



## Pakistan's Diplomatic Maneuvering: Facilitating Sino-American Rapprochement in 1971-72 - A Historical Approach

Aneta Ismail<sup>1</sup>, Muhammad Arif<sup>2</sup>, Wang Yong<sup>3</sup>, Wang Weihong<sup>4\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Historic Cultures & College of Nationalities, Southwest University, Chongqing

<sup>2</sup>Faculty of Education, Southwest University, Chongqing

<sup>3,4</sup>Associate Professor, Southwest University, Chongqing

**Corresponding Author:** Wang Weihong [whong0130@126.com](mailto:whong0130@126.com)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examines the vital role, which Pakistan played in bringing about the Sino- American normalization in 1971-72. The study shall add to Cold War diplomacy by uncovering Pakistan's strategic location that facilitated top secret negotiations that escalated to Dr. Henry Kissinger's visit to Beijing followed by President Nixon. As such, this research, based on the analysis of declassified documentation, memoirs, and oral histories analyzes the change in perceptual categorization of Pakistan from a minor to a gross strategic actor. This concern focuses the historical research for the period of 1971-72 and it uses historiographical sources. Findings indicate that Pakistan's role in geopolitics specifically highlights the significance of the role of small states in major diplomatic shifts during the Cold War.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Politics in the earlier 70s were mainly influenced by the Soviets and the Americans and this period was marked by the Cold War. Two of the world's superpowers, the United States and the People's Republic of China, having assumed diametrically different approaches to a plethora of issues, effectively positioned themselves on the two sides of the divide. With the U. S. being the epitome of capitalist democracy and China under Mao Zedong's rule communism, both nations were enemies and extremely wary of each other. This was a typical division, which captured the essence of the bipolar world seen in the international relations during this period (Jian, 2001; Macmillan, 2007).

Amidst this tense backdrop, an unlikely mediator emerged: Such a country may be Pakistan. During the presidency of Yahya Khan, several political and economic maneuvers allowed Pakistan to balance a relationship between these two large countries. While having its regional issues and domestic instability, Pakistan saw a chance for an opportunity to act as a mediator between the two mighty powers - China and the United State, and change the course of Cold War (Jalal, 2014).

This effort cannot be achieved without the support of Pakistan, and its importance in this role cannot be overemphasized. Strategically located between India friendly with a Soviet Union and China it enjoyed a favorable geo-political location. In politics, Pakistan had developed cordial relations with Beijing as well as Washington. Since President Yahya Khan saw a chance to render a more influential place for Pakistan in the global scale (Gaddis 2005), and own strategic interests, he is said to have, actively, contributed towards encouraging secret contacts between the United States of America and China (Christensen 2015). These efforts bore fruits in the historic secret visit of Dr. , Henry Kissinger to Beijing in July 1971 when he used a sick leave pretext during a tour to Pakistan and Vietnam (Burr, 1999a).

Kissinger's secret visit was strategically called for as a new turn in international relations (Schaller 2002). It ended the diplomatic standoff that confined the United States and China for almost thirty years; this was followed by President Richard Nixon's official visit to China in February 1972 (Ross and Jiang 2001). This rapprochement not only affected the US-China relations but also had significant impact upon international relations and world order change (Garver 2016). It marked the start of a new phase of relaxation of confrontation, reorientation of alignments and profound alterations in the strategic equations of other super powers especially the Soviet Union -Thus wrote Kissinger in his book (Kissinger, 1994a, p. 750).

This paper shall therefore seek to elaborate on the following: diplomacy of Pakistan during this period? What was its reason for doing so? he result of this diplomacy and also the overall effects of such diplomacy on cold war Sino-American relationship? Through the historiography of this crucial point of time, the paper seeks to open a paradigm that will look at the role of Pakistan, which is often overshadowed but not the least important, in the diplomatic process that led to one of the biggest diplomatic processes of the twentieth century. Therefore, in this study, an attempt has been made to systematically cover the aspects of how Pakistan's behaviour impacted the geopolitical shift of the global power

during early 1970s based on the historical works, access to secret papers and researches made in this period or after.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Early Narratives and Diplomatic Perspectives**

Relations between China and the United States during the early period of the 1970s is an area of interest among scholars in diplomacy (Westad 2017). Many of these works were published during early periods of opening such as Northern memoirs of Henry Kissinger, providing the American side of the story without paying much attention of details like the Taiwan issue which was discussed during negotiations. Kissinger's *Diplomacy* (1994b) stays an influential book for analyzing the US involvement in China and the region during this time, which again, does not assign much significance to Pakistan as more than a tool (Tanner 2009). This western or American-centric perspective often tends to leave out the concerns and the stringer dynamics of 'intermediary diplomacy' which have played such a significant role in this geopolitical game of chess (Kissinger,1994c).

