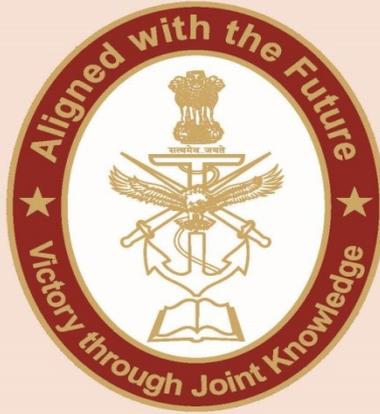


CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



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GEOGRAPHICAL SPACE OF PAKISTAN AND ITS STRATEGIC LINKAGES

BY

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1. In ancient times, Maluha, the land of milk and honey, was the home of a flourishing Aryan civilization on the banks of river Sindh. It has been the fountain head of Indian culture duly protected by Hindu Kush in North West and Himalayas to the North till the time its sanctity was violated around third century BC by Alexander from Greece. **Sindh River along with its tributaries flowing from North East to South West acted as impregnable barrier for large military bodies to approach the mainland Bharat of yore.** whereas, once the river basins of the five rivers (Punj-aab) were crossed it was comparatively easy to move towards further East along banks of Yamuna and Ganga rivers as the grain of the country happens to be from North to South East.

2. The sprawling swaths of Indo-Ganges plains are bestowed with right amount of sun and rains with abundant resources and riches unlike deserts of West and cold mountainous terrain of Central Asian landscape. The economically rich Bharat, therefore, has been prized bounty for impoverished greedy raiders from faraway lands, cultures and races. In that, the Indus valley has been the gateway to most of the foreign incursions right from the ancient times. As a result it has always been strategically important region for politico-military overtures for foreign powers seeking inroads into rich Indian heart land. In essence, it is the military geography of present day Pakistan which has shaped the historical destiny of Indian sub continent. **This geographical strategic strength and historical legacy of Indus valley continues even today,**

except that now it is along the grain of Indus facilitating access to Indian Ocean and not across it as was the case till medieval period.

3. The British reversed the direction of flow of political encroachment from East to west and further across the Kyber Pass with intentions to dominate the strategically important junction point of West, Central and South Asia. The British probably were not fully convinced if independent undivided India with quasi socialist agenda of congress party would do their bidding when they leave the sub continent. Accordingly, one of the probable reasons for division of Indian dominion based on religion was to create a loyal proxy who would always be grateful to British, thereby take care of their strategic interests of dominating mineral rich tracks and also act as a frontline state for checking spread of Marxist ideology.

4. British assessment was reasonably correct as Russia did intrude into political space of Afghanistan and its periphery. Apropos; the Af-Pak region continues to be the most contested area for the geo political interests of the big players in the recent times. In that, the conduct of Pakistan seems to be a continuum of their historical legacy to exploit political opportunism coming their way.

5. The reasons of Pakistan being the area of interest for the big powers lies in her geographical virtues, military as well as economic due to its contiguity to Afghanistan & Iran and access to Indian Ocean. The Afghanistan, due to her geographical location, has been the pivot for politico-military assertions of super powers for ideological dominance and control of mineral resources of west and central Asia. The Soviet Union, sensing the likely intrusion of western powers to dominate the Central Asia, intervened in Afghanistan in 1980 to nix their agenda. The US, in order to oust the intruder from their area of interests, albeit without taking up direct confrontation with the rival super power, **chose to follow insurgency route. To do that, Pakistan with her geographical location contiguous to Afghanistan fitted into their scheme.**

6. It was easy to motivate economically weak and politically gullible Pakistan to play their ball game. Pakistan on their part found an opportunity to exploit the situation for their economic and military buoyancy. **Thus emerged the Taliban phenomenon, a US sponsored concept of "war by proxy" based on exploiting unemployed Pakistani youth alongside Afghani dissidents under Pakistan Army patronage.** It is a known fact that Taliban contributed substantially to compel Soviets to move out of Afghanistan after a decade in 1989.

7. The proven strategic value of Taliban prompted Pakistan to use such a potent force multiplier sans state accountability for liberating Kashmir. Accordingly, they adopted the Afghan template verbatim for their infamous war game **Operation Topac** conceived by General Zia-ul-Haq in late 80s to initiate insurgency in J&K. They succeeded in subverting a section of population in the name of jihad but popular uprising as envisaged could not be materialized. The Kargil intrusion by the Pakistan army camouflaged as a jihadi freedom fighters followed a decade later in 1999. The appreciated objectives seem to interdict the only road link to Laddakh region, and thereafter turn the defences both in the Kashmir valley as well as in Siachen. However, the professionalism, grit and determination of the Indian Armed forces gave them a crushing defeat once again. Pakistan, obviously, did not take a lesson from their national humiliation in 1971 Indo- Pak war.

8. Consequent to disintegration of Soviet Union and CARs becoming as independent states, the US and her NATO allies moved into Afghanistan in 2003 on pretext of Global war on Terror (GWOT) in 2003. Whereas, the actual purpose was to occupy the strategic space vacated by the Soviet Union and assert their control over oil and gas of the Central Asia. **To do that, the Pakistani geographical space became crucial for the logistics to sustain the US forces in the Afghanistan.** Hence, Pakistan once again became an important ally of the US in the region deserving all kinds of military aids and economic grants from them.

