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## China in post-September 11 World: posturing mixed responses

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Winds of change in policy matters are blowing across the world (is it?). China with its own vulnerability and strengths must be watching the prospective changes in international security dynamics more closely than ever before. Chinese eyes on the current US involvement in Afghanistan and the associated American activities reflecting on regional and international security imperatives might intend to accept the present impasse both as a challenge and an opportunity to include them in future national behaviour.

Historically, contradictions prevail in Chinese words and the deeds. USA's policies and initiatives remain pivotal to Beijing's international behavior. Evoking a sense of mystery in international relations has long been a pertinent foreign policy characteristic of China. It is not important that China makes promises, rather international confidence building relies more on how many and to what extent those promises are kept by Beijing.

Having realised the enormity of the strength of Sino-US economic ties and the level of Chinese penetration into the American consumer market, Beijing enjoins every opportunity to remind US policy-makers of the possible impact that may appear from even the minimalist drift in the sustained American approach of engagement with China.

In the post cold war world phase, Chinese official pronouncements emphasise on the proposition for “world peace and development” through a multi-polar world order”. In contrast to this prescription, with the collapse of Soviet empire, Beijing seeks to break the American hegemony and emerge as an alternate center of power.

US policy-makers on the other hand project a skewed understanding of China. American dilemma in defining the relationship with China as one of strategic competitor or strategic partner gives rise to speculations amongst the world community.

China's ambition, overall, remains double-edged as that to emerge, as a competitor to US's international standing and as to translate the increasing military strength through modernizations to economic gains. It is believed that the Chinese leadership sees WTO membership as a means to bolster economic reforms and, ultimately, to sustain its grip on power to shape the competitive landscapes.

The imminent change in US security prescriptions appeared to radically change the cold war doctrines after the famous May 01, 2001, Bush's speech at National Defense University, Washington, that indicated to US determination to go ahead with National Missile Defense programme and American willingness to move away from ABM Treaty.

The apocalyptic terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, however, compelled the US presidency to turn the national focus towards “war against terrorism”. The bottom-line remains the same- to save the American people and the US national interest from the asymmetric attacks of hidden enemies. In turn, that ensures the security of other civilizations too.

Nations round the globe condemned the scourge of terrorism unequivocally. The end objective has collectively been identified to fight this anti-civilisational menace with all available resources. Voices of difference are yet to surface over the means that US has been applying to smoke out the perpetrators of terror and the entities that support or harbour them.

As an initial response to the terrorist attacks in America, Chinese President, Jiang Zemin expressed condemnation and sympathy. Following the initial response, China has committed to join hands of cooperation with U.S.A and the international community in the joint efforts to fight against terrorism.

China's readiness to participate with US and particularly with the international community in fighting against the evils of terrorism might reflect upon the urgency of its own domestic reasons. In the aftermath of 9/11 incident China might also see this as an opportunity to demonstrate its credentials as a rational competitor of the sole superpower of the world.

Reportedly, at the national front, Beijing, gaining a new impetus, has swiftly been striking down on the designated extremists and domestic dissent inside the country. Zhang Guobo, vice chairman of the State Development Planning Commission, in the sidelines of APEC meeting has been quoted saying endorsed that “the Chinese government has struck down resolutely on terrorist activities”. According to a recent

report, so far this year 10 groups have been wiped out and around two hundred ten people; said to be hardened minority splittists, suspected violent criminal terrorists or religious extremists; were arrested in Urumqi. And the 70-days pursuit that was launched by the Ministry of Public security on September 20 has been claimed successful for the police across China have caught 60069 persons (considered as criminal suspects and prison escapees). China in November 2001 has also reportedly rounded up a cross-border organization said to be involved in terrorist activities in Yunnan Province.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress of China has ratified China's accession to the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombing. The State Council has also decided to be party to the International Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism.

Beijing is said to be worried that US-led military strikes against Afghanistan may squeeze the terrorist activities out of Afghanistan that might have spill over effect into western China region that has common border with both Afghanistan and Pakistan and particularly the already troubled Xinjiang province.

As long as China carries out operations against terrorist groups, the international community must admit the concern. The suspicion abounds from the past experience in China, that like Tiananmen Square crackdown, human rights violations and the suppression of democratic voice by the state authority will be done in the name of international terrorism.

While describing terrorism as a "common scourge" for the international community, Jiang Zemin's support to the US-led operations in Afghanistan remains restricted to "proof of guilt and compliance with the international law". The ongoing operations though tacitly accepted by Beijing, future Chinese response might include its claimed insistence on the authority of Security Council, principles of non-intervention and non-interference in the domestic jurisdiction of a sovereign state.

