



Pakistan's Rulers Facilitate the US Plan for China

The recent claims by the military leadership of its realignment with China and alignment away from the US requires some analysis. In essence, it tacitly accepts that the alignment with the US was not beneficial, otherwise why would there be a need to align away from the US? The realignment with China is meant to imply that the military leadership will play a balancing game, where by it pitches China as a counterweight against the US and its policies in the region. Implicit within this is that our military leadership is thinking with the interest of Pakistan at heart, and that they have a vision for Pakistan within this realignment. The US China conflict in the Asian subcontinent, was officially stated in Hilary Clinton's article 'America's Pacific Century', published Foreign Policy Magazine of October 2011. The reality of the conflict had been ongoing for many years before that. So the burning question is why now? Why not in October 2011, when US policy was formally published? Why not earlier in 2000, when the US policy was formally put in place?

The current geopolitical status is a consequence of events much earlier. The context of this realignment began in the first term of the Obama presidency. In January 2009, upon taking office, President Barack Obama ordered an extensive review of US policy in Afghanistan. The new "Af-Pak" US policy declared in March 27, 2009, would base its new policy on the premise that "the future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan" because "terrorist" elements in Afghanistan were crossing the Pakistan border to seek safe haven from US war operations. Afghanistan and Pakistan, therefore, would be treated as a unified policy concern within the new US strategy. By late 2009, the White House declared the deployment of an additional 30,000 troops to "seize the initiative" in Afghanistan, and that within 18 months, the American effort in Afghanistan would begin to wind down in preparation for transferring security responsibility over to Afghan forces. Hence, the target date for troop withdrawal would be the middle of 2010 or early 2011. The US strategy in Afghanistan emphasized the role of Pakistan in combating regional insurgency, and China's close relations with Pakistan made it a critical player in the US strategy, with the objective being a greater Chinese involvement in resolving the conflict. Hence, the US policy in 2009 had two aspects.

The first aspect was to draw Pakistani forces into the tribal areas with a view to stabilizing the region to protect the US forces and support the so called "draw down". This point has been discussed in previous articles, but in summary it was implemented via; increased suicide bombings in Pakistan, ostensibly via the Raymond Davis network, to raise the specter of terrorism as a real threat, an exponential rise in drone attacks to create a conflict between the Pakistan army and the tribal region and an inevitable transfer of troops from the eastern border to the western border, which was faithfully implemented by Kayani, the then army chief.

The second aspect was to draw a greater Chinese involvement in the Afghanistan crisis. The economic burden of the war was too much bearing in mind the US' fiscal deficit. Additionally, the continuing justification of US soldiers dying in wars was becoming more difficult to justify in domestic politics. Hence, the political focus was to lure the Chinese into taking a greater responsibility for the wider region. US policy makers were already annoyed at the hands off approach of the Chinese, seemingly seen to be living off the US "sacrifices". S. Frederick Starr, chairman of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, stated: 'We do the heavy lifting...and they (China) pick the fruit.'¹

Hence the desire for a larger Chinese role in the region was predicated on China taking a larger security burden for the region. Naturally, the Chinese were suspicious of the US presence in the region. But at the same time, the Chinese had their own issues warranting a US presence in the region. The US strategy on Afghanistan-Pakistan is relevant to a number of long-standing Chinese regional interests. Primarily, it is Beijing's desire to ensure domestic

stability, particularly in China's heavily Muslim western province of Xinjiang, where Chinese officials have long been concerned about Muslim activists who advocate greater autonomy, and even independence. Chinese leaders refer to such activities as "extremism, separatism, and terrorism." One of Beijing's most important counter-terror goals is preventing extremist groups in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, which share borders with Xinjiang, from agitating China's domestic Muslim populations. The US was aware of the Chinese sensitivities to separatist movements in the Xinjiang province, and with the activities of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), and of Chinese sensitivities to separatist movements in general.

