

Made for China model

Recent Chinese moves in South Asia are being seen as part of Beijing's strategy to contain growing

American influence in the region *Asia*

By Javed Rana

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The geo-strategic scene and economic realities in South Asia are fast undergoing tremendous changes. China in a subtle manner is pushing its long term strategy that seeks to offset US agenda to marginalise Beijing, already upset over Washington's backing for its rival Japan and American stance on the issue of Taiwan's independence.

By developing friendly bilateral relations with India even at the cost of going against Pakistan's stated views on UN reforms, China is marching to achieve its long term geo-strategic, political and economic goals. This is being done by systematically countering the clout of the US in South Asia.

Similarly, Chinese moves to thicken economic and military bonds with Pakistan are parts of a grand strategy that does not bode well for Pentagon's military and political designs for this part of the world. China is increasing its economic cooperation with India as well and has finally agreed on settling territorial and political disputes it has with New Delhi. These are important giant geo-strategic policy initiatives to neutralise an expanding US role in South Asia.

China inked 22 agreements including a 'Treaty of Friendship' with Pakistan last week. The most important of these agreements states: "Each contracting party shall not join any alliance or bloc which infringes upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity

of the other contracting party, nor shall it take any action of this nature, including the conclusion of treaties of this nature with a third country... each Contracting Party shall prohibit, on its own soil, the establishment of organizations or institutions which infringe upon the sovereignty, security and territorial integrity of the other Contracting Party".

With fresh reassurance of lending Pakistan all possible support on defence, China has peremptorily ensured that Islamabad does not enter into any new alliance with US or allow Pentagon to penetrate more in this part of the world in future.

China has also ensured that Chinese Islamists do not manage to get shelter in Pakistan. Through the Treaty of Friendship the two countries have agreed to cooperate on both bilateral and multilateral basis to crack down on terrorism, separatism and extremism, as well as such activities as organised crimes, illegal immigration and illegal trafficking in drugs and weapons.

Military strategists see Chinese moves in South Asia meaning more than what meets the eye. They see the latest Chinese initiatives as an attempt to contain American influence in region where US has given a further push to an arms race by announcing the supply of a lot of military hardware, including fighter planes, to India and Pakistan.

General (retd) Talat Masood, an Islamabad-based expert on

military affairs, says China's primary concern is to counter US bids to encourage the separation of Taiwan from China and indirectly rationalise American clout over rival Japan with whom Beijing still feels uncomfortable because of the torturous memories of atrocities in the second world war by the Japanese army.

Chinese Parliament has already authorised its army to stop Taiwan from declaring independence, a move that Beijing suspects is being abetted by Washington.

For Japan, too, the situation is equally crucial. Chinese ambitions to further occupy the Japanese market is yet another factor that has placed Tokyo in a quandary as to how to contain alarming penetration of Beijing into its huge economic market with Chinese-made cheap electronic items and goods of other categories occupying Japanese shopping malls.

Beijing is policing in Asia in a cool manner giving tough time to Tokyo whose multi-national companies are shifting their business to China due to availability of cheap labour there, a situation which is aggravating rivalries between the two countries. Japan, considered to be the moneybag that US uses to dole out aid and loans to the third world, is under pressure to improve its economy whose bubble has already burst.

Military experts like Talat Masood and General (retd) Asad Durrani, former chief of Inter

Services Intelligence, believe China does not want to be encircled by its all rivals on its 22,000 land and 18000 coastal boundaries. And that is the reason why it is cozying up to India by softening its posture on political disputes and expanding trade and economic ties with New Delhi.

"This is a natural result of past events. China no longer thinks in terms of Pakistan alone. (Now Beijing has) a broader perspective," says Durrani. He also believes that China's new friendly posturing with India was inevitable to protect Beijing's national interests in geo-strategic situation obtaining in the region. "It is pushing Beijing to form a triangular alliance with Pakistan and India."

Gwadar port is another manifestation of this geo-strategic rethinking on the part of China. The completion of the 248 million dollar first phase of the Gwadar port on the southwestern Makran coast of Balochistan is being seen by security experts as a move to have an eye on the US presence at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.

Given Gwadar port's location, it comes as no surprise if Washington is uncomfortable over its strategic significance. US fears that it might serve as a forward naval base for China amid suspicions that Beijing operating from Gwadar, might spy on US activities in the Persian Gulf and track shipping in the Indian Ocean.

Islamabad, however, insists that the port has nothing to do with Chinese strategic policies.

From Pakistan's perspective, Talat Masood believes, Gwadar port has the potential to outplay India in the Persian Gulf where New Delhi is exceedingly becoming a powerful player because of the large business network that New Delhi has created through its expatriates living in Gulf states.

javedjournalist@yahoo.com