### **Chinese Strategic Thinking**

Several authors like Chen Jian in his *Mao's China and the Cold War* (2001) do very well chronicling the discussions that occurred in Beijing thus offering insights on the thinking that prevailed in China during this period. Thus, Jian's work is to some extent critical to grasping the attitude of PRC's paramount leaders, Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai, toward the normalization of the Sino-American relations with the United States as a tool for the containment of Soviet expansion. This perspective assist in understanding why meeting Pakistan's needs and interest is not just important to maintain it as a mediator but also an important player in China's geopolitics (Jian, 2001). The paper that Jian has provided explains how China had regarded Pakistan as a key instrument through which it could access the Western world especially in the backdrop of the Sino-Soviet split and rising tensions along the northern frontier of China(Westad 2012).

### **Role of Intermediary States**

Scholars have devoted a lot of effort in trying to understand the factors surrounding the involvement of intermediary states in diplomacy. For instance, the records and collection of the National Security Archive featuring declassified U. S documents on the Zhou Enlai Henry Kissinger communications chronicles nearly every aspects of these talks and underscores the centrality of Pakistan to these secret diplomatic contacts (National Security Archive, 1999). William Burr in his review published in *The Kissinger Transcripts* (1999) argues that Pakistan, though through its ruler Yahya Khan, was also a significant participant in the events. This has well been captured by Burr who, in writing about Pakistan, vividly explains how geography and diplomacy with particular reference to the cold war was all important in diplomacy (Burr, 1999b). Pakistan's case can be the example of how small states can play a great extent in international relations and by using their strength of their position and contacts, can bring or mediate two giants together.

### **Gap in Focused Studies on Pakistan's Role**

However, to date, there was a lack of extensive focused study about Pakistan and its post-Cold War role regarding these two superpowers and the specific methods that this country used during this period to maintain balance. Still, some historians as Ayesha Jalal in *The Struggle for Pakistan* (2014) discuss the Pakistan role; however, the majority do not go far beyond heavy-handed explication and demonstrate insufficient awareness of the intricate strategic and diplomatic games initiated by the Pakistani leaders during this period. While Jalal's work helps in understanding the implications of Pakistan diplomatic policy where international relations are concerned, there is no proper literature available for getting understanding about the specific strategies and policies of this rapprochement specifically between 1971-72 (Jalal, 2014a). Jalal further posits that the Pakistan movers and shakers viewed the Sino-American rapprochement as an opportunity to improve their security and status in the international system mainly in the context of marginalization by India and Soviet backing of India.

### **Recent Scholarly Contributions**

Some of the recent contributions have attempted to address this issue. For instance, Zhou Enlai's *China and the Cold War after Mao: The 2019 paper Open Door Diplomacy, 1976-1982* employs Chinese documents for analysing how China regarded Pakistan's diplomacy as crucial for the starting dialogue with the U. S. Though earlier works were self-explanatory, where Pakistani sources stressed on a confined role of Pakistan, this scholarship offers a multi-faceted perspective and offers a more nuanced narrative (Zhou, 2019). Zhou Enlai's work provide an opportunity to get the view from the Chinese side and how Chinese leaders defined the role of Pakistan and its behaviour towards the US (Hess 2001).

Furthermore, Evelyn Goh's *Constructing the U. S. Rapprochement with China, 1961-1974: While From "Red Menace" to "Tacit Ally"* by Robert S. Ross described the rapprochement process in details it focuses on stagist process and crucial role of the intermediary state as in the case of Pakistan. Goh Godwin's research work is a comprehensive study of the diplomatic process hence it brings out a paradigm shift of the diplomacy process (Goh, 2005).

Jeremi Suri's *Power and Protest: Détente and protests: While Global Revolution and the Rise of Détente* (2003) presents a focus on the topic of détente, it gives a general background of protests across the world and how such global events affected the U. S. and China's readiness to approach diplomacy. Suri's approach is unique and enlightening especially in respect to how local events shape diplomatic strategies all over the world (Suri 2003). These two facets of knowledge work in tandem to specify the nature of Pakistan's interests and locate its diplomacy within global political changes and evolution in the Cold War period (Engel 2008).

