

# American, Russian and Chinese Factors in Militarization of South Asia

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An analysis of U.S. cold war involvement in South Asia from 1949-89 would reveal that the cold war led the United States to think once again about the strategic defence of the region. South Asia had come under attack by Japanese ground and naval forces in World War II -- did it face the same kind of the threat from Soviet and later Chinese forces? The United States' early containment policy, as implemented in South Asia was to help India and Pakistan defend against Soviet and Chinese forces. "Although the motive was to obtain arms for their own dispute both Indian and Pakistani officials stressed to Americans the risk that the subcontinent faced from the "bear" to the north"<sup>1</sup> Ultimately Pakistan was the recipient of significant military, economic and grant programs especially from 1945-65. This induced \$ 630 million in grant military assistance for weapons \$ 619 million for defence support assistance (construction of facilities and salary support for designated units), and \$ 55 million worth of equipment purchased on a cash or concessional basis.<sup>2</sup> During those years non-aligned India received considerably more in economic loans and grants, purchased about \$ 55 million in military equipment from United States and \$ 90 million in military grant assistance after the India-China war of 1962. The amount might had been much greater had John F. Kennedy, who was very pro-Indian, not been assassinated.<sup>3</sup>

The "second" cold war, precipitated by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on Christmas day in 1979, revived the long moribund US-Pakistan military relationship. Soviet intervention of Afghanistan made Pakistan all the more important for U.S.A. In the 1980s, during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, it was frequently heard in Washington (more than in Islamabad) that Pakistan was a "front-line" state, and that if Afghanistan fell, Pakistan and all the South Asia would be vulnerable and the Soviets would have a clear run to the warm waters of the Indian ocean. Therefore during this period Pakistan received more than \$ 7 billion in loans and credits for military and economic assistance until the programme was terminated when the Bush administration concluded in 1990 that Pakistan's covert nuclear weapons program violated U.S. Law.<sup>4</sup>

Here, it is noteworthy that during 1980s U.S.A. so desperately needed Pakistan as a conduit to supply arms to Afghan Mujahideens that despite of being full cognizant of Pakistan's covert nuclear weapons programme America totally ignored it. Kuldeep Nayar, former Indian High Commissioner to United Kingdom once wrote in Illustrated Weekly that during Soviet-occupation of Afghanistan "even if Pakistan had shown the bomb, America would have looked the other way because its stakes were high; keeping the Afghan sore running to bleed the Soviet Union, having bases in Pakistan and making it a cantonment which the different regimes in the Middle East could draw upon to bolster their tottering government."<sup>5</sup> This criminal connivance of U.S.A.

with the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme during 1980s laid real foundation of nuclear arms race in South Asia. It was during this period (around 1987) that India gave serious thoughts towards exercising its nuclear option. Thus the decade of 1980s saw not only excessive militarization but also nuclearization of Pakistan as well as India.

During the height of the U.S.A., USSR proxy war in Afghanistan, not only the state of Pakistan was armed to teeth but Pakistani civilian society too underwent unprecedented militarization due to the advent of drug economy in Pakistan. One of the major offshoots of Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan war and its subsequent support to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (1996-2001) was the growing impact of the role of drugs in Pakistan. Along with Iran and Afghanistan, Pakistan has become a part of Golden Triangle notorious for poppy cultivation and illegal traffic in drugs. As the production of all intoxicants was declared illegal in Iran after the revolution, the heroin laboratories from Iran were shifted to Pakistani Baluchistan in the early 1980s. Further, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan over three million refugees from Afghanistan fled to Pakistan and some of them were familiar with the production and processing of heroin. As a result, they were able to establish plants in Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) to produce drugs. The poppy cultivated in Afghanistan could be processed in Pakistan owing to the initial logistic/tactical support offered by the Pathan ethnic groups on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.<sup>6</sup>

