

30th USI National Security Lecture

A Comprehensive Response Strategy to a Collusive and Collaborative Threat from China and Pakistan*

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An Overview: India's Bilateral Relations with Pakistan and China

Since Independence, India's relations with Pakistan have fluctuated but always remained below the friendly level. Pakistan has never shed the animosity and employed various means to pursue its feud through direct military aggression, supporting insurgencies, stoking communal tensions, infiltration and use of terrorism as an instrument of state policy. It has used foreign collusion against India, whenever and wherever it could get strategic advantage over India. Pakistan Army, which drives Pakistan's security and strategic policies, has always endeavoured 'strategic parity' with India.

China occupies Aksai Chin (38,000 Sq Km), which de jure is part of India's Jammu and Kashmir (J & K). It keeps asserting claim on Arunachal Pradesh (92,000 Sq Km). The Line of Actual Control (LAC), which came into existence after India-China war in 1962, remains disputed and un-delineated. Since 1962, there have been two incidents of military fire fight on the LAC; in 1967 (Nathu La) and 1986 (Wangdung). China has now improved military infrastructure and capability in Tibet substantially. In spite of several high level agreements to maintain peace and tranquility on the LAC, and many rounds of negotiations to work out a framework to resolve the border dispute by the Special Representatives, border confrontations, where even a slight miscalculation can spark off a limited border war, keep occurring frequently.

China, which received Shaksgam Valley by Pakistan from the Gilgit - Baltistan region of J&K in 1963, treats India's J&K and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) on different footings; apparently challenging Indian sovereignty over J&K. China has also positioned itself in the rest of South Asia. It has been increasing its economic and military footprints in India's immediate neighbourhood – Nepal, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives and, its maritime interests and assets in the Indian Ocean.

*This is a slightly edited version of the text of the 30th National Security Lecture 2014 delivered by General VP Malik, PVSM, AVSM (Retd) at USI on 03 Dec 2014 with Shri Arun Shourie in the Chair.

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Despite the strategic challenges mentioned above, India and China have been able to maintain political, diplomatic, economic and military dialogues. There have been regular high level state visits and rapid improvement in the trade (expected to touch \$100 bn by 2015) despite an ever increasing trade deficit for India.

An important factor in China- Pakistan- India security relationship is that all three nations are nuclear weapons equipped nations. This has an impact on the possible nature of conflict. There are reports that Pakistan is developing/has developed tactical nuclear weapons. As per current Indian nuclear doctrine, our response to all types of nuclear, chemical, or biological strike would be a massive counter strike.

Definitions: Collusive and Collaborative Threats

‘Collusive threat’ from China and Pakistan to India implies both countries acting in secret to achieve a ‘fraudulent, illegal, or deceitful goal’ or being engaged in secret or hidden avowed goals vis-à-vis India. ‘Collaborative threat’ implies a joint threat by working together. Basically, that would cover overt as well as covert threats to India from the China - Pakistan nexus.

History of China-Pakistan Collusion and Collaboration

Pakistan was the first non-communist, Islamic country that broke relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan) to recognise Peoples Republic of China and establish diplomatic relations with it. The China-Pakistan collusion started soon after India - China 1962 war. In 1963, China and Pakistan signed a Boundary Agreement to formally delimit and demarcate the boundary between China’s Xinjiang and the contiguous Northern Areas of POK. With this delimitation, Pakistan ceded the Shaksgam Valley to China. Both countries extended their common boundary up to Karakoram Pass. China was careful. Article 6 of the Agreement states that *after* the settlement of Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan, the ‘sovereign authority’ will reopen negotiations with the Chinese Government so as to sign a formal Boundary Treaty to replace the Agreement.

