SINO-PAK NUCLEAR AND MISSILE COLLABORATION IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

Interestingly, the 1963 Sino-Pak border agreement states that China would negotiate the border with the “relevant sovereign authority” after India and Pakistan settle the Kashmir dispute. Given the strategic importance of the Karakoram Highway, it would not be in China’s interest for the Indo-Pak dispute to be settled in India’s favour and for the area to return to Indian control. Therein lies the rub. Beijing’s assistance to Islamabad ranged from providing designs of a tested nuclear weapon to giving fissile material for putting together two nuclear bombs to assistance with the Chashma and the Khushab facilities.

Cost-benefit analysis is an intrinsic part of international relations and integral to understanding behaviour of states and the choices they make. Countries always try to find ways of maximising benefit while minimising costs. China has put this strategy to good use while providing assistance to Pakistan in the nuclear and missile domain. By providing assistance to the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme, China – at least cost – has attempted to counter the Indian nuclear capabilities. The Chinese assistance can be seen as part of a larger attempt to tie down India to its Western neighbour, thereby thwarting New Delhi’s regional ambitions. In doing so, China and Pakistan seem to have put into practice, Kautilya’s maxim “the enemy of my enemy is my friend.”

Relations between China and Pakistan were however not always this close. Though formal diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in May 1951, Beijing viewed Pakistan as being firmly entrenched in the Western camp. It was only with the worsening of Indo-Pak relations after the 1965 border clash and the souring of Sino-Soviet relations that China and Pakistan began reaching out to each other.

Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto realised the importance of the Sino-Pak relations very early and worked hard to lay the foundations of this unique relationship. Bhutto described the Sino-Pak relationship as “my greatest achievement and contribution to the survival of our people and the Pakistani nation.” Bhutto’s perseverance over eleven years and his visits to China in February 1972, September 1974 and April 1976 led to the historic July 1976 Sino-Pak agreement.

Between 1963 and 1966 as Foreign Minister of Pakistan ZA Bhutto initiated the process of reaching out to Beijing. In March 1963, immediately after the Indian loss to China in the border clash, Pakistan signed a Boundary Agreement with China. Pakistan ceded about 5,000 square kilometres of Indian territory south of Munsaka Pass bordering Gilgit. This piece of territory proved crucial for building the Karakoram Highway which runs between Kashgar and Gilgit. The strategic importance of the highway can be gauged from the fact that during the 1971 Indo-Pak War, China used the highway to transport military supplies to Pakistan. To date, China continues to spend enormous amounts of money to develop an ‘economic corridor’ between Kashgar and Gwadar which traverses through the Karakoram Highway.

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Nuclear Weapons Collaboration

Gary Milholin, founder of the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control, describes the importance of the Chinese assistance to the Pakistani nuclear programme in the following terms. He states, “… if you subtract Chinese help, there wouldn’t be a Pakistani nuclear programme…”

The nature and scope of Sino-Pak nuclear assistance mirrors the assistance provided by the Soviet Union to the Chinese nuclear programme in the initial years. Beijing’s assistance to Islamabad ranged from providing designs of a tested nuclear weapon to giving fissile material for putting together two nuclear bombs to assistance with the Chashma and the Khushab facilities.

China is believed to have provided Pakistan with the design of the nuclear weapon (Chic-4) and which it tested in 1966. Gordon Corzana in his book *Shopping for Bombs: Rise and Fall of AQ Khan* has an interesting story to tell. He narrates how Q Khan carried around papers relating to a nuclear weapons design in his briefcase. During one of his foreign trips, Western intelligence agents got access to Khan’s briefcase. The spooks were shocked to find a drawing of simple yet effective design of a nuclear weapon and steps detailing how to make the bomb. Later, the Americans realised that the design provided in the early 1980s a proven design of China’s fourth nuclear bomb. Also, China is believed to have allowed Pakistan to test its nuclear device at the Chinese Log Nor nuclear test site in 1989.

If this was not enough, Pakistan is also believed to have received, weapons grade uranium sufficient to put together two nuclear weapons. In addition, China also helped Pakistan build the unsafeguarded (50-70 MW) plutonium production reactor at Chashma. Beijing is suspect of having supplied excess heavy water to Karunpur which could have been used by Pakistan to power up the unsafeguarded Khushab plant. Also, Pakistan is believed to have received assistance from China for completing the plutonium reprocessing facility at Chashma. The facility was originally to be completed by France but was suspended in 1979 with the French backing out of the agreement under American pressure.

In 1986, China is also suspected to have transferred tritium to Pakistan. Tritium is used to trigger hydrogen bombs and boost the yield of fission weapons. Subsequently, in 1995, the news about transfer of 5,000 ring magnets hit the headlines. The ring magnets were destined for use in Pakistan’s centrifuge enrichment plant at Kahuta. The news of the sale broke at a time when Pakistan was lobbying the Clinton Administration to push the Brown Amendment through the US Congress. The Brown Amendment sought to dilute the Plessier legislation and – despite the continued proliferation of nuclear technology – was to grant a one-time waiver of the Plessier legislation and authorise the sale of military supplies to the tune of US$ 368 million.

News reports hinted at Chinese officials privately admitting to selling the 5,000 ring magnets to Pakistan. They however, claimed that the sale did not violate the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) guidelines as the ring magnets were not magnetised. This is nothing but a convenient interpretation of the guidelines and Chinese obligation therein.

What was more surprising to many was the Clinton administration’s response to the whole transfer of ring magnets. Both China and Pakistan got away very lightly as the US did not sanction either country for the transfer. The Clinton administration chose to turn a blind eye and was satisfied with a cursory statement from China to the effect that it would conform to nuclear non-proliferation rules and regulations.

However, as events a year later highlighted, not much changed. In 1996, China is believed to have sold a special industrial furnace to Pakistan. This furnace was an important component in Pakistan’s progress towards building its nuclear weapons as the furnace could melt the fissile material into the shape of a nuclear bomb core.

Missile Transfers To Pakistan

We now turn to the Chinese assistance towards Pakistan’s ballistic missiles capability. The Chinese assistance to Pakistan’s ballistic missiles provided Islamabad with the wherewithal to effectively deliver its nuclear weapons. China has helped Pakistan’s ballistic missile programme by transferring the mobile, solid-fuelled M-9 or DF-15 and M-11 missiles. Pakistan has modified these missiles into the Shaheen-1 and the Ghaznavi missiles.

Ghaznavi (M-11)

It is believed that China and Pakistan signed a deal for the transfer of over thirty M-11 missiles in 1987. These missiles were to be transferred in a completely built-up form, were solid-fuelled and could carry a nuclear warhead. The deal came to light in November 1992 and violated the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) provisions given that the missile could transfer a 500 kg payload to a distance over 500 kilometres. China however contested this stating that the missile could travel only 800 kilometres.
Malicious Nexus

By Xu Hong

The journey so far...

In the 4th anniversary issue of the DSA magazine, combined with an Air Force special edition, it is only fitting the OODA loop (for Observe, Orient, Decide, and Act), be included. Revisiting this somewhat controversial decision-making process is key to enhancing performance in combat, politics and management. By understanding how the OODA loop can help us make better decisions, it also brings us to light possible ways to interrupt the enemy’s decision-making process.

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