Although necessitated by the US's political and economic compulsions, the declared US withdrawal was engineered in a fashion to lure China in, the Chinese became more apprehensive of a chaotic security situation in Afghanistan and the surrounding regions. Hence, the US political machine began working to cajole the Chinese to take a wider role. Richard Holbrooke and other US officials now regularly met with their Chinese counterparts specifically to discuss the new strategy, and prove their commitments to securing Chinese interests in the region. In a press conference concluding Hilary Clinton's visit to Beijing in February 21, 2009, Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi stated: "and we agreed to work together on the best way forward to combat extremism and promote stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan"² In November 2009 during a joint press conference in the great hall Beijing, between President Obama and Chinese President Hu, President Obama stated: "President Hu and I also discussed our mutual interest in security and stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and neither country can or should be used as a base for terrorism, and we agreed to cooperate more on meeting this goal, including bringing about more stable, peaceful relations in all of south Asia"³. In May 2010, during a visit to Beijing, US Assistant Secretary of State for south and Central Asian Affairs Robert Blake, discussed the south Asian situation with scholars and officials at the Ministry of Foreign affairs, stating: "China has an important stake in the success of these (international) efforts. and we welcome the opportunity to discuss ways China can contribute more both through investments and through assistance of various kinds."⁴

In parallel, the US provided a host of security incentives in relation to the ETIM. On 27 April, 2009, Pakistan handed over 9 Muslim Uighurs to China. In May 2010, Abdul Haq al Turkistani, ETIM's leader, was killed in a US Predator air strike in Pakistan. Abdul Haq had been the figure most closely involved in ETIM's relationships with other militant groups in the border region. China had issued an eight-man "most wanted" list of terrorists in 2008. Second on the list was Abdul Shakoor Turkistani, who took over the job after Abdul Haq al Turkistani had been killed. On Friday 24 August 2012, two US Hellfire missiles killed Abdul Shakoor Turkistani in Pakistan, the chief of al Qaeda's forces in FATA, along with three of his commanders. He was also one of those believed to have been responsible for the propaganda videos threatening attacks on the Beijing Olympics in 2008. In June 2012, the top al Qaeda ideologue who had called for a jihad against China—Abu Yahya al-Libi—was killed in a North Waziristan compound. Thirteen Uighurs and two Turks, all of them confirmed by ETIM as its members, were killed in Afghanistan's Baghdis province in another Predator strike a few weeks before Abdul Haq. In July 2012, six Uzbeks belonging to a splinter organization that was close to ETIM were killed in a strike.

After the US attack on Abbottabad to supposedly apprehend Osama bin Laden, China reportedly stated that an attack on Pakistan would be regarded as an attack on China. The response of our military leadership was casual at best. The Pakistani military leadership saw no reason to respond to the Chinese offer, as they were already committed to the US plan of drawing the Chinese in to stabilize Afghanistan, as per Obama's new AfPak policy. By May 2011, at the US-China strategic and Economic Dialogue, the Chinese began taking a more active role in the political issues in Afghanistan. To quote from the press summary press

2 <http://www.cfr.org/china/secretary-clintons-remarks-chinese-foreign-minister-yang-jiechi/p18595>

3 <http://www.cfr.org/china/joint-press-statement-president-obama-chinas-president-hu-november-2009/p20771>

4 http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/cndy/2010-05/05/content_9809681.htm

release, in the presence of Hilary Clinton and the Chinese Vice Premier Wang Qishan: "We agreed on the importance of cooperating in Afghanistan to advance common goals of political stability and economic renewal."⁵

On June 22nd 2011, in a televised speech, President Obama declared the troop withdrawal: "Tonight, I can tell you that we are fulfilling that commitment. Thanks to our men and women in uniform, our civilian personnel, and our many coalition partners, we are meeting our goals. As a result, starting next month, we will be able to remove 10,000 of our troops from Afghanistan by the end of this year, and we will bring home a total of 33,000 troops by next summer, fully recovering the surge I announced at West Point. After this initial reduction, our troops will continue coming home at a steady pace as Afghan security forces move into the lead. Our mission will change from combat to support. By 2014, this process of transition will be complete, and the Afghan people will be responsible for their own security."⁶ In a recent article in Foreign Affairs Magazine, Evan Feigenbaum wrote, "But the notion of regional connection is no Chinese invention... And it was not Beijing but US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, the World Bank and the ADB that pressed for the development of Central and South Asian roads and power lines in the middle of the first decade of this century." (Foreign Affairs January/ February 2017, Volume 96 Issue 1) Hence the push for regional connectivity was a regional requirement. In July 2011, the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, spoke in India about the benefits of linking Central Asian economies with those in south Asia, with Afghanistan and Pakistan in the center. Increased regional economic connectivity, she argued, would promote sustainable economic growth, a crucial part of the effort to defeat extremism. Specifically, she stated: "[an] entrepreneur here in Chennai should be able to put her products on a truck – on a truck or a train that travels unimpeded, quickly, and cheaply through Pakistan, through Afghanistan, to the doorstep of her customer in Kazakhstan. A Pakistani businessman should be able to open a branch in Bangalore. An Afghan farmer should be able to sell pomegranates in Islamabad before he drives on to New Delhi. Or as Prime Minister Singh put it so beautifully, "I dream of a day, while retaining our respective identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul. That is how my forefathers lived. That is how I want our grandchildren to live."⁷