Cooperation in Nuclear, Missiles and Arms Industry

China has played a major role in the development of Pakistan’s nuclear infrastructure.¹ In 1990s, China designed and supplied heavy water Khushab reactor, which plays a key role in Pakistan’s production of plutonium. A subsidiary of the China National Nuclear Corporation contributed to Pakistan’s efforts to expand its uranium enrichment capabilities by providing 5000 custom made ring magnets, which are a key component of the bearings that facilitate high-speed rotation of the centrifuges. When China joined the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group in 2004, it ‘grandfathered’ its right to supply Chashma 1 and 2 reactors.²

Despite growing threats of Pakistani terrorists acquiring material to make nuclear devices, in March 2012 China reaffirmed that it would continue to support Pakistan's civilian nuclear programme. Currently, Chinese state-run companies are in talks to build three 1000 megawatt nuclear power plants in Pakistan – two at the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant and the third one at the Chashma Nuclear Power Complex.

On the missiles front, it is well known that the Chinese sale of 34 complete M-11 ballistic missiles around 1990 was in contravention of the Missile Technology Control Regime guidelines. China also built Pakistan's missile plant at Tarwanah, near Rawalpindi. In the last 20 years, China and Pakistan have been involved in several joint ventures to enhance military and weaponry systems. These include the JF-17, K-8 advanced training aircraft, AWACS, Al Khalid tank, Babur cruise missile, and so on.

Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-Neighbourly Relations

Of all the treaties and agreements signed between China and Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good-neighbourly Relations, ratified by both the sides in 2005-06, is the most significant in China Pakistan collusion and collaboration. It binds the two nations to desist from *joining any alliance or bloc which infringes upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other side*. It also forbids both countries to conclude a similar treaty with a third country. Then Chinese President Hu Jintao had described it as 'an important legal foundation for the Strategic Partnership'. While Pakistan considered significance of the Treaty in terms of protecting its security and a hedge against India³, the Chinese downplayed the security aspect but laid stress to the importance of the document in preventing Pakistan going back to the US camp.⁴

China and Pakistan have signed several agreements for development of communications along the Karakoram Highway, and railway and oil pipe line from China to Gwadar Port (of Pakistan), which has been constructed by China and is being managed by their company. Optical Fibre Cable is being laid along the Karakoram Highway. Recently, China has committed US \$45.6 bn for 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor' and for various energy and infrastructure projects.

China and Pakistan have also signed several agreements for the military usable infrastructure in Gilgit - Baltistan and POK. A Chinese Company is building/to build 165-km long Jaglot - Skardu road, and the 135-km long Thakot - Sazin road. *China Mobile has set up cell towers in the area.* There are some intelligence reports of (a) 22 tunnels being constructed, which could be used for stocking missiles, and (b) about 1000 Chinese working on the Neelum - Jhelum hydro-electric project and on

Muzaffarabad - Athmuqam road project. These include elements of the PLA to provide security to the Chinese engineers and workers on these projects.

In March 1997, I was invited by the Chinese PLA for a friendly visit. When I called on the Defence Minister General Chi Haotian, our conversation was mostly about the need to improve military to military relations and implementation of the agreements signed by China and India in 1993 and 1996. I suggested that Chinese and Indian divisional commanders on either side of the LAC should meet each other. He agreed promptly and said that the first such meeting could be held in Leh. Several months later, after I had taken over as Chief of the Army Staff, a date was fixed mutually for the meeting of division commanders of both sides in Leh. At the last moment, the PLA sent word that the Chinese division commander will not be able to go to Leh and that the meeting should be held in New Delhi. I felt that such a meeting in New Delhi will not serve the intended purpose. We, therefore, called off the proposed meeting. The reason behind this change was not Chinese accessibility to Leh, but because Pakistan did not like a senior Chinese officer visiting J&K.

In 1999, after Kargil war, when all foreign *defence attaches* were invited to visit Dras and Kargil, only the Chinese *defence attaché* did not avail this invitation. Later, when I asked him the reason, he told me informally that they did not want to hurt feelings in Pakistan. In May 30-31, 2011, during Siachen talks between India and Pakistan in New Delhi, Pakistan pushed for China to be represented during negotiations on the ground that Beijing controls the Shaksgam Valley. On 13 Dec 2011, in an Urdu Daily, Tufail Ahmed wrote “Chinese Military Taking over Gilgit Baltistan: Pakistan Considering Proposal to Lease the ‘disputed region’ to China for 50 years”.

