may also improve. This is a possibility that assumes importance in view of Gorbachev's attempts to consolidate Moscow's relations with China, with whom Pakistan has strong ties.

China's pursuit of an independent foreign policy backed by military power gives it enough flexibility to negotiate with both the superpowers. Its nuclear weapons have further enhanced its global image. Chinese ICBMs and SLBMs can today threaten targets in both European and Asian Russia, and perhaps the western seaboard of the United States. It is with good reason that the United States, in deference to the wishes of China (a friend) and Japan (an ally), had insisted that the Soviets remove the 171 SS-20s stationed in the Far East as part of the INF accord. In their negotia-

tations with Moscow, the Chinese had only once made an issue of the SS-20 (in 1982) when the present foreign minister Qian Qichen led the negotiations.

China has always insisted that the superpowers must first reduce by as much as 50 per cent the number of their strategic missiles, and at the Moscow Summit held from May 29-June 2 this year, there was the hope that such a reduction might actually take place. The US unwillingness to give up the SDI option stymied the move towards such reductions. It is conceivable that Gorbachev aims to restrict the growth of Chinese ballistic missiles both on land and on sea, through arms control negotiations. For some time, these missiles are likely to remain delinked from the central strategic balance much like the British and the French missiles.

There have been several reports to suggest that in the mountainous caves and valleys of Qinghai province that borders Tibet, scores of IRBMs and MRBMs have been deployed. India has chosen not to make an issue of these missiles in its negotiations with China. Of late, evidence has come to light that some of these missiles have been sold to Saudi Arabia, after the Israelis modified their guidance system. As far as India is concerned, a similar sale by China of these missiles to Pakistan could pose a grave threat. So far, no conclusive evidence is available to suggest that any such sale has taken place. A report prepared by the US Congressional Research Service has alleged that Pakistan is in possession of a 1,000-km range missile. Indo-Pakistani relations are far more complicated than the issue of a mere possession by each of the parties of a long range ballistic missile. The nuclear element is an important element in the posturing which has characterised the diplomatic offensive between the two countries.

An "identity crisis" bedevils Pakistan which turns to the Islamic countries of West Asia, but remains India-oriented and geographically in South Asia. India, in spite of all influence in Southeast Asia, sees no need to use it although there is enough for it to be able to influence events there. China, because of its geographical outlets, is always able to have influence in regions far from it. Today, it maintains the status and profile of a global power—witness how it can manipulate the Khmer Rouge in Kampuchea and influence the course of negotiations.

China is perceived in New Delhi as one that weakens India's

power. Since 1962, one has heard much about the threat from China but nothing has been done concretely to take on this threat. India does not want to exploit Chinese vulnerabilities in Tibet. China's fears of a southern vulnerability arise because of Vietnam. Can Vietnam and India therefore become "natural allies" in the true Chanakya sense? No clear correlation of military activities between Hanoi and New Delhi can take place as they are geographically apart. Hanoi is at present concerned with the restructuring of its economy. In the context of improving Sino-Soviet relations such a strategy becomes even more important. For this reason, complete correlation of Indian and Vietnamese military efforts to thwart China's growth is unfeasible, especially in an era where the Soviet relations with China are likely to undergo a significant change and both Hanoi and Beijing would be more interested in participating in the economic miracle of the Asia-Pacific region rather than confronting each other militarily.

India must therefore accelerate its efforts to improve relations with China well into the 21st century rather than dwell on stale ideas that have bedevilled its foreign policy over the last forty years. India must set its sights beyond Pakistan and aim to participate, if not influence, events in Southeast and Southwest Asia. China's relations with the USSR cannot improve at the expense of India. It is Gorbachev's revolutionary and messianic zeal that will shape the course of Sino-Soviet relations in the 21st century. Chinese hegemony in Southeast Asia may increase once the Soviets have reached detente with China.

Zhao Ziyang as General Secretary and Li Peng as Premier are likely to continue Deng Xiao Ping's pragmatic policies and thus maintain an equilibrium in China's relations with both the superpowers. Gorbachev's revolutionary ideas of "perestroika" and "glasnost" pose no problems for Deng's China, which has its own version in "kiefang" and "gaige."

Some Sinologists predict that due to the differences in ideological beliefs between Zhao and Li, there will be a downturn in reforms. Much is also made of differences between Gorbachev and Ligachev. How far differences of opinion in the Politburo and Central Committee will make both the communist giants stray from their chosen paths of reform will have to be carefully monitored.

