

**Andrew Small, *The China-Pakistan Axis, Asia's New Geopolitics*
(Hurst & Company: London, 2015), 297.**

By Majid Mahmood

The book titled "*The China-Pakistan Axis, Asia's New Geopolitics*" written by Andrew Small is a study of Pakistan-China relations from both historical and contemporary aspects. It explains the underlying strategic, economic and political imperatives of China-Pakistan relations and how this relationship has significantly evolved over the last few years with more economic impetus recently as opposed to earlier focus on strategic dynamics. The author has examined nearly every aspect of bilateral relationship between Pakistan and China ranging from India question to Afghanistan, the United States, trade and nuclear cooperation.

The fundamental argument of the book is that China, despite all the domestic challenges faced by Pakistan, will remain a credible partner for meeting its defense, economic and political needs albeit with a pinch of pragmatism. The *Asia new Geopolitics* in the title of the book reflects the theme that developments in China's relationship with Pakistan will be a key factor in determining Asia's strategic milieu in coming years.

The book begins with a prologue which details the events leading to 'red mosque' crisis in Islamabad in 2007 where some Chinese nationals were briefly abducted by the mosque administration. The author therefore begins the book with highlighting challenges and stress moments in Pakistan China relations by detailing the incident and concludes that the 'red mosque' crisis was a watershed moment in Pakistan-China bilateral history.

The book's first chapter deals with the historic origins of China Pakistan relations. The author explains the Cold War dynamics and its effects on the relationship between China and Pakistan. The first phase of relationship i.e. from 1950 – 1970 saw Pakistan joining US led alliances against communism where SEATO was specifically aimed against China. Andrew Small recalls important events taking place in late 1960's. He point to a significant turn in Pakistan China relations where Pakistan facilitated China's rapprochement with United States. The author details the events of 1971 India-Pakistan war where the newly established China-Pakistan relationship was put to test and explains how the US and China were coordinating their strategies against India which fell short of any meaningful physical intervention to save Pakistan's eastern wing from falling. The China Pakistan relationship therefore was forged in 1971 war as the author puts it. Shared antagonism of India since then has been bedrock of China-Pakistan relations till date.

Chapter two of the book deals with cooperation between China and Pakistan on the nuclear front. There is not much revelation in this chapter as most of the material in the chapter is quoted from open sources. Linked with the first chapter, this nuclear cooperation history between China and Pakistan is explained by the author in the context of China's role in developing Pakistan's defense capabilities.

Chapter three assesses the impact of India in China-Pakistan relations. The author explains that the United States' South Asian policy is to de-hyphenate India from Pakistan; China's policy on the other hand is of re-hyphenation. The author stresses that though India is a major factor in China-Pakistan interests, however, there are now other factors as well which transcend the Indian issue in their relations. Those factors are China's renewed focus on South Asia which is centered on linking China's western territory via trade routes to Middle Eastern energy markets and growing concerns about instability in Afghanistan. The author also discusses the gradual improvement in India-China relations and challenges that the two countries face in improving their relations.

The next three chapters deal with interconnected issues such as Chinese war on terror, China's relationship with Taliban before and after 9/11 build to secure Chinese interests and contemporary history of China's involvement in Afghanistan and its views on long term US military presence in Afghanistan.

Overall this book covers a large ground involving China-Pakistan relations which is evident from the structure of the study. While the author has pointed to the level of difficulty faced in researching of the book because of lack of sufficient declassified material in both China and Pakistan regarding the issues, nonetheless, he was able to interview some knowledgeable Chinese figures on some critical issues in regard to China-Pakistan relations, which adds to the value of the book and helps the reader gain a clearer perspective on those issues.

The area where this book struggles to make its mark is the lack of theoretical framework to put the discussions in a proper perspective. The journalistic account heavily referenced by author does have the benefit of adding information on critical issues but fails to give a qualitative explanation of history and events unfolding in the bilateral relationship between the two key friendly neighbors. The book for this reason adds little to the existing literature on China-Pakistan relations which in any case is dominated by Western writings. However, the book may motivate South Asian scholars to further explore the factors determining Asia's most important bilateral relations and how it will impact the strategic discourse of Asia in coming years.