

Andrew Small

China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics

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Andrew Small's book *The-China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics* is an attempt towards the hitherto less studied and less researched arena of the Sino-Pakistan relationship. It is a vital area of study in the global political setup, and has various ramifications on not only South Asia but cross-continental implications.

Andrew Small has delved deeply into the study of this peculiar relationship and its changing contours down through the corridors of time. Small has given a proper insight into the fomenting of the Sino-Pakistan relationship and the changing nature of this relationship over a period of time. The relationship is guided by political expediency, changes in the internal political dynamics of Pakistan, insurgency in Xinjiang province of China and also the various geopolitical changes in the greater international system. The Sino-Pakistan relationship was fomented post-1959 Lhasa uprising which China believed had the covert support of India. China was made to realize that it would be prudent for it to distract India by relying upon Pakistan as an ally. Ever since then, China has helped Pakistan as a vital entity which can enable it to contain India and thus balancing the power dynamics of the region.

Small has elaborately studied this relationship by extensive field research, interviews with relevant officials and an extensive search of available sources.

The relationship between China and Pakistan had traditionally been primarily guided by an 'India centric approach', which had primarily guided Sino-Pakistan relationships in the early phase. China provided military arms to Pakistan in order to enable it to act as a suitable and dependable counterweight against India, in the absence of any other trustworthy ally in the neighborhood which China could rely upon. However, this relationship, as Small suggests, has now gradually transformed and shifted from the traditional 'India centric' to a more pragmatic and China's

'Westward policy oriented' one in which Pakistan owing to its geostrategic location plays potentially a vital role in enabling China to realize its 'China Dream'. New vistas of trade have opened which enable it to provide access to the Persian Gulf directly via the Karakoram highway and the Gwadar Port on the Makran Coast. It provides China with an opportunity to play a vital role as a trade conduit between the West and the East. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will benefit Pakistan enormously as this will lead to considerable development of its infrastructure.

However, as a quid pro quo, China is taking keen interest in Pakistan's internal affairs owing to its diminishing trust or the capabilities of Pakistan's state machinery to ensure the safety of Chinese workers in Pakistan. Small has portended towards the Lal Masjid episode as an example of China's proactive interference in Pakistan's internal security wherein it is believed that the decision of Pakistan's military to attack Lal Masjid was covertly guided by Chinese leadership, owing to the fact that the hostages in Lal Masjid were Chinese citizens working in massage parlors in Islamabad.

Small's book has elaborated that much of the aspects of this mystified relationship have come out of the shadows, although there are still many aspects of this relationship that still remain a mystery.

Apart from the prologue, in the first chapter of the book Small gives a vivid account of the beginning of the fomenting of the Sino-Pakistan relationship post-1959 Lhasa uprising. China believed that the asylum to Dalai Lama was a part of the greater design of India to create a buffer state between China and India, to reap certain geopolitical and strategic benefits. A comprehensive view is given of the relationship between the two countries that developed over the three wars – the 1962 Sino-Indian war, the 1965 Indo-Pakistan war and the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war. The Sino-Pakistan relationship was placed at a higher pedestal and grew stronger after the 1962 Sino-India war. It reinforced China's belief about Pakistan's geostrategic importance as an ally in the region and the need to strengthen and stabilize Pakistan. After the defeat of Pakistan in 1971, China helped the country to develop a set of military capabilities to ensure that it would never face the same fate again (p. 3). This relationship has been vital for both nations. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, the spearhead of the 'China camp' in Pakistan played a pivotal role in forging good relations with China,

despite of the opposition from the pro-US Camp in Pakistan, who thought that increased alignment towards China will spoil US-Pakistan relations.

Small writes that China did not intervene militarily on Pakistan's side during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war. Bhutto was urging China to intervene and open a second front. China declined citing its own compulsions and its apprehension about Soviet invasion in the case it opened any front against India, in preparedness for which China was itself heavily involved in local Civil Defense Programmes. This portended towards the limits of this 'all weather friendship' imagination which had developed in the minds of Pakistan's public during the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war, when China was ready to intervene on Pakistan's side.

The second chapter looks at China's support to Pakistan's nuclear ambition and the close cooperation between the two nations on this matter. China has played a crucial role in helping Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons and missiles by supplying technology, expertise and material. It has, in fact, gone a long way in forging a strong and reliable relationship between them based on understanding and mutual trust. Small correctly notes that "if the military relationship lies at the heart of China Pakistan ties, nuclear weapons lie at the heart of the military relationship" (p. 29).