9. However, there was a twist this time as US sponsored and Pakistani controlled Taliban dispensation of 80s happened to be the opponent of the US in their new strategic move. With that, started the game of deceit, duplicity and dubious ways of Pakistan to extract their pound of flesh from the US and at the same time support the Taliban and Haqqani net work in Afghanistan. The game continues even after 17 years of US campaign in Afghanistan with no visible signs of achieving any of the politico-economic objectives. The strategic paradigms seem to have changed with substantial shale gas production in the US lowering the need to stretch out in far flung areas with diminishing politico-economic returns.

10. With that, the real politics seem to be emerging wherein US seem to be agreeable to participation of Taliban in institutions of governance in Afghanistan, albeit under terms which would perpetuate US interests. The US seems to be keen to wind up her Afghanistan mission and with that they need Pakistan to mediate with the Taliban, being their protégé. Pakistan which was ridiculed by the president of US a year ago for their

deceit and duplicity is eagerly awaited in US folds once again in the changed scenario.

11. **The China has been nurturing Pakistan since long looking at her geographical virtues** to create military leverages against their main Asian rival India. In that, they have gone to the extent of facilitating Pakistan to become a nuclear power along with delivery means, besides supply of substantial conventional weapon and equipment. They have now encashed their benevolence by taking Pakistan as their partner in their biggest politico-economic initiative CPEC for their economic expansion in Asia, Africa and Eurasia. **The CPEC scheme is irreversible and highly skewed in favour of China which may even impact the political autonomy of Pakistan in times to come.** China is here to stay in geographical spread of Pakistan like British as traders to begin with and later converted the India into their colony.

12. **Russia, seem to be interested in occupying the strategic space in Pakistan being vacated by US which as on date appears to be a possibility.** With that, bear bug would be completed from Mediterranean to Indian Ocean providing them much needed politico-military leverages as a resurgent world power. Besides this, Russia also seems to be looking at the arms market of Pakistan with indications of US reluctance to continue their patronage in this regards. The Russia has also joined the CPEC band wagon to utilize this corridor for their trade with Asian and African markets. All of this is contingent on political stability in Afghanistan and improvement of security situation. To facilitate that, the Russia along with China and Pakistan has been in touch with the Taliban to expedite the reconciliation process.

13. It would be seen that **the Pakistan with her strategic geographical attributes has been playing with the big boys US, Russia and China** as they all need Pakistani space for their political, economic and military purposes. Pakistan, on their part is fully seized with their unique strategic value and has been exploiting them with impunity in most audacious ways. Whereas, Pakistan is not on good terms with any of her peer group, viz India, Iran and Afghanistan.

14. The nemesis of Pakistan is their Kashmir obsession and well orchestrated Pakistan army narrative of Indian military threat, which incidentally has been created by themselves by initiating four wars and losing all of them. The perceived Indian threat is being hyphenated to her shallow geographical space, thereby creating a concept of need of strategic depth. It has lead Pakistani desire to encroach upon Afghani political space which in turn has manifested in abetting insurgency

through Taliban. Similarly Pakistan have lukewarm relationship with Iran who is seem to have complicity in disturbances in border areas, besides afflictions of Islamic sectarian divide under pressure of Saudi Arab.

15. Pakistan has been manipulating the Indian Territory under their occupation for their political advantages since partition of the country. They transferred the Shaksgam valley to China in 1963 with intentions of legitimizing their claim over POK as one of the motives. In a recent move they are now trying to change the political status of Gilgit Baltistan region of POK as their fifth province. It obviously is to accommodate Chinese interests as the CPEC road network passes through this area which is being objected by the India being a violation of her sovereignty.

16. Such a political move would make Chinese presence somewhat legal and any Indian action in this sector would be construed to be violating Chinese interests. In consequence, Pakistan would have higher military deterrence in the Northern Areas leaving remainder POK better managed within available military resources. **Pakistan, with Chinese backing is expected to continue her anti Indian rhetoric in times to come and use the geographical space to increase the ante.**

17. Pakistan, as a pattern has been conducting their business of state based on external leverages provided by the big powers instead of strengthen their internal fundamentals and structures within the country. The Pakistan, unfortunately, refuses to see the exploitative dimensions of self serving objectives and vested interests of these big players which have not permitted them to grow due to perception of their misplaced political buoyancies. But for importance of her geography in the contemporary context, who would ever give a second look to Pakistan which has nothing to offer except as a nursery of global terrorism with mediaeval mindset and negative discourse of jihad.

18. Whereas looking dispassionately from economic perspective, India and Pakistan both stand to benefit by utilizing their geographical space for trade and commerce. Indian connectivity to Afghanistan, Iran, CARs and further on to Eurasian landscape is through Pakistan which they have blocked as of now. It is in benefit of Pakistan to open up the communication network and accept Indian offer of 'most favoured nation for trade' as it has positive synergies with potential to bail out their economy. Similarly, the projects like suspended Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipe line and energy transfer from CARs and West Asia through land routes would benefit all the countries involved. With Karachi and Gwadar ports in tandem, Pakistan stands at a tremendous economic potential due to their geographical connectivity with the land locked countries in

the hinterland. To do that, they have to take charge of their own assets and be in the driving seat.

19. It is time Pakistan looks at the present day opportunities on the horizon by connecting her geographical space with her neighbours who have higher potential to help them in strengthening their economic fundamentals instead of looking at distant powers. The Pakistani geographical space is their biggest virtue and it needs to be utilized for creating positive synergies instead of indulging in narratives of extra regional players as a junior partner. While Pakistan have full freedom to decide their priorities and governance mechanism as a sovereign nation, but if these are in sync with present day realities it would be better instead of keep looking at the rear view mirror. Earlier they regain the lost political space and follow pragmatic economy driven policies instead of continue to be under shadow of the military, better it would be for them.

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