

## Pakistani-Chinese Relations: An Historical Analysis of the Role of China in the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971

By Mavra Farooq

China played an important role during the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, a time when drastic changes occurred in the arena of international politics. In 1971 Pakistan faced a great tragedy in the shape of the separation of East Pakistan. On December 16, 1971, Pakistan's Eastern part was separated from West Pakistan. The Indo-Pak war was a major concern for the People's Republic of China (PRC), which had developed deep relations with Pakistan in the 1960s. China's reasons for the development of these relations with Pakistan were numerous, including the deterioration of China-India relations due to the 1962 border clashes, and the importance of the Indian-Subcontinent for superpower politics in the same time period.

While the East Pakistan crisis culminated in the India-Pakistan war and breakdown of diplomatic relations between Delhi and Beijing, the relations between Pakistan and China had already been strengthened in the era of Ayub Khan (1959-1969). The Ayub Khan era saw the beginning of Pakistan's move away from the orbit of the Western world as direct consequence of Pakistan's disillusionment with the politico-military pacts such as SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). During this time Ayub Khan also "normalized relations with China based on strong friendship constructed within the framework of the principles of Third world solidarity."<sup>1</sup> During Ayub Khan's era, a border agreement signed between Pakistan and China on March 3, 1963 was an indication of the genesis of the cooperation and understanding on all fields of Sino-Pakistani relations, including diplomatic, economic, and cultural. This trend of mutual trust persisted into the 1970s. Geographical proximity is one more important key element in the evolution of Sino-Pakistan relations. In 1969, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto wrote that "China is our neighbor country and it is essential for us to maintain good relations with all our neighbors on the basis of friendship and equality."<sup>2</sup> Both countries are contiguous to each other and share India as their common hostile neighbor. Moreover, China's ideological differences with the US and USSR affected China's regional interests. A close relation between Pakistan and China provided the ideal counterbalance to the anti-Chinese feelings and anti-Pakistani feelings that prevailed in India in the 1960s. Moreover, Pakistan was quite effective

in Third World cause and one of the most populous Islamic countries in the world. Friendship of both countries (China-Pakistan) held many possible advantages for the PRC itself in the pursuance of the Maoist global objectives. Moreover, China's support for Pakistan also coincided with the pragmatic interests of the Chinese leadership.

China's supportive policy towards Pakistan came at that time when China had reappeared at international diplomatic scene with a new agenda, and one of the repercussions of the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966) was its impact on the PRC. China's reaction in East Pakistan issue revealed the essence of Chinese interest in that region as perceived in Beijing.

The most important statement of Beijing's position in the East Pakistan crisis was Premier Chou En Lai's message to President of Pakistan, General Yahya Khan, in April 1971, in which he showed his full support for Pakistan. Chou En Lai's letter addressed many points involving crisis of East Pakistan, including the emphasis that unification of the East and West Pakistan was one of the "basic guarantees" for the construction of Pakistani prosperity. Secondly, Chou En Lai also referred to the separatist movement in East Pakistan as a "handful movement" that desired to sabotage Pakistani unification. Chou En Lai emphasized that "broad masses of the people" had no leaning whatsoever in the direction of separatism. He further said that India was guilty of "gross interference" and exploitation of Pakistan's internal affairs, while also accusing the super powers and India of meddling in the internal problems of Pakistan, arguing that Pakistan's domestic affairs and should be resolved internally by Pakistani leadership. Lastly, Chou assured China's support to Pakistan in the event that the "State and sovereignty and national independence" of Pakistan was threatened by the aggression of the Indian expansionists. Until December, China proclaimed support for the Government of Pakistan. For instance, on May 11, 1971, in an editorial, Jin Men Jih Pao condemned "Washington and Moscow for working in close coordination with the Indian reactionaries to crudely interfere in the internal affairs of Pakistan."<sup>3</sup>

Under the treaty with the Soviet Union, India received arms assistance while the US ordered to halt military supplies to Pakistan, "a dilemma which Pakistan protested only broadened the arms dangerous imbalances in favor of India. A vast Indian military moved along the East India Pakistan border raised the tense atmosphere in Pakistan and was intensified by the aggrandizement of the Indian supported guerilla activities."<sup>4</sup> Yahya Khan sent a delegation to China under the leadership of Bhutto. The Chinese Foreign Minister, Chi Peng Fei, stated that secessionists were only a handful while the broad masses of Pakistan were patriotic and wanted to safeguard national unity. Interestingly, Chi Peng Fei did not repeat the speech of Chou En Lai. This was, however, hardly surprising since President Nixon's visit

to China had already altered China's perception of its role in the region and China was working towards normalizing its relations with the US. The Chinese foreign Minister suggested that the issue between two nations should be resolved through negotiations rather than aggression. The Pakistani delegation was unsuccessful in getting solid support from China. China did promise to support Pakistan if India attacked.