President Reagan, in his last few months of tenure, has brought

the state of US-Soviet relations to one of a cooperative, rather than of a conflictual nature. It is likely that such a relationship may be further strengthened by the election of Michael Dukakis as president. At the same time, US-China relations are unlikely to be de-emphasised. China is growing economically fast enough to be of great interest to the United States for several years to come especially when the US trade with the Asia Pacific Basin is increasing.

#### **India's Security Imperatives**

In the 1990s India has to contend with a growing power profile. Its military capabilities and national power have at present the potential to extend beyond the region but there is as yet no meaningful doctrine that takes it beyond the confines of the region. Dr Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, has had a change of heart towards India—he condescends to equate India with Japan and China as the major Asian powers of the 21st century. It remains unclear, however that India herself has faith in her own capabilities. India's geographical size and population gives her a great power profile. The potential has yet to be realised in full largely because of the internal problems that continue to plague its polity. By mere leasing of the Charlie I-class nuclear powered submarine from the USSR, ripples were generated as far away as Australia. The firing of a 250km-range Prithvi surface to surface missile has been an ad hoc event that helped her re-establish her credentials as a nascent missile power. However, this image soon suffered a setback, when the test fire failure of the augmented satellite launch vehicle (SLV) occurred in July 1988.

India at present has no intention to manufacture nuclear weapons; this in spite of a detonation of a solitary nuclear device in May 1974. It has failed to convince the think-tanks of the western world, such as the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, in Washington, who continue to allege that India has as many as twenty atomic bombs in the basement. Pakistan is credited with having four bombs in the basement. None of these estimates is convincing.

Moscow's relations with Islamabad, especially after the complete withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, will greatly be determined by the nature of the regime in Kabul. China likes to promote

Afghanistan as a neutral or nonaligned nation because of its interests being threatened by Soviet occupation of the Wakhan corridor.

China's thrust into West Asia has of late become aggressive, what with the arms sales to Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Pakistan's strong ties with several of the Islamic countries of the Gulf will help Beijing to move into the affairs of the Gulf. Moscow is likely to view with trepidation China's thrust into the Gulf. Moscow is also interested in improving its relations with Pakistan and Iran because of the rise of Islam in several of its southern republics. Long-range US interests in the Gulf are likely to retain the US strategic relations with Pakistan. General Zia, as long as he was in office was secure in the knowledge that the US is unlikely to pressure it to give up the nuclear weapons option.

The destruction of the SS-20 missiles that were stationed in the East Asian theatre against Japan and China as part of an INF agreement covering Europe, represents the extent to which Gorbachev is willing to accommodate China. Gorbachev is also putting a greater stress on the security of the Asia-Pacific region, and to achieve this he needs good relations with both Beijing and Tokyo. The importance of China arises because of tensions on the Sino-Soviet border, which tie up 47 military divisions. For Gorbachev, perestroika, that is, restructuring of Soviet society, requires additional resources, and these become available when his disarmament measures succeed. At the present stage of the world, the type of de-nuclearisation that Gorbachev envisages seems a little idealistic. China's development of long-range ICBMs on land and SLBMs at sea, is likely to be constrained by Gorbachev's plans for de-nuclearisation of the world, convinced as the Chinese are that no such radical restructuring of the world will take place. Meanwhile, it needs to be stressed that the Chinese development of nuclear powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBMs) is likely to be enhanced as the result of appointment Admiral Zhang Liazhong as Chief of Naval Staff of the PLA Navy. He has stressed the development of a blue water navy. One could say, therefore, that China's naval doctrine for the 21st century would aim towards the development of a blue water navy. India's navy is unlikely to complete against such a growing navy during the next two decades.

The procurements by India of the Kashin destroyers and the Kilo-class submarines from the Soviet Union marks but a step in the right direction. China's use of their navy against the Vietnamese in their conflict over the Spratly and Paracel islands could open the eyes of the navy to the possibility that it could undertake similar missions against the Andaman and Nicobar islands. If Chinese nuclear submarines were to make periodic visits into the Indian Ocean, it would need to surface for rest and recreation (R&R) of the crew. Rangoon port with its excellent facilities is suited for this purpose and China has strong ties with Burma. Rangoon's proximity to the islands of Andaman and Nicobar raises the spectre of a Chinese threat from its nuclear submarines.

