SOUTH ASIA CONFLICT RESOLUTION APPROACHES OF CHINA AND PAKISTAN: A Comparative Analysis

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Introductory Background: South Asia of late is often being quoted in political and academic analyses of the West as one of the world’s highly sensitive conflictual regions. This more so after 1998 when India and Pakistan emerged as overt nuclear weapons powers.

Pakistan emerging as an independent nation in 1947 after an undesirable division of India, has been in perpetual conflict with India. It launched four aggressive conflicts against India in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999 with the interregnum marked by proxy war and low-intensity conflict. Despite adverse results in each war that it launched, Pakistan continues in a conflictual mode with India and in armed confrontation.

China’s conflictual relationship with India commenced overtly with its military aggression in 1962 in what was termed as a ‘teaching a lesson to India’ over border disputes. However in the last decade or so, China has changed somewhat, towards a conflict resolution mode in terms of approaches to India, but is yet to give up its power-politics in South Asia. South Asia today therefore witnesses a triangular tug of war between three nuclear weapons nations, with geographical contiguity and unresolved territorial disputes. Complicating this triangular phenomena is the intrusive influence of the world’s uni-polar power, the United States, which has had a history of ‘strategic convergences’ with India’s two adversaries- Pakistan and China.
This triangular convergence between USA-China-Pakistan has led to the impediments in conflict resolution in South Asia so far and also to the emergence of Pakistan as a nuclear weapons state (touted by it in civilisational terms as the “Islamic bomb”) due to China’s collusion and United States permissiveness.

South Asia therefore, has no honest brokers to promote conflict resolution as supported by the analysis in this author’s earlier paper: United States Conflict Restraint Initiatives in South Asia [1], Paper No.458 dated 16.05.2002.

In fact in South Asia, the problem is compounded by the external inputs in conflict generation from the intrusive external powers. For more detailed analysis of this aspect, one could see this author’s Chapter 12, “External Inputs in Conflict Generation & Resolution” in the book “Conflict Resolution, Human Rights & Democracy”, Ed D. D Khanna and Gert N Kueck published by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

**Pakistan’s Rigidity in Opposing Conflict Resolution in South Asia:** Before analyzing Pakistan’s approach to conflict resolution in South Asia, it would be proper to set in perspective what conflict resolution implies. In the book “Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts by Hugh Miall, Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Wodehouse (Cambridge, Polity Press 1999) it is amplified that “Conflict resolution is a more comprehensive term which implies that deep rooted sources of conflict are addressed, and resolved. This implies that behaviour is no longer hostile and the structure of the conflict has been changed. It is difficult to avoid ambiguity since the term is used to refer both to the process (or the intention) to bring about these changes, and to the completion of the process”.

Analysing, Pakistan’s attitudes and approaches in the above context, the following emerges:

* Pakistan’s deep rooted source of conflict with India is not Kashmir as Pakistan would like the world to believe. Kashmir is only a fig-leaf. Pakistan’s deep rooted source of conflict can be summarised as follows:

(1) Pakistan’s civilisational approach to the rationale for its creation and hence the emphasis on ‘Islamic Jehad’ and ‘Islamic Bomb’.

(2) Pakistan’s inability to reconcile with its strategic asymmetry with India and persistently seeking external power patronage to offset this.
Pakistan's Army's vested interest in perpetuating the India-Pakistan conflictual existence to ensure its hold on power in Pakistan.

* Pakistan's behavior continues to be violent as manifested in its proxy war in Kashmir.

* Pakistan's official attitudes towards India continue to be hostile and aggressive both in content and form.

* In terms of changing the structure of the conflict, Pakistan Army’s stout opposition to any normalization of relations with India is a serious impediment.

* Pakistan’s military ruler, General Musharraf incessantly uses nuclear blackmail and the nuclear threat to keep USA involved in South Asia in the mistaken belief that Kashmir is a nuclear flash-point.

With such a background, using Kashmir as a fig-leaf and terming it as the ‘core issue’, provides Pakistan with a convenient tool to stall any peace processes initiated by India. Therefore Pakistan cannot be expected to initiate any genuine peace processes and display sincerity of intentions to implement them.