The Indo-Pakistan war began on December 3, 1971, when Indian army crossed the international border into East Pakistan. China declared its support for Pakistan, while the Soviet Union backed India, a collusion that intensified throughout the duration of the war. Beijing vehemently accused Moscow of supporting Indian military provocation and subversive activities towards Pakistan. The Soviets, on the other hand, were described by Deng Xiansheng and other Chinese leaders as the power that both occupied the Soviet Union's alleged "ally" Czechoslovakia and instigated the war to dismember Pakistan. The UN's General Assembly was transformed into the hub of Chinese protest on behalf of Pakistan. Clearly the hard Sino-Soviet dialogue in the UN during the period of War showed the significant influence of the traditional Sino-Soviet dispute regarding the PRC's assistance to Pakistan. The Soviet's usage of Veto Power in the UN that encouraged New Delhi to capture the territory of another state "was described as tactic designed to permit India the necessary time to present to the world of a *fait accompli* that is as an occupied East Pakistan."<sup>5</sup>

In 1970, Yahya Khan helped the US establish relations with China that resulted in a 1971 visit to China by then US National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger. Pakistan played key role as a bridge between the US and China. Pakistan provided crucial support in China's membership of the UN as "Peoples Republic of China" which resulted in PRC's inclusion as a full member on October 25, 1971. The Chinese, in turn, showed support for Pakistan by raising a draft resolution at the United Nations. In this resolution, China strongly condemned

the Indian Government's acts of creating so called Bangla Desh and subverting, dismembering and committing aggression against Pakistan and raised a plea that all nations support Pakistan in their just struggle to resist Indian aggression and mutual troops disengagement and withdrawal."<sup>6</sup>

On December 7, 1971, a resolution was adopted by the General Assembly and on December 21, 1971, another resolution (NO: 307) adopted by the Security Council called for the immediate end to the war and troops withdrawal on the both sides."<sup>7</sup> Huang Hua, the PRC representative at the UN Security Council, expressed the "dissatisfaction of China over the failure of the resolution to make anyone note of

Indian aggression” and any call for the support of Pakistan although China voted for the resolution.”<sup>8</sup>

Pakistan received moral and verbal support from China in the 1970s. China also took every opportunity to criticize India and the Soviets. On December 16, 1971 China gave its final statement in support of Pakistan when Pakistani forces surrendered, stating:

The Soviet Government has played a shameful role in the war of aggression launched by India against Pakistan. The whole world has clearly seen that it is back stage manager of the Indian expansionists. For many years the Soviet Government has energetically been fostering the Indian reactionaries and abetting India in its outward expansion.<sup>9</sup>

The Chinese attitude remained the same throughout the period of turmoil in Pakistan. But in another statement, the Chinese, for the first time, recognized the refugee problem in East Pakistan: “As for the question of the return of the East Pakistan refugees to their homeland, it should, and can only be settled by India and Pakistan through consultation.”<sup>10</sup> Neither Chi Peng- fei’s speech to the Pakistan delegation in November nor Chou En Lai’s message to Yahya Khan in the previous April made any reference to the existence of the refugee problem in East Pakistan.

China emphasized the importance of negotiation rather than conflict in seeking a diplomatic resolution in East Pakistan. China described Bangladesh as a “puppet regime” which was “inserted into East Pakistan by armed forces,” and the Soviet Union was accused of increasing arms shipments to India in order to “bolster and pep up” the Indian aggression.<sup>11</sup> China once again protested the Soviet Union’s tactics at the UN, stating that “what makes people indignant is that the representative of the Soviet Government in the UN Security council has time and again used the veto to obstruct the ceasefire and troops withdrawal which are desired by the overwhelming majority of the countries and the people over the world.”<sup>12</sup> Chou En Lai declared that the separation of East Pakistan “was an event which marked the commencement of endless strife on the Subcontinent and the beginning of India’s ultimate defeat.”<sup>13</sup> China supported Pakistan politically, morally, and materially, discontinuing American military shipments in March in 1971. Given the diplomatic background of Sino-Pakistani relations, the Chinese clearly provided a politically logical alternative to the US.<sup>14</sup> China gave military aid to Pakistan from 1966 until the outbreak of the East Pakistan crisis in 1971, serving as Pakistan’s main source of arms<sup>15</sup> (according to the US observer in Pakistan, during the five year period from 1961 to 1966, Beijing contributed over \$130 million worth of military equipment and supplies). A Pakistani spokesman revealed in 1971 that the “PRC had