Hence the notion of a regional infrastructure was first put forward by the US, via Hilary Clinton's speech in Chennai, India. In November 2011, Turkey hosted the "Heart of Asia Conference" and supported by the United States and China, the concept became a touchstone for regional cooperation. "They (the Chinese) were very vocal and raised several issues during the drafting...before, you would attend meetings on Afghanistan and the neighbors would be silent, and here you have them taking a lead and that's what it is all about," said another diplomat...The Chinese for the first time were very comprehensive and constructive, you could really see an elevated role of China in the region and more outspoken than ever before,"⁸

Thus to summarise for reflection: In May 2011, the US-China strategic dialogue takes place. In June 2011, Obama declares the troop withdrawal from Afghanistan. In July 2011, Hilary Clinton proposes the New Silk Road, in a speech in Chennai, India. In September 2011, the United States convened a New Silk Road ministerial meeting in New York and China expressed enthusiasm for the project. In November 2011, Turkey hosted the "Heart of Asia Conference."

The Chinese commitment to a wider regional role was complete. But the US plan was much wider. The New Silk Route as expounded by Hilary Clinton in Chennai, India was another carrot to the Chinese. The US was never in an economic position to fund this type of project, but the Chinese were, and they took the bait. According to Shen Weizhong, Deputy Division Director of the Department of European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's

5 <http://beijing.usembassy-china.org.cn/sed2011.html>

6 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/richard-adams-blog/2011/jun/23/afghanistan-barack-obama-troop-withdrawal#block-9>

7 <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/texttrans/2011/07/20110720165044su0.7134014.html#axzz4aDzEyQcG>

8 <http://in.reuters.com/article/idiNindia-60281020111102>

Republic of China: “When [the] US initiated this we were devastated. We had long sleepless nights. And after two years, President Xi proposed [a] strategic vision of our new concept of Silk Road.”⁹

The Chinese said the name New Silk Road “belonged to China” and “Historic Trade Routes” would be a better name for the US initiative. In 2013, Chinese leaders responded with a Silk Road initiative of their own: One Belt One Road consists of two main components – a land-based Silk Road Economic Belt and a sea-based Maritime Silk Road– which Chinese leaders believed would together change the geostrategic and geo-economic face of the region. During his visit to Pakistan from 22 to 23 May 2013, Chinese premier Li Keqiang proposed a China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to connect Kashgar in China’s Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region with the southwestern Pakistani port of Gwadar. This visit took place immediately after his visit to India, during which India and China had agreed to explore the scope for a BCIM (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar).

But this became the precursor to Chinese involvement in talks with the Taliban. in an article published by Andrew Small in June 2013, it is stated that: “...Beijing quietly maintained a relationship with the Quetta Shura, the Taliban’s leadership council based across the border in Pakistan in a conversation, one former Chinese official claimed that besides Pakistan, China was the only country to continue this contact. Over the last 18 months, exchanges have taken place more regularly, and China has started to admit their existence in meetings with U.S. officials, according to people familiar with the matter. The same sources said that Taliban representatives have held meetings with Chinese officials both in Pakistan and in China.”¹⁰

So the relationship with the Taliban had already begun, culminating in the famous meeting in Murree, which were scuttled after news of Mullah Omar's death were confirmed. Hence, even the Chinese relationship with the Taliban were facilitated by the military leadership, consistent with the US requirement to bring the Taliban to the peace table. This places the historical context on the current geopolitical scenario. So now when the military leadership talks about a new strategic realignment with China, one has to question their sincerity. The current political scenario has been led by the US. So exactly where is the alignment away from the US?