The United States only can bring Pakistan to heel in terms of conflict resolution in South Asia. But the United States falters in terms of conflict resolution in South Asia because the United States equates Pakistan, as the aggressor state, with India. This faulty equation of the United States reinforces Pakistan's intransigence.

**China’s Contrasting Approach to Resolution of its Conflict with India:** China, despite its strategic nexus with Pakistan, has embarked on a contrastingly different approach towards resolution of its conflict with India. Both China and India in the mid-1990s wisely decided that the territorial and border conflict issues should be set aside, for step by step negotiation, conscious of the complexity of the issues involved. Both China and India have seen the necessity of breaking ground in others fields like economic cooperation, trade and commerce and scientific and technology cooperation. Significantly after the Indian Prime Minister visit to China in June 2003, military cooperation in terms of joint exercises, training exchanges and military to military contacts have been added.

Borders between China and India, in marked contrast to the India-Pakistan borders have remained tranquil since 1987-1989 with regular meetings between border officials of both sides to avoid tension.
While acknowledging that China-India negotiations on the boundary settlement have been painfully slow, one cannot help the stupendous increase in two-way trade between the two countries with a target of reaching $10 billion in the next two years.

Overall, it can be stated that with the confidence and trust that would be gradually built up in other fields, China and India have taken steps towards attitudinal changes on the boundary negotiations. Of course, a lot of this stands stimulated by the prevailing international security environment with its attendant implications for both India and China.

In direct contrast to Pakistan, China has never publicly threatened India with nuclear blackmail, though Indian targets are part of China’s nuclear weapons arsenal.

Concluding Remarks: Having outlined the contrasting approaches of China and Pakistan towards conflict resolution in South Asia, the question that begs an answer is as to why Pakistan is so intransigent towards conflict resolution in South Asia, when for confronting India, its arsenals are dependant in Chinese and American military hardware? The follow-up questions that also beg for an answer are as to whether both China and United States are reinforcing Pakistan’s confrontational and aggressive attitudes towards India and if so, why China is adopting a different track in resolution of its conflicts with India?

These are complex questions and need detailed analysis. However, the following observations can be hazarded in conclusion:

* Pakistan’s relentless confrontation with India is more fuelled by the United States than China, as Pakistan’s strategic utility to USA is more varied in comparison to Pakistan’s single point strategic utility to China in relation to India.

* Pakistan’s strategic nexus with the United States, pre-dates that with China by a margin of 15 years. However, both proceeded in parallel in the 1980s-1990s and now with USA more intensely after 9/11. As per this pattern, the United States has built up over the years Pakistan’s conventional “strike power” against India, right from the 1950s. Pakistan's nuclear and missile power would not have come into existence but for United States permissiveness of Chinese supplies to Pakistan.

* In terms of dilution of the United States-Pakistan and and the China-Pakistan strategic nexus, this author feels that there are greater chances of the latter being diluted first as Pakistan today is in a vice-like strategic grip of the United States and which in course of time may run counter to Chinese strategic interests.
China’s contrasting approach to conflict resolution in South Asia as emerging from this comparative analysis, may be an indicator or pointer towards the above trend, and also in recognition of India's rise to power.

In final conclusion, it can be stated that both China and India are rising powers, with vibrant economies stimulating this rise. Pakistan was a ‘failed state’ till the morning of 9/11 with a poor economy entirely dependant on external aid. In terms of fruits of economic progress reaching the masses, it is taking place both in China and India. Pakistan Army’s consistent grabbing of nearly forty percent of Pakistan's financial resources, whether in power or out of power, will keep Pakistani masses economically deprived and the Pakistani political scene turbulent.

With the above background, the Pakistani Army has a vested interest in promoting constant conflict with India to divert domestic attention and ensure its continued hold on power in Pakistan. The Pakistani Army as the controlling entity in Pakistan therefore has no sincere interest in any conflict resolution processes in South Asia despite any rhetoric mouthed by its military ruler i.e. General Musharraf.

The above is a point that is being sorely missed by policy planners in Washington.

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