dispatched 200 military instructors to Pakistan for the purpose of the training of Pakistani troops for guerilla warfare.”<sup>16</sup> Moreover, according to a US observer, in the final week of the Indo Pak. War, “China supplied 200,000 rounds of anti-craft and tank ammunition for Pakistan.”<sup>17</sup> Indian Institute for Defense Studies (I. I. D. S.) estimated that the free Chinese arms assistance of Pakistan in 1971-72 consisted of 225 T-59 tanks, one squadron of II-28 bombers, and four squadrons of MIG-19 interceptors, along with “an unspecified number of river boats and coasters and Chinese assistance in the construction of two major ordinance factories.”<sup>18</sup>

However, since the Soviets had signed a treaty with India, openly supporting Pakistan could have provoked war between China and the Soviet Union. The PRC would not endorse the Bangladesh movement, which they did not regard as the “war of liberation.” Chou En Lai stated that it was a separatist movement perpetrated by a small group of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan. Beijing issued the following statement about the nature of the war: “The Chinese government and people consistently oppose imperialism, expansionism, colonialism and neocolonialism and firmly support the people of all countries in their just struggle in defense of their state sovereignty and territorial integrity and against foreign aggression, subversive, interference control and bullying. The war between India and Pakistan is a struggle between aggression and anti-aggression between division and anti-division between subversion and anti-subversion.”<sup>19</sup>

These international developments also affected the geo-strategic situation of Pakistan. These were clear-cut factors in shaping and determining Pakistan’s foreign policy in the 1970s. Pakistan secured independence in 1947 and from the outset its foreign policy was shaped by security issues relating to India, the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, and the acquisition of aid from the developed world. As Liaquat Ali Khan told the National Press Club in Washington during his official visit to the United States in May 1950, “Our strongest interests, therefore, are firstly the integrity of Pakistan.”<sup>20</sup>

According to Keith Callard, the primary object of Pakistan’s foreign policy since its independence “had to be to show the world that Pakistan was a reality and was capable of maintaining its independence.”<sup>21</sup> President Ayub Khan wrote that, “We have an enemy, an implacable enemy in India,” and referred to “India’s ambition to absorb Pakistan and turn her into a satellite.” The Indian leaders made no secret of their political designs. Mr. Acharya Kripalani, who was President of the Indian National Congress in 1947, declared that “neither the Congress nor the nation has given up its claim of United India.”<sup>22</sup> On March 19, 1966, Bhutto asserted that India could not tolerate the existence of Pakistan and that “in the destruction of Pakistan lay India’s most sublime and finest dream.”<sup>23</sup> On December 21, 1973, Bhutto defined the objectives of his foreign policy: “The object of a foreign policy

is to promote friendship, to foster understanding, to clarify certain issues and to remove frictions and confusions.”<sup>24</sup> In Pakistan’s quest for security, territorial integrity, and national unity, equitable settlement of its disputes with other states and economic development for the welfare of the people were the principle objectives of Pakistan’s foreign policy. Security was another constant factor, as G. W. Chaudhury details:

In search for security against a potential Indian threat, Pakistan turned to the Commonwealth and to the Muslim countries in the early years of her independence (1947-53); then she turned to the USA by entering into a number of bilateral and multilateral defensive pacts. Then in the 1960’s Pakistan found that her Western allies had disturbed the balance of power in the Subcontinent by arming India against China … Pakistan therefore turned to new friends, if not allies, in her same search for security.<sup>25</sup>

During the War of 1971, China had a pivotal role in formulation of Pakistan’s foreign policy. The Chinese veto on the admission of Bangladesh into the United Nations was a statement of complete political support for Pakistan during this crucial time.