The CPEC is used as the practical example of Pakistan’s new leverage. Yet, China was initially not interested in providing any financial support to Pakistan. When the Zardari government looked to China to provide it with a multi-billion dollar soft loan to help it through the financial crisis in 2008, it received a strong rebuffed.¹¹

Khurram Hussain of the Dawn provides useful insight into the economic aspects of the CPEC: it seems Pakistan does not have all that much to gain economically from the completed CPEC as the Western Chinese provinces have small economies¹² and the work on the CPEC is being carried out by Chinese firms with few local inputs other than cement; also, the \$46 billion loans appear to be on near-commercial rates, not the low near 1-2% interest rates on international agency loans such as the World Bank¹³ so this may mean we are dependent on further capital inflows from China in order to pay back previous loans¹⁴, there are also security costs to this.¹⁵

The International Monetary Fund said in June that repayments and profit repatriation from large-scale investments such as CPEC could add to Pakistan's medium- and long-term

9 “One Road for Many itineraries” panel, at Bucharest Forum 2014, held at the Palace of Parliament on October 2 - 4.

10 <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/06/21/why-is-china-talking-to-the-taliban/>

11 <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/10/19/world/asia/19zardari.html>

12 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1299683>

13 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1302328/cpec-cost-build-up>

14 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1306493/birth-of-another-dependency>

15 <http://www.dawn.com/news/1286698/hidden-costs-of-cpec>.

risks, predicting that the country's gross external financing needs would rise to \$15.1 billion in 2018/2019 from \$11.4 billion in the current financial year.¹⁶

However, these points are peripheral to the original discussion about aligning with China. The more interesting element of the CPEC deal is the 24% allocated to the infrastructure. In a geopolitical sense, is this not more or less what Hilary Clinton mentioned during her speech in Chennai, India when she first unveiled her plans for the New Silk Road? The fundamental question is what strategic benefit has the military leadership extracted from China for providing the access to the Arabian Sea? Celebrating the convoy of goods from China to Gwadar achieves what strategic gain for Pakistan? The economic benefits are in the future, and hence not guaranteed at all. What Pakistani interests are being safeguarded because of this relationship?

Chinese interest in the flow of good from the Arabian sea to Kashgar will surely reduce time and costs, but in what way does that make it a strategic shift away from the US? Is the US particularly affected negatively by a shorter and faster path for Chinese goods? Rather, the infrastructure will also enable the flow of energy from the West coast to the East coast, and actually work in favor of India. So why would the US have any problem with this? From inception, greater Chinese involvement has been part of the US plan. Is the CPEC any different?

The military leadership has already raised the point that India could be an obstacle for the completion of CPEC and Chinese realignment strategy. It should be clear that the current geopolitical situation is much to the benefit of India. It is more than comfortable with CPEC running through Gilgit Baltistan. If CPEC is consolidated, the Pakistani establishment will have to consider declaring Gilgit Baltistan as a province, making its claims to Indian Occupied Kashmir void and making the LoC as a de-facto border. The only problem would be a potential military conflict in the meantime in which Pakistan manages to use China to internationalize the Kashmir issue. This would lead to multilateral talks, which India is loathed to do, which China could potentially use against the Indians. It is based on this that there is the consistent Indian mantra of closing down the Jihadi camps, very much like the US mantra of doing more.

Hence, the internationalization of the Kashmir dispute is what India fears, not CPEC.

We raised in the beginning of the article the subject of timing, that is why realign to China now? From a geostrategic perspective, pre 9/11, Pakistan was the dominant power in Afghanistan, and via the Kashmir Jihad, was able to restrict India severely. The US plan was to reverse this by displacing Pakistani control in Afghanistan, eliminate the Kashmir Jihad to focus Indian economic, political and diplomatic efforts towards China, and make the Pakistani army focused on an internal contrived threat. The status as we stand today is that Pakistani troops are involved in preventing the Afghan Taliban from attacking US troops via the Zarb-e-Azb. The Army Green Book has been rewritten to make the internal threat equal to the Indian threat. The Kashmir Jihad is getting its final nail in the coffin with the security operations in Punjab.