The Disputed Border Length

Our Army HQ and MoD claim the length of India - China border to be 4056 km which includes boundary/LAC with J & K and Gilgit - Baltistan, including the Shaksgam Valley. Beijing declares the length of the border with India to be about 2000 km, which obviously excludes J&K and Gilgit - Baltistan. The strategic implications of this move can be as under :-

(a) China has become a new factor in the India - Pakistan debate over J&K.

(b) The India -China boundary dispute may get divided into two parts. While the Eastern and Middle Sectors remain a bilateral issue between India and China, the Western Sector becomes a trilateral issue involving India, China and Pakistan.

(c) Repeated references to the length of the India - China border as 2,000 km may impact future global discourse on J&K relating to subjects like construction and international loans or financing of development projects.

(d) China can now question India's locus standi to discuss the Western Sector, while its own territorial integrity and authority over Shaksgam Valley and Aksai Chin remain unquestioned and therefore secure.

(e) In the security scenario and defence planning for the Western Sector, Indian Armed Forces would now have to seriously factor in the collusive, two-front China - Pakistan threat.

Manifestation and Dimensions of Collusion on the Military Front

The dimensions of a China - Pakistan military collusion could vary from; one, *collusive support without direct military intervention*; to two, *activating a second front militarily*. The transition from one to the other could also occur seamlessly.

Collusive Support without Direct Military Intervention

This activity, as noted earlier, is already happening. It is likely to increase manifold in an India - Pakistan conflict scenario. Its probability is higher as it is easier to deny, and will accrue high benefits compared to the efforts put in. Such support could take the forms such as:-

(a) **Military Material Support.** China has been providing military material support to Pakistan for decades. This is likely to continue. During hostilities, it may enhance Pakistan's weapons and equipment reserves, force re-generation and war duration capability. Support in the nature of high end technological weapons and equipment can become a major advantage for Pakistan.

(b) **Locating Extra Forces in Tibet.** In an India - Pakistan war situation, mere positioning of extra PLA forces in Tibet (from within or outside the military region) can influence Indian Armed Forces' decision to move any dual tasked formations and other military assets from the India - China front.

(c) **Cyber Warfare Support.** China has potent cyber warfare capability, which if shared with Pakistan, can cripple India's crucial networks, including strategic forces assets, command and control systems, air defence, and civil support structures like the railways, civil aviation, power grids, banking sector, and so on. It can impact India's deterrence and war fighting capability very adversely.

(d) **Information Warfare Support.** China can support Pakistan's strategy to shape the world opinion against India, in the UN and other world forums.

(e) **Internal Destabilisation.** China in the past has shown capability to exploit India's internal fault lines and instigate ethnic strife, particularly in the northeast. It would result in diversion of India's war effort.

Collusive Support with Direct Military Intervention

An interventionist military collusion could come about in different scenarios as under:

(a) Pakistan led or China led.

(b) Either state may take advantage of an adverse situation for India brought on by the other.

(c) It could be part of a grand design between China and Pakistan to bring India down to its knees.

Historically, full scale activation of a second front has never occurred despite the collusion being in place since the 1960s. However, in view of the updated military infrastructure development in Tibet, and by China in Gilgit - Baltistan and POK, the possibility of a two front war cannot be ruled out. Let us examine each one of these scenarios.

Pakistan Led Scenario. In this manifestation, China is likely to participate only if it sees some gains for itself. Otherwise, it would not be in its best interest. But then Pakistan could beg for the Chinese support even if China does not wish to be drawn in physically. In such a situation, a major offensive by China is unlikely. That would hurt its global image and scare many friendly neighbours. However, China may use the rail and road communications being developed in Gilgit - Baltistan to provide logistic support to Pakistan. It could also make moves to tie down our forces in the North and East by moving extra forces in Tibet; aggressive patrolling by the Chinese leading to provocation and minor clashes; major/minor fire assaults, and intrusion of Indian airspace. India's dual tasked formations would then not be available for deployment against Pakistan. Our offensive capability on the Western front would be affected adversely.