### **CHINA’S POLICY DURING THE WAR OF 1971**

The domestic crisis had massive regional and international ramifications. It is to these we will now turn, paying especial attention to China’s response to the unfolding crisis in Pakistan. China’s initial response was made public on April 12 via a message from Chou En-Lai to Yahya Khan.<sup>26</sup> The main points of this message were as follows:

- (i) the “happenings in Pakistan” “a purely internal affair” to be solved by Pakistani people without “foreign interference”. This favored the principle of non-intervention could also be seen in China’s protest Note to India of 6 April 1971;
- (ii) That China opposed the separatists as was seen in the expression: “The unification of Pakistan and the unity of the people of East and West Pakistan are the basic guarantees” for Pakistan’s prosperity and strength;
- (iii) China felt the separatists to be in a minority, “a handful of persons who want to sabotage the unification of Pakistan”;
- (iv) on the issue of solving problems, China’s preference for negotiations can be seen in the expression that “through the wise consultation and efforts”

of the Government and “leaders of various quarter in Pakistan”, the situation will remain peaceful;

(v) taking note of the “gross interference” by India in the affairs of Pakistan, China understood the US and the USSR collusion with India. In the protests note of 6 April also China accused India of “‘flagrantly’ interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan”;

(vi) that China’s support to Pakistan was assured if “the Indian expansionists dare to launch aggression against Pakistan.”

During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, China adopted the non-intervention policy that it had suggested in the previous April. China repeatedly reminded Pakistan of its support. Bhutto, along with an eight-man delegation, visited Peking as the personal representative of the President. The reasons for this visit were manifold and included both the expansion of Indian troops on the East Pakistan border and the increase of activity of guerrillas trained by India, as the shelling of border towns between India and Pakistani troops in East Wing increased the danger of a fight between the two. Additionally, on August 9 1971, India signed the Twenty Years treaty of peace with USSR, who correspondingly increased military aid to India. Meanwhile, the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, had visited European countries to encourage a favorable world opinion of India, while the US stopped military aid from March 25th 1971, and cancelled licenses for the exports of 3,600,000 dollars worth of military equipment to Pakistan. India, in contrast, received arms supply from the USSR, further widening the military disequilibrium in the South Asia. In this crisis, Pakistan sought strong military and diplomatic aid and China was the only country that was able to provide support. Although no joint communiqué was issued at the end of Bhutto’s visits, it may have been because he was not holding an official governmental post at the time.

Minister Chi Peng fei stated China’s stance on the crisis in a speech, the message of which was later reiterated by Premier Chou En lai: “should Pakistan be subjected to foreign aggression,”<sup>27</sup> “China would play a positive role in favor of Pakistan, “resolutely support[ing] the Pakistan Government and People in their just struggle to defend their state sovereignty and national independence”<sup>28</sup> Mr. Chi Peng fei expressed the view that “secessionists were a handful of persons” and “broad masses of Pakistan are patriotic and want to safeguard the national unity and oppose internal split and outside interference.”<sup>29</sup> China stressed that “disputes between states should always be settled through consultation and not by resorting to force.”<sup>30</sup> Indian interference activities in East Pakistan were criticized on the basis of China’s support for the principle of non-intervention. It is also important to note that China did not reiterate its previous allegation that the US was collaborat-

ing with India. This omission was likely related to President Nixon's planned visit to Peking.

President Nixon's visit was a "complete success." Yahya Khan and Bhutto pointed out the possibility of China's intervention if India attacked Pakistan. It was a distant possibility because Pakistan was not extremely concerned that China intervene in its affairs China did not give any assurance of physical intervention or diversionary action on the Sino-Indian border.

On November 22, 1971, during the Indo-Pakistani War, the Indian Army entered East Pakistan. China continued to constantly reaffirm its support for Pakistan. China denounced India and the Soviet Union on different occasions, such as during the reception on the Albanian Independence Day, at the banquet in the honor of the Sudanese delegation and the United Nations forum, and on the Tanzanian National Day. China opposed the Soviet Union's interference and expansion in Asia, since the Soviet Union supported India militarily and in its subversive activities against Pakistan. When Bangladesh was recognized by India, China denounced it as arising from New Delhi force and as a puppet "forcibly imposed" upon the East Pakistani People by India.

Siding with Pakistan, China denounced the twenty-year treaty of peace that it had signed with India and the Soviet Union. During speeches at the United Nations, China reminded the UN what the Soviet Union did in Czechoslovakia and of the actions of India in Tibet and Kashmir. Debates were held at the Security Council and the General Assembly regarding the Indo-Pakistani conflict. These debates also evidence the growing differences between China and the Soviet Union.