Although the Zia-ul-Haq regime (1977-88) declared the use of opium illegal in Pakistan in 1979, drug-related underground activities flourished under the Zia regime. The Northern regions of Pakistan and the barren mountainous ranges of the Pak-Afghan border are suitable for opium cultivation and some drug specialists in Pakistan have mastered the techniques of converting opium into morphine and heroin. The ban imposed by Zia regime was not only ineffective, but the Inter Services Intelligence (I.S.I.), which was endowed with special powers to deal with Afghan problem, only consolidated drugs and arms related illegal activities. In fact, as the U.S. poured sophisticated arms in huge quantities into Pakistan to handle the Afghan problem, the ISI managed to keep a substantial proportion of the arms in its reservoir before distributing them among the various Mujahideen groups.<sup>7</sup> A study conducted by United Nations has disclosed that out of every 100 weapons supplied by USA to Afghan Mujahids via Pakistan, 70 were kept by Pakistanis and only 30 reached their destination.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to the corruption in the army, the same arms resurfaced in arms bazaar in Peshawar and adjoining cities. What is more, the ISI actively indulged in drug smuggling for laundering money to meet the expenditure on the war fronts in Afghanistan and Indian Punjab. Within the ISI a special cell was established for heroin to facilitate covert action. The cell was designated to look after a network of refineries and smugglers who smuggled heroin to western countries. The Mujahideen groups, in their turn, accelerated heroin production because by then it had become a lucrative business.<sup>9</sup> The irony is that all this has been going on all along in full cognizance of America and this connivance of America has not only been prejudicial to South Asian peace, security and development but also boomeranging on U.S.A. herself in a big way.

Every American military assistance programme in South Asia has generated strong even vehement objections from the non-recipient. The United States' initial programme for Pakistan (1954) provided India with pretext to back away from its pledge of a plebiscite in Kashmir and encouraged Delhi's move toward Moscow. Subsequent U.S. assistance to India immediately after the 1962 India-China war led Pakistan to move towards China and to

question the value of its ties to the United States. The revival of the U.S.-Pakistan military relationship in the 1980s propelled India towards Soviet Union and contributed to the largest arms buying spree in regional history. Stephan Philip Cohen, an American expert on South Asia argues that "United States' policy makers have been confronted with the same Hobson's choice in the nuclear arena. The United States' initial reluctance to come down hard on New Delhi for its 1974 nuclear test was taken as further justification for Pakistan's own nuclear programme. Conversely when Washington looked the otherway while Pakistan perfected its nuclear programme in the 1980s, Indian hawks argued that an Indian nuclear test would be a fitting response, if only to disrupt the U.S. - Pakistan relationship by forcing Pakistan to conduct a test of its own."<sup>10</sup> These prophetic words of Cohen came to be totally true when Bhartiya Janta Party (BJP) led government of India exercised the nuclear option by conducting 5 nuclear tests on May 11 and 13, 1998, and as expected, Pakistan followed the suit by conducting her own 6 nuclear tests on May 28 and 30, 1998 to even the score with India. Thus India and Pakistan became overt nuclear powers in South Asia by weaponizing their nuclear potential. U.S.A. this time came down heavily on both India and Pakistan and imposed severe economic sanctions on both the countries. Russia, although expressed its mild displeasure and concern over India's nuclear test but did not favour the imposition of any economic sanctions and even offered to supply a nuclear submarine to India while US led industrial nations of the world were in the process of finalizing their tough sanctions on India.

It is in the field of nuclear weapons that China substantially helped Pakistan in order to countervail India's power. According to the former U.S. Central Intelligence Director James Woolsey, "China has consistently regarded a nuclear armed Pakistan as a crucial ally and counterweight to India."<sup>11</sup> China and Pakistan have been involved in one of the most stable strategic relationships between nations since World War II. China's clandestine nuclear assistance to Pakistan, its largest conventional arms client, has been the subject of international concern since the early 1980s. Former Pakistan Army Chief Mirza Aslam Beg has also admitted, "the friendly country which is a common factor in almost all the major project we have undertaken is China."<sup>12</sup> The assistance which Beijing has never formally denied, has apparently been motivated by the strategic aim of tying down India on the subcontinent and thereby prevent its rise as a serious political and military rival to China."<sup>13</sup> This China factor has also been main spur to nuclear arms race in South Asia. China contributed to Pakistan nuclear programme by providing her a tried and tested design of a weapon in the early 1980s. More recently, it helped in the construction of a 70 MW research reactor that will provide Islamabad the more useful weapons-grade plutonium required to make compact weapons.<sup>14</sup> China has also provided Pakistan with missiles to deliver the bomb. Pakistan can not do without the external help and for the present China seems to be more than a willing ally.

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