The method of American war on terrorism may make China wary of the increasing American influence and presence in the Asian and Pacific regions. The expected changes in the security dynamics of South Asia may influence significantly the Chinese policy towards Pakistan and India. The possibility of any major strategic shift though remains low, the issues concerning China's role in proliferation matters remain slightly unpredictable.

China has long been maintaining a close strategic relationship with Pakistan to build on an influential position in South Asia and to contain the emerging strength of India globally. In its joint adversarial collaboration with Pakistan against India, China hopes to have a check on the rising ambitions of India in the South Asian strategic triangle (India, Pakistan and China). In exchange, to serve the Chinese interests, Beijing has relentlessly supplied missile and nuclear technologies to Pakistan to keep Islamabad's aspirations high against India. Consequently Pakistan receives strength to wage sustained proxy war against India by supporting and abetting cross-border terrorism. India now hopes that in the aftermath of September 11 attacks in US would make the international community, particularly US to re-evaluate its

approach to the menace of terrorism that India has long been suffering from.

US and its allies, ever since the cold war days, have incorporated Pakistan as a frontline state to accommodate the interests in Asian sphere and the Muslim world. Similarly, Islamabad has been co-opted in the global coalition to fight war against terrorism. Pakistan in a tight ropewalk situation has been trying to prove its credentials for the long enduring relationship with U.S.A.

In fact, during the American operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan got exposed of Pakistani regular army and intelligence battling along side the Taliban troops. Pakistan will have a tough task ahead to reinstate the US confidence in Islamabad's international objectives and policies. The fundamentalist groups had long supported Pakistan government to wield influence in the Muslim world but got trapped to US compulsions therein with President Musharraf during Afghanistan operations. They may also now see a decisive change of equations with the ruling government of Pakistan. The unexpected changes to come in Pakistan both domestically and internationally will have significant ramifications for the South Asian region in particular and for the Pakistan's diluting reliability in bilateral relationships worldwide in general. To survive this crisis is the most undesirable challenge that Pakistan has been facing today. In any case, a survived Pakistan will certainly look earnestly to restrengthen its ties with China and Islamabad may take certain steps to augment the Kashmir issue in India.

Over a telephonic conversation with Pervez Musharraf on September 30, 2001, the Chinese President Jiang Zemin, reportedly praised Pakistan's "tough stand" on terror and offered to join hands with Pakistan.

It may be worth remembering Pervez Musharraf's warning to the world not to write off Pakistan's special relationship with America. In an interview with *The Guardian*, May 2001, Musharraf had pointed out that " we have had a strategic relationship for 53 years. There is a strategic balance in the region. Now if this strategic balance gets disturbed it certainly disturbs Pakistan. I only hope that this does not happen".

During the same period Pervez Musharraf has also been quoted, by Voice of America Radio, in Islamabad saying "Pakistan expects China to assist Islamabad in maintaining minimum deterrence level, the balancing role which is so essential for regional and world peace".

Such strong reactions certainly may raise apprehensions in US of getting Pakistan Talibanised. US cannot afford another Taliban. Punitive or harder American stances may be secondary than first to stop those who help and encourage Pakistan to go belligerent.

In fact, despite international condemnations China has constantly been involved in illegal nuclear and missile exports to Pakistan. Americans, though noticed, overlooked such illegal transfers, for long for reasons best known to them. But in view of defence literature and intelligence assessments of potential proliferation and consequent probable asymmetric threats to US security in particular and to the global strategic stability in general, US administration started following those illicit exports more seriously. Subsequently US pressurized China to pledge not to violate the international norms.

The latest Chinese pledge of November 2000 is still to prove its worth in practice. It has been estimated that since 1980s China has made more than dozen of promises but has kept none. The latest violation was reported in August 2001 that of a clandestine shipment to Pakistan of Shaheen missile equipment and spares.

In the light of current international sensitivity, there may be a momentary halt, but China is unlikely to help stop meeting the Pakistani demands. The degree of Chinese exports may vary depending on relative interests of Beijing.

To meet its own domestic nuclear energy needs China seeks help of the developed countries like Germany, Japan, Canada and France. Beijing may not like to antagonize disproportionately to these states that also share in its economic development.

China being well aware that strong American perceptions on National Missile Defence (NMD) and Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty would erode effectiveness of Beijing's existing weapons that would adversely affect China's aggrandizing ambitions.

China's official news agencies, which reflect the views of the Chinese government, have constantly lashed out at President Bush's plan for the missile defense system. Most of the Chinese analysts believe firmly that the proposed missile shield development would spark a new arms race and threaten world peace. Government officials of China have consistently opposed any such plan for long for its future destabilising influences of the world strategic peace and stability.