China drafted a resolution that condemned India and requested that warring parties withdraw their troops, calling on "all states to support Pakistan" in its struggle to resist "Indian aggression."<sup>31</sup> China voted for the General Assembly resolution of 7 December 1971. The Chinese representative, Chiao Kuan- Hua, called for a ceasefire and withdrawal of troops between the two countries. "China, however, expressed its dissatisfaction with the fact that the resolution did not denounce India's aggression toward Pakistan."<sup>32</sup>

The Indian government claimed that the problem of East Pakistani refugees necessitated invasion of Pakistan. India also sheltered the exiled government of China's Tibet, headed by the Chinese traitor Dalai Lama who was a Buddhist leader of religious officials of the "Yellow Hat" branch of Tibetan Buddhism. The Indian Government used the refugee question as pretext for invading Pakistan, much as they used the Tibetan refugees as a pretext for invading China. Both scenarios provide evidence of India's attempt to become a superpower. The aggression against Pakistan was the outcome of the implementation of these expansionist actions. China also voted in the UN Security Council on December 21,

1971. China's stance was that the world should not pardon the serious crimes that India had committed against Pakistan. China opposed flagrant aggression, interference and subversive activities of Indian imperialism and colonialism towards other countries. The People's Republic of China also supported the Pakistani people in their struggle against aggression and subversion. The Chinese were optimistic that Pakistan would achieve a victory. The Chinese showed their complete solidarity with Pakistan by opposing the proposal of the Soviet Union to invite a "Bangla Desh" representative to participate in debate of the United Nations and by voting against the Soviet resolution that called for a ceasefire without withdrawal. The Soviet resolution of 5 December secured two votes of Poland, and the Soviet resolution with 12 abstentions passed. The People's Republic of China's representative Huang Hua voted against the Soviet draft resolution due to reasons such as Indian direct interference and aggression in Pakistan, an endeavor which was supported by the Soviet government's provision of large quantities of arms to the Indian expansionists. China saw that the main aim of the Soviet Union was to compete with the US for world hegemony and that the Soviet's assistance of India was in service of this goal: the control over India, fostered by India's dependence on the Soviet's for military support, could lead to Soviet dominance of the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent and the Indian Ocean, allowing the USSR to spread its sphere of influence. Due to these reasons China voted against the Soviet draft resolution. Peking Review commented, "India launched a large scale of war of aggression against Pakistan on November 21, 1971 with an active encouragement and energetic support of the government of the Soviet Union. They wanted not only to swallow up East Pakistan but also to destroy Pakistan as a whole. If a timely stop is not put to such aggression committed by the Indian Government, Pakistan will not be the only country to fall victim, inevitably other countries neighbouring on India will also be endangered."<sup>33</sup>

The Chinese Government thus firmly supported the Pakistani Government and its people in their struggle against aggression, division, and subversion: "they not only were doing this politically, but will continue to give them material assistance. China said that there can be no neutrality on the question of aggression versus anti aggression, of division versus division, and of subversion versus anti-subversion. Certain big powers making no distinction between right and wrong and remaining inactive and silent have all along allowed the aggressor to grow through appeasement."<sup>34</sup>

It is noteworthy that, after the outbreak of the war, Pakistan played the role of a bridge between China and the United States, fostering cooperation between the two powers. As a result, in 1971 China visited the United States and vice versa, resolving previous misunderstandings. Like China, the US also accused India of aggression<sup>35</sup> and Moscow of blocking "international action until the capture of East

Pakistan was a fait accompli.”<sup>36</sup> Pakistan also believed that India’s treaty with the Soviet Union encouraged Indian aggression against Pakistan. Also, with support from India, a guerrilla movement developed in East Pakistan. The US also mentioned the “strategic expansion of Soviet Power.”<sup>37</sup> Both the US and China voted for the same resolutions in the General Assembly and the Security Council. In the joint communiqué which was issued in Peking, both countries called for the observance and implementation of the Security Council resolution of 21 December. They did not recognize “Bangladesh.” Nonetheless, the use of the term “East Bengal” in place of East Pakistan in a US foreign policy report provided clarification that the US was not against the aspiration of East Pakistan. China, in this joint communiqué, supported Pakistan’s sovereignty and independence.

The last crucial official statement made by China on the Indo-Pakistani war occurred on December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1971. On this date, Pakistani forces surrendered in East Pakistan, because the “Indian Government is... moving massive troops to press on the capital; of East Pakistan, Decca.”<sup>38</sup> The timing of the statement suggested that China was unaware of the surrender of the Pakistani forces. China’s stance on various issues—subversive activities, non-intervention, Indian aggression, and the Soviet Union’s role in the war—remained the same.