The CPEC will become the sacred altar, at which everything will be sacrificed. That is why no less than the Commander, southern Command, Lt Gen Amir Riaz "...invited India to join the China Pakistan Economic Corridor and 'share the fruits of future development by shelving the anti-Pakistan activities and subversion'".¹⁷ And so the Punjab operation is now in motion, a smoke screen for arresting and preventing the Jihadi activities in order to give the Hindu nationalist BJP a victory in their domestic public opinion. So is strengthening the anti-Muslim, pro-US BJP the real objective here?

The US has been compelled, by its domestic political and economic predicament to draw China into the region. Its military prowess has failed to subdue the brave Mujahideen of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Did our military leadership even have a clue that the US is in decline,

16 <http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/idINKBN13I1XE>

17 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1269691/olive-branch-lt-gen-aamir-invites-india-join-cpec/>

and hence was dealing from a position of weakness? The US used the Taliban and the threat from the tribal areas to lure the Chinese to take a wider political role in Afghanistan. So why did our military leadership not have the political awareness to sense this, and then the political acumen to ally with the Chinese to counter the US presence?

There is a regional conflict between China and the US, and it is growing both in terms of intensity and spectrum. In his last visit to China as President of the United States, US President Barack Obama found himself compelled to use the emergency steps at the rear of the plane that carried him to Guangzhou airport to attend the first summit. It is not because of a fire or a technical failure, but because the Chinese authorities did not provide airplane steps to exit from the front of the plane as normal. Observers believe that China deliberately insulted the US president and that this reflects the size of the tensions in the relations between the two countries that differ in many styles and issues, beginning with the declaration of the United States and South Korea of the deployment of a missile shield on the territory of the latter, as well as the American position on the dispute between China and the Philippines in the South China sea, and the recent decision by Washington to impose additional fees on imports of Chinese steel.

Musharraf's lack of sincerity and vision was such that he undertook the Kargil operation, knowing that the US was now aligned with the BJP and India, to give the BJP election success, and conceding defeat in Kargil. Kayani's lack of sincerity and vision was such that he would publicly condemn US drone attacks, while privately advocating more, executing Obama's policy for the tribal regions, and in parallel his ISI chief, Ahmed Shuja Pasha worked for the release of Raymond Davis. As for Raheel Sharif, this is a man on whose watch the brutal and despicable Army Public School (APS) attack occurred. He convened an All Parties' Conference, amended the constitution, enforced military courts, and used the incident to change the good Taliban/ bad Taliban policy to all bad Taliban, clearly to pressurize the Afghan Taliban to the peace table, consistent with US policy requirements. In August 2015, the Kasur child abuse scandal reared its ugly head, where many children were systematically abused, and which was covered up. Raheel Sharif did not do anything, as the event could not be used to advance US policy in the region. There is no difference in the children from the APS or Kasur, but one has political mileage for US policy. And one sees this consistently in terms of terror attacks, where they are used to undertake military actions specifically for the fulfillment of strategic US objectives.

It is the leadership of Islam that can transform us into not only a regional power, but a world power. There is no need to align with the US or China, for Pakistan occupies such a strategic position, has a thoroughly professional army, nuclear weapons and ample resources to sustain itself as a major power shaping the international scenario, on its way to becoming the leading state. It only needs a sincere Islamic leadership for it is only through Islam, that truly visionary leaders will come forth. It is Islam that molded individuals from a Jahil, idol worshiping, female baby killing society into dynamic, forthright ideologues who turned the then world powers upside down by carrying Islam. Armed with the Deen of Truth and its Ahkaam regarding the foreign nations, hostile and benign, and rising to the true legacy of the Ummah before whom the forefathers of the current major powers cowered, the soon to arrive Khilafah will quickly gather the Ummah around it and march for the dominance of Islam over the entire world, achieving victory after victory for Islam. Allah (swt) said, ﴿هُوَ الَّذِي أَرْسَلَ رَسُولَهُ بِالْهُدَىٰ وَدِينِ الْحَقِّ لِيُظْهِرَهُ عَلَى الدِّينِ كُلِّهِ وَلَوْ كَرِهَ الْمُشْرِكُونَ﴾ **“He is the One who sent His Messenger with the Guidance and the Deen of Truth to dominate over all other ways of life, even though the mushrikeen may detest it.”** [Surah At-Tawba 9:33]

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