

Why Have China-Pakistan Relations Soured?

Written by Kirthi Jayakumar

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All is not well for the “all-weather friends”, China and Pakistan, over the recent spurt of terrorism in Xinjiang. In a recent statement, China has alleged that the masterminds of the attacks in Xinjiang which killed 11 people – i.e. the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) – were trained in Pakistani terror camps. Although the motive is still unclear, the TIP, more or less like its sister-organizations that target Central and South Asia, has struggled to find a foothold in the face of unrelenting assaults by the US and its allies. The fact that its members were trained in Pakistan suggests that with the US troop-draw down, Pakistan’s incentives to continue with its erratic war against the *jihadi* bases in North Waziristan are diminishing.

In a series of revelations since the 2008 terror attacks in Mumbai, Pakistan has emerged shamefaced as its hand in supporting terrorism has been exposed time and again, by the US after the Abbotabad operations in May this year and India after the Mumbai attacks in 2008 and, now, by its own ally, China.

China and Pakistan both sought to balance the role of the US in Asia. With every step taken by the US to strengthen its ties with India, China made sure to counter it with moves that strengthened its ties with Pakistan, efforts which also included the attempt to sell nuclear reactors to Pakistan. So why China? If Pakistan cannot be trusted enough to respect its allies, then what of the states it deems as its foes?

The Xinjiang events show the world how difficult it is to compel Pakistan to act in support of fighting terror. If Osama bin Laden was shielded by Pakistan, does this suggest that terror lies at the very root of the state’s policies? Do the Xinjiang attacks imply that Pakistan cannot even be trusted as an ally? Or is the lesson in fact that Pakistan has failed as a state, has lost the legitimate monopoly over the use of force, and is no longer in charge of its own foreign policy?

The new Chinese stance against Pakistan-based terror is significant for Asia, because it strengthens claims in the region alleging Pakistan’s affiliation with terrorists. However, is China’s addition to the list of states fighting terror enough to goad Pakistan into putting an end to supporting terrorism? Did Pakistan target its own ally, China, out of cynical strategic intentions or sheer incompetence? What will become of Central Asia when the US troop draw down is complete? How should Pakistan be handled if it avails to be neck-deep in supporting terrorism? What sanctions can be imposed against a state that does not even honour its basic obligations under international law? What use are conventions that outlaw supporting and financing terrorism, when they fail to keep states like Pakistan in check?

Please share your thoughts in the comments.

About the author:

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