“Bangla Desh” was considered a “puppet regime” that India forcefully inserted into East Pakistan. China also recognized the existence of a nationality problem in East Pakistan, stating that the Pakistanis should be willing to seek a political solution in the spirit of understanding. China commented on the East Pakistan refugee problem for the very first time and suggested that the problem should be settled by both India and Pakistan in a way that avoided the use of force. This attention to the refugee situation is significant because neither Premier Chou En-Lai, in his message on April 12, nor Chi Peng-fei, in his November 7 speech, had mentioned the refugee problem. The Chinese representative at the UN likened the issue to the Tibetan refugee problem, as it arose out of Indian interference with Pakistani affairs. China openly declared that it was not only supporting the Pakistani people politically but that it “would continue to give them material assistance.”<sup>39</sup> India was warned against future aggression: “Henceforth there will be no tranquility... on the South Asia Subcontinent... the Indian expansionists will surely eat the bitter fruit of their own making.”<sup>40</sup> China’s advice, interestingly, “to the South Asian friendly countries” was “to strength their defense capabilities so as to hit back when attack[ed].”<sup>41</sup>

China’s reaction to the occupation by the Indian troops was reflected in Premier Chou’s meaningful remark that the “fall of Dhaka is... the starting point of endless strife on the South Asian subcontinent and of their (the Indians) defeat.”<sup>42</sup> China also gave material assistance to Pakistan by providing 133 million dollars

worth of arms, remaining Pakistan's main arms supplier between 1966 and 1971, during which the US and European countries had suspended arms trade with the country.

At the end of the War, China also provided "all the weapons and ammunition" that Pakistan wanted, and some were supplied for free. The US Defense Department revealed on 4 November that "Pakistan received arms via shipments from China and Romania. Moreover, excluding arms supply, China supported Pakistan in other ways as well. An Indonesian military spokesman disclosed that China had sent two hundred instructors to Pakistan to train Pakistani troops in counter-guerrilla warfare."<sup>43</sup> China also suggested reestablishing two divisions trained in West Pakistan to replace those sent to East Pakistan. In the field of naval and air forces, Pakistan faced difficulties. During the last days of war in East Pakistan, Chinese rescue ships were assembled in the Ganga Delta for the evacuation of the Pakistani army in East Pakistan. Whether these ships were stationed in the Ganga Delta for a possible evacuation was uncertain. The Chinese were ready to help Pakistan, and press reports reveal Moscow's advice that India keep from attacking Chinese ships. The Chinese armada was in the Bay of Bengal during the War.

China made a friendly gesture when ceasefire occurred in the West and Pakistani forces surrendered in the East. In spite of this, Bhashani urged Chairman Mao Tse Tung and Premier Chou En Lai, by means of letters, to recognize "Bangla Desh."

Examining the role that China's support played in Pakistani history sets the events in Pakistan in a historical analytical framework that enables us to look beyond the day-to-day events. China sought to pursue an independent foreign policy line from both that of the US and the USSR. This was explicitly mentioned by Mao in a speech in September 1982, but it had been present during the previous decades: "Our general task is to unite the whole people and win the support of all our friends abroad in the struggle to build a great socialist country, defend world peace and advance the cause of human progress."<sup>44</sup> China's foreign policy had been traditionally influenced by The Five Principles (in handling international relations, China has consistently taken The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence as the guide instead of using social system, ideology or the concept of values as the criterion. These principles were first put forward by the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai) of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. Theoretically, China's solidarity with Pakistan was a result of the five principles of peaceful coexistence; these principles went directly against foreign aggression. China reiterated this stance in various speeches and statements during the time.

The War of 1971 was understood in China as a struggle between aggression and anti-aggression, between division and anti-division, and between subversion and anti-subversion. China condemned India because it was violating the Bandung Principles. Moreover, China did not forget Tibet and the border war with India. China did not endorse “the war of liberation” theory in East Pakistan. China did not consider the conflict a guerrilla war; it was fought by peasants and workers of their own area. In China’s eyes, the War of 1971 was a separatist movement started not by the broad masses of East Pakistan but by a “handful of persons” “who wanted to sabotage the unity” of Pakistan. Further, the separation of East Pakistan did not take place until 1958, when martial law was imposed and the elite leadership of the Punjab did not allot power to East Pakistan. Instead of sharing power, the Punjab leadership ruled via the “One Unit,” which enabled them to merge the four provinces of West Pakistan into one unit as a counterbalance against the numerical domination of the ethnic Bengalis of East Pakistan. The leadership of the Punjab did not want to see the participation of the East Pakistan in government. Chinese policy has always stated that guerrillas must fight their own wars without the help of foreign aid. Hence, China was averse to the policy of the Awami League. Mujibur Rahman was known as pro-American, and the Awami League stood for developed relations with India. China’s Red Cross society sent a message to the international committee of the Red Cross:

The barbarous outrages perpetrated by the Indian occupation forces against innocent inhabitants in the eastern part of Pakistan not only flagrantly contravene the principle of humanitarianism and the December 21, 1971 resolution of the U.N. Security council but also crudely trample upon the 1949 Geneva conventions to which the Indian Government is a party.... We appeal to the international committee of the Red Cross, the League of Red Cross societies and the National Red Cross, Red Crescent and Red Lion and Sun Societies of various countries... condemn the Indian forces for their sanguinary atrocities of massacring Pakistan People.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from these verbal and theoretical considerations, other factors influenced Peking’s attitude towards Pakistan. The Indian-Soviet Treaty contributed to China’s firm support of Pakistan, increasing China’s negative attitude toward India and its increasingly positive relations with Pakistan.

Realpolitik strategic considerations along with principle of foreign policy influenced China’s position, as China did not want to see a new state of Bangladesh, likely to be friendly with rivals India and the Soviet Union, created on its border. These strategic concerns materialized following the emergence of the Bangladeshi

government's pro-Soviet elements and initial economic agreements. China's stance is also linked to its longstanding cordial relations with Pakistan and lack of border tensions with the country. According to the 1963 agreement, Pakistan yielded some 1,300 square miles of Kashmir to China. Since then, China has linked up the old Silk Route Highway where it runs from Sinking to Gilgit in close proximity to the northern region of Ladakh near the ceasefire line. Therefore, Indian occupation of Pakistan Kashmir would make China's position insecure. The threat of Chinese aggression in 1971 prevented India from launching any mass offensive in Azad Kashmir. China also helped Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. But China did not embark on any divisionary moves because of the threat that the Soviet Union could also become involved. The Soviet Union in fact assured India that it would take action in Sinkiang in the event of a Chinese international attack. Bhutto responded by rejecting the possibility of Chinese diversionary moves. India, in response, predicted that China would not intervene on Pakistan's behalf. Following this prediction, India moved her forces from its border with China to East Pakistan. However, protests from China did not effectively prevent India from violating China's border with Sikkam. The first intrusion of Indian forces into Chinese territory was made on December 10, 1971, and the first protest in response was occurred on December 16th. The second protest note was lodged on December 27th, just after the second border violation on December 15th. The suggestion made in the first note to "immediately stop the activities of intrusion into Chinese territory" was reiterated in the second protest note. This time, however, China did not give an ultimatum as it had given during the War of 1965. China's response was lukewarm this time around, the main reason being that China was not directly involved in the War of 1971 as it had been in 1965, since article nine of the treaty of Indo-Soviet cooperation made mutual consultations imperative in the case that any party "is attacked or threatened with attack." As a result, China could not help in Indo Pak war 1971 as China helped in the Indo-Pak War 1965.

The Twenty Years Defence Pact between India and Russia confirmed that the Soviet Union would participate in any war on the side of India, "India could not have liberated Bangladesh (without) the treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union."<sup>46</sup> Premier Chou En-Lai on 31 January 1971 admitted that China's assistance "in the past has remained limited and that China could not do more."<sup>47</sup> On December 14, Pakistan urgently appealed to China and the US for practical aid. It should be kept in mind that China's lack of military involvement in the Indo-Pakistani War was in line with its previous statements; at no time did China ever indicate the possibility of involving itself in the conflict. As for China's relations with Taiwan, China did not resort to use of force. Therefore, it seemed inconsistent for China to assist Pakistan against Indian military aggression that had Soviet

backing. The lack of military support did not shake Bhutto's belief in Pakistan's friendship with China.<sup>48</sup> President Bhutto visited Peking in February 1972. During the meeting, China decided to convert several Chinese loans to Pakistan into grants, and also postponed the payment of the loan given in 1970 by nearly twenty years. China also gave to Pakistan substantial military equipment, including tanks and jet fighters.