In reaction to the American determination to go ahead with the missile defence programme, China may expedite the possible modernization of military and create such international and regional atmosphere that create uneasiness to American policy-makers. Juxtaposing Beijing's covert supplies to Pakistan or any other country, increasing concerns over Taiwan may come up more resolutely.

During an October 12, 2001 press conference, the US State Department spokesman, Richard Boucher was quoted saying that " the department is disappointed that China was not in a position to provide authoritative assurances". Even at the APEC summit meet in Shanghai, the talks between Bush and Jiang Zemin could hardly produce any reported result. To withstand the American pressure much will depend as how China consolidates and accommodates its interests in the strategic relationship with Russia. Russian response to American future approach toward the Russian concern over ABM treaty may further decide the degree of Chinese resistance to American

interests.

Russia is facing a dilemma of supporting huge arms reduction with US commitments and sticking to its adherence to revamping the ABM treaty. US on the other hand is determined to carry forward its tests of missile defence. The seventh test was successfully conducted on December 3, 2001.

During Crawford (Texas) meeting of November 2001 between Bush and Putin, Bush announced further cut in America's stockpile to between 1700-2200 warheads from over 6000 now. Putin also assured to cut down its existing stockpile by two third. However, nothing substantive could come out with regard to much speculated any change in American stance on ABM treaty. Neither, any clear sort of indication from the Russian side could come out for opposition or acceptance to the American desire.

Taking into the domestic and international economic concerns, Russia, till now, has been maintaining co-operative and confidence building approach to overcome the cold war hostile misperceptions between the two countries. Economic interests and the concern for Chechnya will remain effective till Russia does not raise the national sentiment of upholding inherited image of erstwhile superpower. Any change in strategic security posture of Russia in future, if any, may provide some space to China too.

In the meanwhile, Xiong Guangkai, Deputy Chief of General Staff of the People's Liberation Army and his Russian counterpart concluded the fifth round of strategic talks between the two countries in Moscow, November 23-27, 2001. It is believed that China has increased diplomatic parleys with Russia to enhance the existing strategic relations in the wake of deep changes in the current international situation.

### **Conclusion:**

Now that the first phase of American war against terrorism is about to be over with the conclusion of UN sponsored Bonn agreement, many more events are still to come to bring some definitive changes in the international security environment.

Unclear Chinese mandates to the international community to fight against terrorism may unveil varied Chinese opposition to US and its allies in future. While China may be questioned for its credibility over Beijing's dealing with domestic dissent and adjoining regional grievances, use of force and the role of UN may invariably come under debate.

The cold war legacy of US-Pakistan remains inextricably intertwined with post Soviet era interests of US in Asia and the Middle East, particularly the newly independent states of Central Asia and South Asia. However, the developments during US strike against Taliban may influence US to re-evaluate the pattern of its strategic engagements in Asia as whole in particular and the long-term security interests of America in general.

US policy analysts have long been suggesting adjustments or re-orientation in the American post cold war national objectives. Few of them

have already been accommodated, for example, to live with nuclear South Asia and put pressure on China to behave rationally.

The change of equations in US policy concerning geo-strategic and political interest may take considerably more time. In the meanwhile Washington would like to take as many countries as possible into confidence in the proposed strategy to fight against the potential asymmetric threats. Russia and China will remain the countries to be of higher priorities for consultation.

China may not share equally the concern over fighting against terrorism as much as Russia accepts the American views. The future of ABM treaty will decide the level of any further US-Russia co-operation. In the meanwhile China would consolidate its regional and international aspirations.

Taking into India's increasing involvement in international affairs, China is unlikely to change much its pre-September11 posturing. Rising international concern over illegal proliferation of nuclear and missile technologies may bring some momentary recess in Beijing's exports to Pakistan. Else, China may explore different routes and sources to exchange illicit information to keep the observers on toes.

During the US operations in Afghanistan, much raised speculations of Pakistan's nuclear assets falling into wrong hands and so the issues related to nuclear safety still remains important for Pakistan. If Islamabad follows suit to the rumour of getting de-nuked from outside force, seeking further Chinese support to enhance safety capabilities of strategic possessions of Pakistan cannot be ruled out.

In reality, for China there remains little scope to carve more strategic benefits out of the crisis underway. Pre-occupied world, however, will provide Beijing opportunities to re-strengthen its ties with the countries critical of international approach of US and its allies, particularly the American interests. In the meanwhile, China may intelligently wait and watch the changing situation and the corresponding response of the major international actors.

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