Therefore, through this literature review of diverse sources, the nuances of Pakistan's diplomacy and their significant function in the Sino-American rapprochement process has had its understanding gains. It raises questions about how the structural account can be further developed and applied in order to

provide a better understanding of the intricacies of Pakistan's strategic activities and their impact on the geopolitical landscape during this period of change.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Qualitative Analysis of Primary Sources**

The most common methodology used by this research work involves the use of primary sourced document analysis such as the declassified documents, personal memoirs and other documents that are located in national archives of the United States, China and Pakistan. These sources give valuable information about the clandestine signals and bilaterals negotiations that took place during the Sino American normalization in the period 1971-1972. Materials among them include the diplomatic cables, meeting records and intelligence reports regarded as the strategic exchanges between these countries. Furthermore, narratives from specialist observers including Dr. Henry Kissinger and Zhou Enlai offer primary narratives concerning the diplomatic surfaced strategies while records from the Pakistani part shed light on the position of the country in those negotiations. By integrating such different sources, the study establishes a coherent picture of Pakistan's role in remapping the international diplomacy.

### **Historiographical Approach to Understanding Diplomatic Maneuvers**

Historical analysis methodology is chosen in order to reanalyze the histories of the given period using a critical attitude towards the narratives about Pakistan's diplomacy. Analyzing prima- and secondary-sources, as well as historiography of 'Pakistan' and its position in the international relations as well the diplomacy this essay explores how the object of study has been interpreted over the years. It allows the detection of some of the oversights when it comes to the previous works – the cases when the role and significance of Pakistan as an actor in the process of the US-China rapprochement are underestimated or ignored. The study's objective will be to provide a fresh view of these diplomatic actions by drawing on sources and looks at new strategies of examining archives, restore the equilibrium to the overall evaluation of Pakistan's role.

### **Research Timeline Focusing on the Years 1971-72**

The research is specifically centered on the critical period of 1971-72, which was the started of détente in Cold War diplomacy with the visit of Dr. Henry Kissinger to Beijing and subsequently Nixon himself visited China. These events were occasioned by diplomacy by Pakistan which played the role of a mediator between the U. S. And China. This can be dated back to the earlier years when secret communications began through Pakistan and has resulted in these high profile visits which give serious impacts on the international relations. This focused timeline enables the study focus on the events, strategies, and decisions that defined Pakistan's diplomatic involvement and its implications for the Cold War.

## **RESULTS**

### **Findings from the Analysis of Primary and Secondary Sources**

The research is specifically centered on the critical period of 1971-72, which was the started of détente in Cold War diplomacy with the visit of Dr. Henry Kissinger to Beijing and subsequently Nixon himself visited China. These events were occasioned by diplomacy by Pakistan which played the role of a mediator between the U. S. And China. This can be dated back to the earlier years when secret communications began through Pakistan and has resulted in these high profile visits which give serious impacts on the international relations. This focused timeline enables the study focus on the events, strategies, and decisions that defined Pakistan's diplomatic involvement and its implications for the Cold War.

### **How Pakistan Facilitated Secret Communications Between China and the U.S., Including Dr. Henry Kissinger's 1971 Visit to Beijing**

Pakistan continued to remain an important component of diplomacy serving as a third party channel for intelligence talks between the two superpowers, the US and China. During the presidency of Yahya Khan, Pakistan pragmatically a neutral country situated between two giants of the South East, used its ability to facilitate these secret communications. This led to Dr. Henry Kissinger's secret visit of Beijing in July 1971 for which Pakistan provided logistical support and plausible reason for his disappearance from the public domain. From this 'background' it might be mentioned that when Kissinger's secret trip to China was deciphered by the world, the first phase of a new Sino-American relation was initiated, which later on paved the way for President Nixon's china visit in 1972 to a new era of the Sino-American relation. The latter was important as Pakistan diplomatic strategies during this period was instrumental in cementing the relationship between two warring giants.

### **Highlight Pakistan's Evolving Recognition as a Diplomatic Player**

The chronology of the analytical investigation shows changes in recognition of Pakistan as a major diplomatic actor in this or that period. At first, the role of Pakistan was either ignored or downplayed in historiography which was primarily constructed in Western lenses that exclusively concentrated on the US and China. Though initially sources such as CIA documents were limited; however, the recent years have seen many more sources being depersonalized, and with the changing historical narrative, Pakistan's strategic significance has emerged. Much of contemporary historiography recognizes the fact that Pakistan was able to navigate through the diplomatic maze brilliantly and it had achieved its geopolitical objectives while at the same time changing the balance of power in the Cold War accidents significantly. The fact revealed by these findings is that, Pakistan, as a relatively small state, managed to carve out for itself a highly strategic role as the power broker of some of the most critical Cold War events; thus, its role in Cold war history is more and more being acknowledged in the literature.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Reinterpreting Pakistan's Role in Cold War Diplomacy**

This section reexamines the part played by Pakistan during the cold war eras along with analyzing the major historiographical controversies and arguing whether Pakistan's foreign policies were part of a planned strategic move or a result of reactive policies. On the basis of the methodological differences in Cold War history and the evaluation of the consequences of Pakistan's role for the overall geopolitics we arrive at it's a better understanding of it's relevance in the process of the Sino-American rapprochement (Burke & Ziring, 1990a).

