

Brigadier Gurmeet Kanwal on



Fighting a two-front war

Several times in recent years, the chiefs of staff have publicly emphasised the need for the Indian armed forces to prepare to fight a two-front war. Given the ever-deepening nuclear warhead-ballistic missile-military hardware nexus between China and Pakistan, now supplemented by close economic cooperation, the probability of a two-front threat is constantly increasing.

The history of military collusion between China and Pakistan goes back over 50 years. During the 1965 India-Pakistan war, though Pakistani president General Ayub Khan had asked China for military aid, China limited its support to making some threatening military manoeuvres in Tibet. The aim was to keep Indian military reserves tied down so that additional divisions could not be moved from the eastern theatre to the western front.

Similarly in the 1971 India-Pakistan war, despite Henry Kissinger's entreaties

to China to intervene, China chose to restrict its support once again to threatening noises. It is noteworthy that during the Kargil conflict in 1999, Chinese military advisers were reported to have been present in Skardu in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK).

Since the early 1990s, China has been using Pakistan as a proxy to embroil India in perpetual conflict. It provided nuclear warhead designs to Pakistan and reportedly some fissile material as well. China helped Pakistan to test its prototype warhead at its Lop Nur range and gave it M-9 and M-11 nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs).

China also facilitated the transfer of Nodong and Taepo Dong ballistic missiles from North Korea to Pakistan. American journalist Selig Harrison wrote in *The New York Times* that close to 10,000 Chinese engineers and personnel of the People's

Liberation Army (PLA) have been engaged in road and hydel projects in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) for over a decade.

It is believed that Pakistan has outsourced counter-terrorism operations in GB against extremists of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM), active in China's restive Xinjiang, to the PLA. Also, Pakistan has handed over its Gwadar port on the Makran Coast to China. It is possible that as part of China's 'string of pearls' strategy, the port will be turned into a Chinese naval base.

It was in the light of these developments that former army chief General Deepak Kapoor had said during the Army Training Command doctrine seminar in December 2009 that the Indian Army must prepare for a two-front war. Several armed forces chiefs have repeated this formulation since and it has become the *sine qua non* for India's defence preparedness.