

Fellows' Seminar on "China-Pakistan Military Partnership"

General

A Fellows' Seminar on "China-Pakistan Military Partnership" was held at CLAWS on 27 September 2012. The Seminar was chaired by Maj Gen GD Bakshi, SM, VSM (Retd). Aditi Malhotra, Associate Fellow, CLAWS presented her paper on the subject. The Discussants were Cdr KK Agnihotri, Research Fellow at the National Maritime Foundation (NMF) and Col SKS Chauhan, Senior Fellow, CLAWS. The Seminar was attended by a large number of serving officers, Defence Attachés and veterans from the strategic community.

Remarks by Chairperson: Maj Gen GD Bakshi, SM, VSM (Retd)

The emerging China-Pakistan nexus has added another dimension to India's threat perceptions. Indian strategic planners now describe themselves as being confounded by a two and a half front threat scenario. It is important to deliberate of this issue and look for measures to counter this nexus that can greatly impinge on India's national security.

Aditi Malhotra

Pakistan's foreign policy and its relationship with other countries have been primarily dictated by its security concerns. Pakistan's history reflects a deep sense of insecurity, which seems embedded in its choice of forming alliances with other countries of the world.

Pakistan was the third non-communist country and the first Muslim country to recognise PRC on 4 January, 1950, after breaking its relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan). China considered the SEATO as a formation "to mount aggression against China and other Asian people." It was the Bandung Conference in 1955 that paved way for a strengthened Sino-Pakistan friendship. The Bandung conference was an assembly of Asian and African countries in Bandung, Indonesia in April, 1955. This conference was representative of the growing Third World non-aligned movement in the face of international Cold War politics. Pakistan utilised this opportunity to alleviate any possible Chinese fears about its agreements with the United States and assured them that the alliance was, in no way, against China.

The security dimension surfaced and became evidently strong during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1965. China was quite vociferous in its support of Pakistan and deemed India as the aggressor. The animosity between China and India had not receded since the 1962

war. China attempted to weaken India and psychologically pressurise it by issuing volley of notes of alleged border violations by Indian forces and publicly criticising it.

China and Pakistan have since enjoyed strong defence cooperation. Defence cooperation is reflected in their efforts towards upgrading and modernising the armed forces, joint research and development of defence systems, utilisation of IT for national defence, development and upgradation of defence production infrastructure facilities.

The countries hold periodic joint exercises, upgradation of military training institutions and target exchange, international cooperation, collaboration between the defence industries, global/ strategic issues and capacity building to cope with natural disasters. These joint exercises ensure a high degree of inter-operability among the armed forces as it provides an opportunity to learn from the other side. Also, the choices of areas where the exercises are held have latent messages and illustration of priorities for India.

China has also been offering an array of arms and weapon systems to Pakistan. After the 1962 war with India, China's best bet was to militarily strengthen Pakistan to pursue its designs of strategically containing India. Therefore, without fighting India directly, China ensured that New Delhi remained embroiled in its vicinity and not poses a challenge to China's supremacy in the region.

In addition to the direct transfer of weapon platforms and systems, China has also bolstered Pakistan's plans of indigenising its defence sector. Countries without a strong technical foundation such as Pakistan rely on foreign acquisitions or joint-productions, allowing it to jump various stages of technology maturation. Pakistan got Chinese assistance in the establishment of the Heavy Rebuild Factory (HRF) in Taxila and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) in Kamra.

Additionally, nuclear and missile transfers have been part of a well orchestrated Chinese strategy to present India with another nuclear-enabled challenger in South Asia. As decades passed by, China gave dual-usage nuclear-related material and missile components through its private and government firms, adding to Pakistan's strategic weight against India.

China's aid to Pakistan in going nuclear marked just one phase of the proliferation cycle. It was coupled by the transfer of delivery systems which went on simultaneously throughout the period of nuclear proliferation. China's support in Pakistan's quest for a robust nuclear programme was initially governed by its commercial, strategic and foreign policy interests. Economic rationales were prevalent during the early 1980s when the state-owned defence firms were pressed to earn profits by finding lucrative markets abroad. However, with time the dynamics changed and one infers that the strategic and foreign policy concentrations have gained strength overtaking all other motivations.