Due to its important geo-strategic position, Pakistan is of extreme importance in Chinese foreign policy and is a key area in the South Asia region. China had ideological and strategic reasons for providing diplomatic assistance to Pakistan in 1971. China could not, however, contemplate military intervention in the context of the USSR-India Pact. Nonetheless, the position China took up during the East Pakistan crisis and later Bangladesh War enhanced the perception in Pakistan that China was Pakistan's most "loyal" and reliable ally. This sentiment persists to the present day and colors attitudes towards China both in official circles and public opinion.

---

Notes and References:

1. M. Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, (London: Oxford University Press), pp. 161-168.
2. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *The Myth of Independence*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1969,) pp. 132-133
3. For the text of Chou En Lai's letter to General Yahya Khan see *Dawn* Karachi April 13, 1971.
4. "The Mukhti Fauj is Still Fighting," *The Economist*, London, July 10, 1971, p.34; and "The Bengal Pressure Builds Up on Mrs. Gandhi," *The Economist*, July 17, 1971, p.25.
5. "The Bengal pressure builds up on Mrs. Gandhi" *The Economist*, July 17, 1971, p. 25.
6. "Document S /10421, China: Draft resolution "Security Council official Records, 26 years, Supplement for October, November and December 1971, United Nations, New York 1972, p. 92. See also *Peking Review*, December 10, 1971, p. 10.
7. Resolution no: 307 in Security Council official Records, op. cit. See also *Peking Review*, December 10, 1971, pp.7-8.
8. *Peking Review*, December 10, 1971, pp. 7-8
9. "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, December 16, 1971. See also *Peking Review*, December 17, 1971.

10. Ibid.,
11. *Peking Review*, December 17, 1971.
12. Ibid.
13. *Peking Review*, December 24, 1971, p. 9.
14. "A talk with Pakistan's President Yahya Khan," *Newsweek*, November 8, 1971, p. 53.
15. *United States Information Service News*, Karachi, February 9, 1972, p. 1.
16. *Dawn*, November 25, 1971, p. 1.
17. *Moscow* January 1972, p. 10.
18. Major General D. K. Palit, *The Lightening Campaign*, Thompson press, (India) ltd., New Delhi, 1972, pp. 162-163.
19. "Statement of the Government of the People's Republic of China, December 16, 1971," op. cit.
20. Liaquat Ali Khan, Pakistan, *The Heart of Asia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p.11
21. Keith Callard, *Pakistan: A Political Study* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1957), p. 303
22. M. Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters* (London: Oxford University press, 1967), pp. 52, 115.
23. National Assembly of Pakistan, Debates, March 15, 1966, p. 496
24. Address to the Parliament of Pakistan, speeches and Statements, December 21, 1973., p. 251.
25. G. W. Choudhury, *The Major Powers and the Indian Subcontinent*, Unpublished manuscript, n.d., Chap, 9, pp. 3-4.
26. Pakistan Horizon, Karachi, Second Quarter, 1971, pp. 153-154.
27. *The Pakistan Times*, Lahore, April 12, 1971.
28. Mr. Chi Peng fei's Speech in *Beijing Review*, Beijing, November 12, 1971, p. 5.
29. Ibid., p. 5.
30. Ibid., p. 5.
31. *Peking Review*, Peking, December 10, 1971, p. 10.
32. *Peking Review*, December 31, 1971. p. 4.
33. *Peking Review*, December 17, 1971.
34. Ibid., 17 December.
35. See the US ambassador, Mr. George Bush's speeches on 5 and 7 December in the Security Council in *Dawn*, Karachi, December 7, 1971.
36. Nixon's Foreign Policy Report, USIS News Text in *Dawn* Karachi, February 9, 1971, p.11.
37. Ibid., p.14.
38. Ibid., p. 14.

*Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies* Vol. 2, No. 3 (2010)

39. *Peking Review*, Peking. December 17, 1971.
40. Ibid.
41. *Peking Review*, December 17, 1971.
42. *Peking Review*, Peking. December 17, 1971.
43. Ibid.
44. *Dawn*, (Karachi) November 25, 1971.
45. Mao Zedong, "Strive to Build a Great socialist country", *Selected Works*, Vol. V. Eng. (ed.) Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1977, p. 148.
46. *Peking Review*, December 31, 1971, pp. 3-4.
47. *Pakistan Horizon*, The India-Pakistan war, 1971, (Karachi: the Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, p. 61 and in *The Times of India Quoted in the Mirror*, Singapore, 10 January, 1972. p. 3
48. *Dawn*, February 20, 1972.