China Led Scenario. In a China-led manifestation, there may be an attempt to seize Tawang or other territory along the LAC, and/or to teach India a lesson. China may then initiate a limited or even a higher level conventional war, depending upon its objective(s). The latter would have to take into consideration its likely escalation into

the nuclear, aerospace and maritime domain. In any such conflict, it is *unlikely* to bank on the Pakistani collusion or participation. But Pakistan could try to exploit such a situation on the Line of Control (LC) or international border. It could make diversionary moves in Kargil or Siachen, which will result in our formations based in Ladakh having to 'look' both ways. Pakistan could also upgrade proxy war conditions in J&K.

Grand Design between China and Pakistan. The possibility of a concerted twin strike in a 'grand design' by China and Pakistan has very serious implications for India: nuclear, aerospace and maritime dimensions. It may also involve Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh. Such a venture would hurt China's global image severely. India would have diplomatic support of almost the entire world. This, to my mind, is the least likely manifestation. However, if it does occur, India could initially hold China in the North, and turn its attention and weight towards Pakistan. This probability will serve as a deterrent to the Pakistani participation. As India would be the main sufferer, it could legitimately 'hurt' maritime interests of China and Pakistan in the Indian Ocean and even rescind its No First Use (NFU) of the nuclear doctrine to send warning signals to both countries.

In all these manifestations, China-Pakistan military collusion in the Karakoram Pass region can be considered as the most likely scenario.

Comprehensive Strategy to Counter Collusion and Collaboration

What should be our comprehensive response strategy to the collusive and collaborative threat from China and Pakistan? I would like to emphasise that India's national aim is to achieve economic development without compromising its security and strategic autonomy. Thus, it would wish to avoid a war.

The objective of this strategy, therefore, would be to – firstly, prevent and weaken collusion to minimise its adverse impact on our security and secondly, deal with warlike or a war situation, if it occurs despite our efforts to prevent it. This will have to be a multifaceted, multilayered strategy, with synergised political, diplomatic, economic and military measures. These measures will have to be bilateral as well as multilateral.

When deciding on war prevention measures, and their prioritisation, we need to look at the history of our relationship as well as the likely future trajectory. While China and India are expected to grow on the world stage, and increase their influencing power, Pakistan's growth appears stunted. We must also take note of our comprehensive national power (CNP). India factors 5 to 6 times ahead of Pakistan, and about 3 to 4 times behind China. Most analysts also believe that this gap is

widening on either side of India. China, therefore, requires greater focus in the collusion and war prevention measures.⁵

At the same time, an assertive militarily backed-diplomacy is imperative to safe guard our core interests. There is no need to underplay or de-emphasise the 'China Threat', as we have been doing in the past decade. In order to outflank China-Pakistan axis, and/or to create 'distance' between Pakistan and China, we should exploit the widespread regional and global apprehensions about Pakistani terrorism, and Chinese hegemony in Asia. India should not sever or compromise its connections and stakes in Tibet. The spark of China's 'forcible military occupation of Tibet' could be kept alive.

A war with China (over disputed territories) cannot be prevented unless we maintain active political, diplomatic and economic interactions with China.⁶ Such a Sino-Indian relationship can, and should, transcend bilateral scope. Where possible, it should develop regional, global and strategic significance.⁷

Political and Economic Cooperation Strategy

The desired level of cooperation, without compromising security and strategic autonomy, is already reflected in the 'India - China Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity Agreement'. Some of the thrust areas mentioned therein are :-

- (a) Deeper bilateral and regional economic engagement.⁸ Improve trade arrangements, establish industrial zones for enterprises of both countries and explore prospects of regional economic partnership such as the Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor etc.
- (b) Maintain peace, tranquility and improve bilateral relations on the India - China border like the BCDA signed in 2013 to strengthen measures to maintain stability on the border.
- (c) Exploration of a framework for the settlement of India - China boundary question by the Special Representatives of both countries. We need to push this with greater vigour.
- (d) Defence exchanges and military exercises to build greater trust and confidence. This should continue.
- (e) Strengthening cooperation on trans-border rivers, exchange of flood season hydrological data and emergency management.