The third chapter looks at the gradual transition of the Sino-Pakistan relationship from an era of looking at Pakistan as a mere rival's opponent, to an era where China assumes a bigger role in the South Asian region. China acts as a stabilizer, by normalizing Sino-Indian ties and focusing on economic goal, which cannot be realized in an unsecure regional environment. Although China sees any antagonism between India and Pakistan in its own interest, it is however averse to full scale war between these two nations. The Sino-India war has a potential of destabilization and various other negative repercussions in the area to which China cannot remain immune. China tried to diffuse the conflict in cooperation with the US. Despite the changing relations with India, Pakistan's utility as a balanced, potential spoiler, and standing counterpoint to India's ambitions has never gone away (p. 65).

The fourth chapter looks at China's internal security problem in Xinjiang province, where Uighurs, the indigenous inhabitants, have become a

trouble for China's internal security. There are linkages between this region and the extremists in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistani Intelligence Machinery has close ties with extremists of Xinjiang and this has become a bottleneck in the Sino-Pakistan relationship. The attacks by militants on Chinese investments and workers on Pakistani soil have drawn the ire of China on Pakistan. China's trust towards the Pakistani Government's capabilities to tackle such militants and to ensure the safety of Chinese workers and projects is diminishing in the wake of the attacks. This has led China to become more proactive in the domestic affairs of Pakistan. Xinjiang, being an important province of China, has great geopolitical significance owing to its position as a buffer between China and Central Asia. It also has unexplored oil basins and coal reserves, which are vital for addressing China's security concerns. All these factors contribute towards increasing the importance of developing Pakistan as a stable and strong nation. It will ultimately benefit China by means of stabilization in Xinjiang and thus address its internal security concerns as well as realizing its economic goals.

The fifth chapter looks at the trade ties between the two nations and the heavy investments made by China in Pakistan, particularly the construction of the famed Karakoram Highway and the Gwadar Port. Small argues that these projects were successful despite the various obstacles they had to overcome. The projects were dominated by political and military interests, in the absence of any commercial rationale in undertaking such a huge investment by China on foreign soil. These projects will however open new doors for China with access to the Persian Gulf and also enable it to become an important trade conduit between East Asia and the West.

The sixth chapter focuses on Afghanistan, and China's desire to see stability in Afghanistan, even at the cost of the presence of a geostrategic rival. This is owing to the fact that China does not want to see the rise of militancy in Afghanistan, which can spillover to Pakistan. This would in turn lead to negative repercussions on China's internal security by speeding up the momentum of the extremists in Xinjiang province. The seventh chapter looks towards the emergence of China as a balancer and stabilizer in the region. China can reap benefits from both the economic and security points of view, if it stabilizes Pakistan and its neighboring regions, by its 'west ward facing policies'. Moreover, in its endeavors to

stabilize the region, it will not invite any enmity from the US, which also wants to see stability in the region and the curbing of extremism. This is unlike China's proactive role in East Asia, which invites US intolerance and thus risk of military confrontation, owing to strategic competition and various maritime issues.

Small has attempted to focus on the change in the very nature of this relationship from 'India centric approach' to 'westward economic approach' wherein owing to its geostrategic location and significance, Pakistan has got heavy leverage and is thus indispensable for China in the realization of its 'China Dream', of which these westward policies are only a subset. The peculiarity of this relationship is that it is strong and formidable and has withstood the test of time albeit with some moments of downheaval, even in the absence of the mutually obligatory formal alliance. The change of the nature of this relationship from a narrow spectrum 'India centric approach' to a broader spectrum of economic and strategic parameters has in fact strengthened this relationship. There has been a narrowing down of the tolerability of China for Pakistan's destabilizing actions in the region, owing to China's increasing assertiveness in the region as a stabilizer and its realization that the bitter fruits of instability in the region will immediately spill over to its territory. China has realized that any nuclear stand-off between India and Pakistan can trigger heavy unrest in the region whose repercussions will be very negative for China's internal security as well as its external interests in the region. China has shifted its foreign policy from non-interference to interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan. The unconditional support given to Pakistan by China has become conditional and 'only up to a point' (p. 16) owing to the instability in the region. The rise of extremism across the region which John W. Garver called 'extremist cancer' or the 'new generation of extremism', led to more frequent attacks on the interests of China. The support to Pakistan is conditioned by the role of Pakistan to avoid unrest in Xinjiang and stop the use of Pakistani land for the spreading of 'extremist cancer' to the world.

Small has given very narrow space to Japan which is a pivotal nation in determining China's security and external posturing. In spite of any lacunae, which the author can fulfill in a sequel to this book, this book is highly recommended to scholars, politicians and anybody wanting

to get firsthand information about the regions geopolitical matters and atmosphere.

Small's book puts before readers a detailed account and sufficient material to enable them to reach their own conclusions about this relationship. However, the labeling of this relationship as an 'axis' makes one skeptical about the intentions behind the labelling, keeping in view the historically negative connotations of this term, and its having been used for evil powers. However, this might be unintentional and not implying any history of this word for describing relationships between nations.

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