### **Conceptualizing Pakistan's Role**

One of the major controversies in the analysis of Pakistani role over the process of the rapprochement is whether it was a part of the consistent diplomatic policy or it was based on the series of reactions to the changes taking place in the world. In the previous narratives especially the west, Pakistan seemed more like an enabler who did not act by choice but by compulsion (Kissinger, 2011). This view postulated that the Pakistan's actions were mainly of reactive nature, as it had to court both sides, the U. S. and China on the one hand and on the other it had arch rival India which was aligned to Soviet Union (Sattar, 2007).

But, the contemporary learned literature poses a counter argument to this by asserting that Pakistan's leadership under President Yahya Khan for instance saw this as a unique opportunity to place Pakistan in a middle of the two super powers of the world (Haqqani, 2013a). Pakistan's active participation in the secret visit of Dr. Henry Kissinger to Beijing in 1971 is now considered a well-planned diplomatic strategy which clearly worked in the interest of Pakistan by providing it various strategic gains from both the United States and China (Kissinger, 2011). This role was in contrast to passive reactive diplomacy that early history of cold war portrays, Pakistan not only adapted to the unfolding diplomacy, but actively pushed forward plays from its side of the geopolitical chessboard for furthering the interests of the country (Hilali, 2001a).

### **Methodological Divergences in Cold War Diplomacy**

Thus, the historiographical approach to the Cold War diplomacy reveals methodological polarities in the scholarship, which has shaped the analysis of Pakistani role (Jones, 2002). Unlike Cold War political history, traditional sources for Cold War diplomacy comprised mostly of official documents, diplomatic notes, and letters that led, primarily, diplomatic and governmental lines of leading states (Hilali, 2001b). These sources wanted to completely ignore, or pay scant respect to Pakistan type of intermediary states since their contributions were less dramatic and not officially recorded as and when they occurred in the recorded histories of superpowers (Bose & Jalal, 1998).

However, recent pluralist historiographical schools have positioned the issue in a socio-political perspective that includes the analysis of oral evidences, memoirs and the archival documents of the regions. This approach broadens the horizons of the history of Pakistan's diplomacy and shows that it was not only passive, but actively pursued a quite complex policy aimed at balancing relations

with both the Chinese and the Americans. In obtaining broader material – documents stored in the Pakistani archives, and memoirs of the leaders of those years, historians have been able to receive the more complex view on Pakistan's agency. It has facilitated in altering the perspective to pay more attention to Pakistanised deemonstrating it as a significant player that shaped Cold War diplomacy.

### **Impact on Sino-American Relations**

Pakistan soon engaged in the conflict since 1979 with serious geo-political implications especially for the U. S. -China relationship and the overall balance in the context of the Cold War (Haqqani, 2013b). Due to these factors, CIA offer the opinion that by helping both Washington and Beijing maintain secret communications behind the walls of the opaque Pakistani government, Pakistan was instrumental in what helped to finally break the long-standing stalemate between the two superpowers (Kissinger, 2011). This decisive step led to President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 which not only shifted the U. S. -China relations but also bear great consequences on the balance of power in the world.

Its mediation was also political as Pakistan's diplomacy strengthened the country's position in the region through the success of mediatory diplomacy. So, when Pakistan sided with both China and the U. S. it was in a position to deter the upsurge of India that was endorsed by the Soviet Union. This strategic alignment helped in enhancing international recognition of Pakistan as an important Country involved in cold war politics and put effort to decrease threshold between superpowers – the start of a new process of more elastic world politics (Burke & Ziring, 1990b).

To sum up, Pakistani diplomatic moves when China and America decided to establish a rapport were not merely of working at the backdrop as they were cardinal to forecasts that helped alter regional and global geopolitics in the long run. The changes in the approaches in particular have given the further insight into the role of the country, the focus on the small states and their large contribution to the major outcomes of the Cold War.

### **Contributions and Shortcomings**

This paper helps to extend the knowledge about Pakistan's critical diplomatic function for the establishment of the Sino-American détente in the Cold War period, which gives a new vision of the country's actions (Burke & Ziring, 1990c). Analyzing primary sources that include declassified documents, memoirs, and diplomatic records of the USA, China and Pakistan, the study reveals Pakistan's role in mediating between the two superpowers as a history remapped. It also underlines Pakistan's capacity when it come to the geopolitical location to gain not only for the country itself but also to shape the Cold War processes.