Naval cooperation- Sino-Pakistan naval cooperation was formalised by signing the 1990 MoU on decade-long defence cooperation. The US imposed ban on military supplies subsequent to the Pressler Amendment in 1994 compelled the Pakistani leadership to further expand its naval cooperation with China and place orders of more sophisticated technologies and bigger ship.

The main idea behind a strong naval coalition with PN is to add to China's plan of maintaining a strong regional influence while ensuring the security of SLOCs in IOR. It is in this light that having Pakistan as a dominant player in the Arabian Sea is a favourable position for China; as it offers it greater influence and the potential to leverage its Pakistan link in the region. PN aids China's fundamental objective of the Offshore Defence Concept i.e. to exercise control over sea gates pivotal for PLA's force projection.

With China officially taking over the Gwadar port, it would have direct access to the Arabian Sea, coterminous with India's maritime periphery. It is natural that China would increase its capabilities there, which could in the future facilitate intervention during an Indo-Pakistan conflict. If not direct intervention, China could facilitate Pakistan's logistical supply. In case of an Indo-China war, any possible deployment of nuclear weapons on land and maritime region in the Arabian sea (with the help of Pakistan cooperation) could have the potential to deter India's Navy and may also divert Indian military's focus during the period of war.

China's support to the PAF is a subject which has not received desired attention among strategic planners. Even though western sources have acted as the backbone for PAF's technological advancements, China's contribution in sustaining the PAF during years of isolation cannot be ignored. China's interaction with the PAF was initiated in the year 1965. It was in light of the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, which attracted US embargoes on Pakistan. Chinese assistance is not only solicited in enhancing the qualitative and quantitative edge of the PAF but is also visible in its quest for indigenisation with joint-production projects and assistance in air-related infrastructure. China successfully meshes with PAF's strategic goals and contributes effectively to the same.

When it comes to Sino-Pakistan space cooperation, what underscores China's technical expertise is its record that since 2001, China has achieved a 90 per cent success rate, launching almost 50 satellites. Confident of its prowess in the space domain, China has been seeking to employ space cooperation to gain more strategic influence in the world. Pakistan has always sought to blindly ape India in the possession of military technology and weaponry. India's forays into space have compelled Pakistan to follow suit. In view of Pakistan's limitations in developing an independent space programme, the only option it had was to seek Beijing's assistance.

China's policy of supporting Pakistan to counter balance India is once again manifested in China's space relations with Pakistan. As Beijing's space programme advances forward, Pakistan becomes an important beneficiary. BeiDou (Compass) Navigation System will greatly help Pakistan and China is also involved in establishing the Pakistan Remote Sensing Satellite (PRSS).

Deductions of their military partnership are as follows:

- The Cooperation between the two countries is likely to intensify after thinning of US presence in AfPak region.
- China and Pakistan to play a dominant role in South Asia
- Due to the deepening bonds between China and Pakistan and increased presence of Chinese in Pakistan, it will force China to bail out Pakistan in case of emergencies.
- Pakistan will continue to see China as a reliable & dependent partner in terms of arms supplies, especially during contingencies.
- Beijing and Islamabad will continue to undertake collaborative efforts in R&D & weapon systems manufacturing.
- There is a possibility of Pak interfering in Indo-China conflict by employing its irregulars and exploiting the situation for its own advantages.
- Apart from the internal problems India faces and the growing Maoist challenge, the presence of two rivals on India's borders is bound to add pressure on India's military preparedness.

Cdr KK Agnihotri

Apart from its advantages, the "all weather" friendship also has some sticky points. The unequal nature of their partnership is evident in cases of humanitarian assistance, wherein Pakistan does little but magnifies the same in media reports. China too believes in publicising the help it offers to Pakistan during various humanitarian assistance projects. The use of media and psychological warfare is quite unique and commendable. When we take the case of foreign defence forces attending events in China, one sees that most other forces' leadership is sidelined in the Chinese media reports (especially in the case of India) and it is Pakistan that is highlighted repeatedly.