(f) Facilitation of greater people to people contacts and exchanges, supported by sister-city relationships.

(g) Coordination and cooperation in multilateral forums (including Russia-India-China, BRICS and G-20) on tackling global issues such as climate change, international terrorism, food and energy security, and in the establishment of a fair and equitable economic system.

India should also endeavour to forge and sustain strategic relations with its immediate neighbours in South Asia, the littoral states of the Indian Ocean Region including South China Sea, and major powers surrounding China including Russia, Japan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Iran. It needs to strengthen its military diplomacy in the immediate neighbourhood; even reduce these nations' dependency on the China made weapons by offering subsidised military equipment.

To cover China's rise in immediate neighbourhood and other global issues which are likely to be affected adversely by China - Pakistan collusion, India needs to develop *a measure of strategic coordination* with the US in the Asia-Pacific Region, the Persian Gulf, Central Asia and Afghanistan. We should aim to leverage our regional and global relations to dissuade or weaken this collusion. China being a permanent member of the UNSC, and a greater economy, is better placed in the global political and economic structure. It would be possible to neutralise this Chinese advantage to some extent if and when India is admitted to the UNSC.

Military Confrontational Strategy

As stated earlier, India's national aim is to achieve economic development without compromising its security and strategic autonomy. It would wish to avoid a war. But we all know that there are limits to diplomacy.⁹ While continuing with cooperative strategy and measures, therefore, our military strategy should be to possess a level of military capacity, capability and 'escalation dominance', which acts as a 'deterrent' against Pakistan, and 'dissuasion' against China.

To some extent, the nuclear deterrence and our capability with long range weapon systems will itself act as a war preventive deterrent and/or dissuasion. And if a conflict does take place, it would be desirable to apply the limited war concept and limit the war in space, in duration, and in its intensity.¹⁰ The limited war concept also implies that diplomatic channels be kept open, and government to government communication uncluttered. The communications through direct and indirect channels, and tacitly by actions manifest on the ground, would help condition the adversary. At the higher level of a conflict, an early conflict termination would be desirable for both. Localised conflicts are easier to terminate. A face saving is easier

because the resources committed are less, and prestige is not staked inordinately. The limited war concept would also ensure that the NFU of the nuclear doctrine holds. Restricting the conflict to one or more theatres (Ladakh theatre, the Central theatre, Sikkim theatre, and the McMahon Line theatre) may localise the conflict. In a sense, this concept avoids the worst penalties of war to adversaries on both sides.

Limiting a conventional war also requires a certain level of 'escalation dominance'. This can be achieved horizontally as well as vertically. Horizontally, it could mean opening other land border(s) like the Chumbi Valley and the maritime front, where we have some strategic advantage. Vertically, it implies stepping up the ladder-with high calibre conventional weapons, air power, missile strikes, and readiness to use nuclear weapons. Since there is excessive disparity on the land border, we may also consider using naval capabilities to interdict Chinese shipping on the sea lanes near the Malacca Straits and the Arabian Sea. Needless to say, the air power will play a decisive role in any future conflict; hence it would be prudent for India to build a credible capability in aerospace domain and demonstrate its resolve to use the same in a future conflict scenario.

What is important is that we do need to improve our military capacity; with greater focus on cyber, space, C4I and special operations capabilities; and rail, road infrastructure development on both fronts, which would enable force mobilisation with minimum delay. I also recommend three additional, more important efforts to improve military capacity. These are :-

- (a) The need to improve intelligence gathering in Tibet and China. This is a serious limitation and can significantly affect the performance of the Armed Forces on the Northern front.
- (b) A unitary control in border management. Operational command and control of para military forces deployed on the LC/LAC (disputed border belts) should be entrusted to one agency and one ministry.
- (c) A comprehensive operational doctrine for asymmetric war, with special emphasis on the use of Special Forces, against Chinese military adventurism. It is necessary because the desired level of our war preparedness will take years to materialise.