The Indian Navy's procurement of diesel powered HDW and Kilo-class submarines needs further growth. India's relations with Burma need to be further strengthened as also with countries of Southeast Asia that fear the growth of the Chinese Navy. Indonesia and Malaysia are two such countries. China will, thus, not have an unhindered access to the waters of the Indian Ocean. It would have to contend with the Indonesian Navy as its navy enters the waters of the Lombok Straits. The Soviet naval facilities at Cam Ranh Bay and Da Nang in Vietnam will also restrain the passage of Chinese naval vessels. This would be true so long as the Soviets remain committed to Vietnam's security. If Sino-Soviet relations were to improve dramatically, Soviet compulsions to aid the Vietnamese against the Chinese would also reduce. Since the relations between Moscow and Beijing are unlikely to reach the stage of the fifties, it would seem that the Soviets would not altogether write off China as a threat, and hence are not going to abandon their facilities in Vietnam, especially since it provides a theatre for projection into the waters of the Pacific.

China is a belligerent and hegemonistic nation, one that believes in teaching lessons. An article published in the journal the *Liberation Army Daily* in January 1988 was written by the military commander of the Chengdu military region (which covers India and Vietnam). He wrote about the threat to China that is likely to come from its southern borders. It remains to be seen whether India is considered to be one of those threats.

China, unlike India, perceives itself as a global power, capable of influencing events in regions as far away as Saudi Arabia and

the Persian Gulf. It is currently pursuing a dual policy, one of exporting arms to Arab countries, Syria and Iran, and at the other level importing arms technology from Israel. China has reproduced certain weapons such as the Exocet, which were obtained from Pakistan, and has re-sold its Chinese version to other countries. Pakistan has had a central role in the cementing of Beijing-Riyadh ties. It is this cementing that has enabled China to transfer missiles to Saudi Arabia. Until recently, a brigade of 15,000 troops was stationed at Tabuk in Saudi Arabia near the Jordanian border. According to certain reports some of these troops have been removed as General Zia-ul-Haq has been unwilling to use the "Shia element" in these troops against Iran.

India in the long run cannot remain insensitive to the developments in Iran and Saudi Arabia. What the repercussions would be of transfer of missiles to such sensitive regions of the world need to be further taken into account. Pakistan's contiguity to the region also has implications for India. However, the broadening of threat perceptions would impose further strains on the Indian defence budget, which reached the figure of Rs. 13,000 crore for 1988-89. It could well reach a figure of Rs. 14,500 crore in the revised estimates (RE), with the Navy's share standing around twelve per cent, and there is little room for further increases, given the economic constraints. Any development of nuclear weapons and missiles as well as nuclear powered submarines still seems to be far cry. By the time India contemplates the production of such missiles, the process of de-nuclearisation envisioned by Gorbachev may have well come into fruition.

#### **India's Nuclear Posture in the 1990s**

India's lease of Soviet nuclear submarine of the Charlie I-class, that can carry ballistic or cruise missiles, paves the way for developing a nuclear weapons capability. The lease may be the precursor of future purchases of submarines of either the Sierra or Papa-class. By leasing out a nuclear submarine, the Soviet Union has demonstrated that it intends to support India's power projections in the Indian Ocean. Some in India have gone so far as to suggest that the Soviet Union would endorse the development by India of a nuclear missile capability or, in other words, the Soviet Union would have no choice but to go along with an

Indian nuclear weapons programme, even while it remains committed to the nuclear non-proliferations treaty (NPT) and is a member of the missile control regime (MCR) formed in April 1987. The Prithvi surface to surface missile which was recently test fired is liquid fuelled and inertially guided. It has the capabilities to be used in the battlefield since its range is merely limited to 250km. The next series of missiles would pave the way for a newer generation of missiles.