In terms of cooperation, one must realise that Chinese are hard-nosed business people and they invest in places after considering their self-interests. The case of the Gwadar port illustrates this. There were grand plans to establish refinery projects however China recently withdrew from a particular project because of the security concerns it had in the restive province of Baluchistan. China and Pakistan relations are also opportunistic to a certain degree. China gives very little help to Pakistan in economic terms but still continues to be regarded as the best partner Pakistan has ever got.

Another sticky point between the two nations is the alleged support of Pakistan-based groups to Uighurs and separatist groups like the ETIM in the Xinjiang province. While Pakistan states that the government is not involved to any degree and the responsibility lies solely with uncontrollable jihadi groups, there may be another side to the story. Interestingly, Pakistan maintains that the militancy it exports to India is also not government-backed. A similar scenario may be present in its assertions with regard to separatist movements in Xinjiang and Pakistan's support of the same.

When it comes to space cooperation, one cannot ignore the fact that China operates a space telemetry station in Pakistan. The station supports China's spaceflight missions through a range of land-based tracking stations located both within China and overseas, Pakistan being one of the overseas countries. This clearly shows that there is much more to their 'great' friendship.

Col SKS Chauhan

Sino-Pakistan military relations are the cornerstone of their friendship. Today, India feels challenged by China's military assistance to Pakistan. It is an interesting case in point that China and India started their journeys together when they shared almost similar GDP figures. Fast forwarding six decades, one sees Beijing way ahead of New Delhi in innumerable facets such as military, economy, scientific development.

China has grown into a major economic power, which has successfully made inroads into major economies of the world including its adversaries such as the US, Japan and India. Today, it is using its economic tools to justify, enforce its diplomatic/political stands. Despite India's economic and monetary constraints, India can counter the Sino-Pakistan partnership. Besides upgrading its military capabilities, India can think of using the two Ds: 'Democracy' and 'Diplomacy'. Currently, Pakistan is witnessing a failing democracy and when it comes to China, democracy's roots have never grown. Whatever we may say, yet we have a prospering, vibrant and maturing democracy. In view of scenarios in Pakistan and China, India should expose their masses/common man to the tastes of democracy and the fallacies of non-democratic set-up. We could also explore causative factors for implementation, increase people-to-people contact, and expose others to the valued fruit of freedom of expression and right to life and personal liberty.

Indian democracy should be aggressive so that we do not lose out on our friends and potential allies. We should utilise every opportunity and make inroads through the idea of democracy into countries that would matter to us when countering the China-Pakistan nexus.

Discussion

- China and Pakistan have also been collaborating in the cyber domain though this is rarely cited in studies possibly due to lack of verified reports on the same.
- Chinese weapon/weapon systems supplies to Pakistan may include EMP weapons, HPMW-based weapons which will be pivotal technologies that would decide the course of future wars.
- We lack charismatic leaders like Nehru and have limited funds to attract our neighbours and fortify our relationships with them. In these unfavourable circumstances, aggressive diplomacy is important for India.
- China provided CSS-2 missile to Saudi Arabia in 1987 and Pakistan was a facilitator of the deal.
- China's with nuclear and missile technology transfers to Pakistan resulted in making Islamabad a co-equal state to India. This has been a deciding factor of their relationship.
- China and Pakistan bear different ideas over terrorism in Xinjiang and China has accused its "all weather" friend of supporting fundamentalism and separatism in the province. It is also important to look at Chinese annoyance with Islamabad's inability to protect Chinese workers in Pakistan, particularly Gwadar.
- There is a feeling in the Pakistan Army that China is not doing enough and feels that Indian over-hype their relationship, from which Pakistan has not benefitted to the extent usually portrayed.

Concluding Remarks: Maj Gen Dhruv Katoch, SM, VSM (Retd), Addl Dir, CLAWS

The China Pakistan nexus has been a matter of concern for Indian policy makers. The most important aspects of Sino-Pakistan military cooperation that commands attention is their nexus in missile, nuclear and space technology. Also, their collaboration in spread of terrorism is something that cannot be overlooked. However, we should not get too worried about the conventional military transfers that have continued for decades. The Chinese weaponry is sub-standard and it can only add numbers of Pakistan's Army and not comprehensive quality. When it comes to the Gwadar project, one can declare it a failure owing to the various retardation factors in the region, particularly the periodic unrest in Balochistan that has forced the Chinese to rethink some of their actions.