The Siachen Dispute

Many people in India and Pakistan think that Siachen is a 'low hanging fruit' amongst India - Pakistan disputes. They are keen on withdrawal of Indian troops from the Salto Ridge. No doubt, in the initial stages, occupation of Siachen, apart from a military effort of Herculean proportions, involved considerable loss of lives and financial drain. The sacrifices made by the Army and Air Force personnel on account of harsh terrain, extreme climate and enemy actions can never be forgotten. But over the years, with experience and ever improving technology, it has been possible to overcome terrain and sustenance problems substantially. Technological advancements in future can be expected to further offset these difficulties. Should India forego its strategic advantage due to cost-benefit ratio analyses? Or, because not a blade of grass grows in the area! If that is to be believed then why has India put up its flag at Gangotri in South Pole?

Conclusion

The China - Pakistan strategic embrace is not likely to change in the near future. We know that a central feature of Chinese strategy is to persist with a policy of no-compromise on core issues, and to try and win a war without having to fight a battle. Ambiguity with a smile is characteristic of Chinese diplomacy.

China continues to delay delineation of the LAC and to resolve the boundary dispute. It is now becoming shrill on claiming Arunachal Pradesh. The Chinese strategic presence in the POK, particularly in the Northern areas of Gilgit - Baltistan, which had been accepted by them as a disputed area in 1963-64, is yet another provocative joint venture. Pragmatism demands that we do all that we can to contain our differences with China and prevent a two-front war situation. We can continue to build economic links which have made impressive strides, and separate our bilateral differences from the global issues on which we can work together to mutual advantage.

At the end of the day, India's ability to deal with its external security challenges will be determined by its own comprehensive national will, and tangible power in its economic and military spheres. While forging partnerships with other nations, India must build its own strength. This itself would act as a restraint on China - Pakistan muscle-flexing.

Endnotes

1. When stringent export controls by the Western countries had made it difficult for Pakistan to acquire materials and uranium enriching equipment from elsewhere, the US then ignored the China-Pakistan nuclear proliferation nexus, to the point of covering it up in the AQ Khan's case, when India was most affected.

2. Under a 1991 agreement, permissible under the revised 1992 NSG guidelines. In early 2010, Pakistan ratified an inter-governmental agreement with China, which provided for Chinese funding of the reactors to the extent of 82 per cent.
3. Hussein Haqqani once said, "For China, Pakistan is low cost secondary deterrent to India while for Pakistan, China is a high value guarantor of security against India." According to Zardari, "Pakistan is a force-multiplier for China".
4. The atmosphere prior to signing of this Treaty was dominated by the US policy announcements to help India to 'become a major world power in the 21st century'.
5. In fact this is how India - China relations are panning out currently; at bilateral as well as multilateral levels.
6. Such relations are also necessary to be able to create 'distance' and cracks in the China - Pakistan collusion.
7. "India and China relations today are becoming autonomous and inclusive, moving beyond the orthodox bilateral context. Both are important powers in the current global political and economic structure. They are the two largest economies after the US and have a major impact and influence in the evolving global order. Both are attached to a range of multilateral mechanisms and bodies at regional, cross-continental and global levels, which helps them to establish new layers of engagement and power politics. The emerging layers of power politics do take the scope of their relationship far beyond the purview of bilateralism." Dr Jagannath Panda in Review Essay, Strategic Analysis, 2014.
8. Create a condition like two boxers getting into a clinch
9. Admiral JC Wylie in his papers 'Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power' stated (a) 'Despite whatever effort there may be to prevent it, there may be a war', and (b) 'we cannot predict with certainty the pattern of war for which we prepare ourselves.' It has seldom been possible to forecast the time, the place, the scope, the intensity, and the general tenor of a conflict
10. On October 18, 2014, the Prime Minister in the Commanders' Conference said, "Beyond the immediate, we are facing a future where security challenges will be less predictable; situations will evolve and change swiftly; and, technological changes will make responses more difficult to keep pace with. The threats may be known, but the enemy may be invisible. Domination of cyber space will become increasingly important. Control of space may become as critical as that of land, air and sea. Full scale wars may become rare, but force will remain an instrument of deterrence and influencing behaviour, and the duration of conflicts will be shorter."