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) however, failed in two successive years (1987-88) to launch the augmented satellite launch vehicle (ASLV), thereby retarding any missile programme that might have been contemplated in the 1990s. India has to date commissioned only a 30 kilowatt reactor named "Kamini" that can convert thorium 232, a fertile element, into fissionable uranium 233. Such a process holds tremendous promise for India, which accounts for one of the world's largest reserves of monazite ore (that contains thorium) in the sands of Kerala. Former Admiral Rickover of the US Navy had once expressed the view that thorium burning reactors in the so-called "light water breeder" mode, are ideally suited for nuclear propulsion. India's nuclear propulsion programme in existence at Tarapur since 1974 has never really got off the ground. One hopes that by leasing nuclear powered submarine and studying the characteristics of the power reactor, India may eventually forge ahead with the development of indigenous submarines. In a country like India there is often enough a constraint on resources, and hence no massive and large-scale programmes can be undertaken. For this reason, the next best choice is the procurement of the submarines from a friendly country like the USSR. There are reports to suggest Pakistan is trying to procure nuclear submarines from USA and even China.

If India were to embark on a nuclear missile programme, it will face several constraints. China laid the design of its nuclear powered submarine on the drawing board as early as 1963, and brought out the indigenously developed Han-class submarine in 1978, some fifteen years later. This, after R&D test and deployment (RDTD). India has yet to demonstrate that kind of tenacity. India has merely vacillated on the question of exercising the nuclear weapons option and pegged it on the Pakistani nuclear weapons

programme. A.Q. Khan, the determined metallurgist who directs Project 706 at Kahuta, is now setting up a second enrichment plant at Golra, some six miles west of Islamabad. It is conceivable that in the long run Pakistan will develop an *enriched uranium trigger* for fusion weapons. If this were to indeed happen, one more march would indeed have been stolen over India.

In the subcontinent, posturing seems to take a precedence on actual action. India and Pakistan continually resort to propaganda with regard to nuclear weapons even as they have a genuine need for harnessing nuclear energy. The time has come for a choice, once and for all, whether nuclear weapons are necessary. If Gorbachev's peace initiatives were actually to get off the ground, it is possible a day would come when the world order would be rid of the scourge of nuclear weapons. This is also the goal of the three-tier formula proposed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi at the Third Special Session on Disarmament at the United Nations on June 9, 1988. But how far such a proposal would meet with the approval of the United States and the narrow chauvinistic interest of France and China remains to be seen. As was mentioned earlier on, China's sale of the obsolescent DF-3 or CSS-2 intermediate range ballistic missile (IRBMs), capable of delivering nuclear warheads over a distance of 1800 miles, is the first transfer of long range missiles and an event of its first kind, when a country not party to NPT has transferred ballistic missiles to another country not party to the NPT. There is now the distinct possibility that Pakistan may develop missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

India would be forced into a missile race if Pakistan were to accelerate the development of missiles. India needs to adopt an independent nuclear posture, one that is more convincing than its moral stances on disarmament. India's security planners focus unnecessarily on Pakistan, and the developments in the Punjab have clouded the horizon of India made it tie up its exercise of the nuclear weapons option to the developments in Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme.

China's nuclear weapons capability has yet to integrate nuclear weapons into its doctrine. If it were to steadily develop and deploy SLBMs with range between 2000-3000km on the Xia-class nuclear submarines, it would be in a position to provide an assured

second strike capability. China favoured the convening of a world disarmament conference (WDC) in 1958. Today it stockpiles its nuclear weapons. India, by contrast, overstates disarmament and lowers her nuclear profile. India has been able to do precious little about halting the nuclear testing by the five nuclear weapons states. The two superpowers, in spite of their meetings and summit at Geneva, Reykjavik, Washington and Moscow, have not responded positively to the proposals for nuclear testing. In the meeting in Moscow from May 29-June 2 this year, President Reagan and General Secretary Gorbachev could go beyond INF agreement and achieve drastic reductions in the number of strategic weapons. Beijing has insisted that the superpowers must reduce by as much as 50 per cent the number of strategic weapons before it can partake in arms control negotiations. The failure of the Moscow summit to reach an agreement has given a fresh leash to China, which is likely to forge ahead with the development of more SLBMs and ICBMs.

Gorbachev's dream of a world without nuclear weapons has been endorsed by Indian foreign policymakers. Such a dream is unlikely to be reached by the year 2010. For this reason, India's nuclear weapons option, which hinges heavily on Pakistan's nuclear posture, is unlikely to be influenced by what the superpowers say or do. India has resigned itself to the growth of Chinese nuclear power and does not seem unduly concerned by it. Perhaps it is secure in the knowledge that this power will never be directed against it. Whether such a sanguine attitude would enable India to effectively compete with a China will, in large part, shape Asia's destiny in the 1990s.