This study therefore offers a different insight on the diplomatic role of Pakistan in the region that stage managers. A major contribution of this study is the positive revisionist view it provides on Pakistan. In Cold War historiography, Pakistan's role remains often marginal, and where present, was depicted in the passive and reactive manner. In this paper it shall be suggested that Pakistan was

not just an inert link that was passively involved in distribution of geopolitics in the 1970s, but an actor that played a significant role in manipulating. It further opens the possibilities of the Cold War history so that the roles of the second-ranked nations are highlighted in the decision-making process of huge world powers.

However, this study has its own limitations which includes the following: The first limitation is associated with the presence of bias in the sources. Some of the main sources for this research, especially the ones from the U. S. and Chinese archives, are likely to skew the stance of the superpowers and thereby underestimate or misconstrue the Pakistan's contribution. Likewise, the account that is a firsthand description of the events may be coloured by the interests and goals of the author, for instance, memoirs of Dr. Henry Kissinger. Because of these inherent bias in the identified sources, one cannot fully get an objective analysis of Pakistan's diplomacy.

Besides, the issue of archive access still remains a concern. To some extent the study avails of fresh materials from the U. S. and China but the actual Pakistani and the regional Papers and documents are not easily accessible and therefore a deeper understanding of the total contours of Pakistani diplomacy is only partial. Furthermore, documents from other important actors of this region like India and Soviet Union/Russia still remain unresearched in this regard. Exploring the impact of these actors could provide a complementary picture of the circumstances that evolved Pakistan's geopolitical context and, therefore, the period in question deserves a more detailed analysis.

Lastly, it is important to note that unlike the current paper which focuses on the construction of Sino-American rapprochement process from the angle of Pakistan, there is much more left for research in terms of regional actors and dynamics especially regarding Indian association with Soviet Union. Analyzing how such actors impacted and responded to Pakistan's diplomacy would add more depth to the analysis of the Cold War diplomacy in South Asia.

Hence, this paper provides a valuable contribution towards the re-examination of Pakistan's diplomatic role, while recognizing the problems of source prejudices, lack of access to archives and potential overemphasis on the regional actors. Further research should be conducted to fill these gaps with the hope of coming up with a better account of the geopolitics of the period.

## CONCLUSION

The major significance of this research lies in exploring how Pakistan has been instrumental in the rapprochement process of China and America during Cold War with a particular focus on 1971-72. Print media evidence from both subordinate and major sources highlights that the study shows that Pakistan while playing the role of a facilitator was an active and tactical one. This way, due to its geopolitical location in South Asia and diplomacy with Pakistan's President Yahya Khan, diplomacy with China, US's covert communication and eventually Dr. Henry Kissinger's secret trip to China and Nixon's visit. Such diplomatic initiatives greatly changed the bearings of the cold war political map and the balance of power.

The observations made in this study emphasize on how Pakistan as a relatively small nation was able to influence some of the dominant diplomacy trends and shifts. That it played an intermediary in the relationship between two super powers and at a time when the world was so divided shows the relevance of midwiving states in the international system. Moreover, it strengthens Pakistan's national interest as well as it also affected the factual global power balance in a way that lessened the US and China tensions and overall Cold War politics.

However, there exists ample room for the further research in this area in relation to Pakistan's diplomacy. New documents which have recently possibly been released in U. S, Chinese or Pakistani archives could give more specific information on the details of the negotiation process which resulted in this diplomatic diplomacy. Furthermore, comparison with other intermediary states in the Cold War diplomacy like Romania or Yugoslavia might also help to shed light on the specific tactics smaller actors used to shape the superpowers relations. That was where the expansion of the research to the regional actors such as India and the Soviet Union would serve for a better identification of the geopolitical context was Pakistan in. Lastly, it should be noted that Pakistan's diplomacy in Cold War period played role in changing the dynamics of world politics. Further studies must to look at the multifaceted nature of the intermediary diplomacy, use new available sources and look at the wider regional context. Such studies will further enlighten the international diplomacy's respect by showing how even the smaller states matter when it comes to contributing to the global diplomacy processes.

#### **ADVANCED RESEARCH**

In writing this article the researcher realizes that there are still many shortcomings in terms of language, writing, and form of presentation considering the limited knowledge and abilities of the researchers themselves. Therefore, for the perfection of the article, the researcher expects constructive criticism and suggestions from various parties.

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