

Chairman of the Senate Defence Committee

Mushahid Hussain Sayed*

**“There is no contradiction between
China’s system, world view and Islam”**



**Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed is a current Pakistani Senator and Chairman of the Senate Defence Committee. A graduate of the Master of Science in Foreign Service (MSFS) program (Class of 1975), Senator Hussain Sayed has a distinguished career in the Pakistan public service as a four-time elected senator from the Islamabad Federal Capital. His public service career also includes positions as the Chairman of the Prime Minister’s Task Force on Central Asia (1992), Leader of Pakistan Delegation to UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva (1993), Special Assistant to Prime Minister (handling relations with U.S. & Central Asia) (1993), and Minister for Information, Culture & Tourism (1997-1999). He also served as Minister-in-Waiting to President Nelson Mandela, President Yasser Arafat, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, President Fidel Ramos & President Muhammad Morsi during their visits to Pakistan. He has career experience in the journalism sector as well. He was the youngest editor at age 29 of The Muslim. He has contributed op-eds and articles to The New York Times, The Washington Post, the LA Times, National Interest, Jane’s Defence Weekly, Middle East International, Inter Press Service, The Times of India, and The Hindustan Times. He has published three works, including Pakistan and the Changing Regional Scenario, Pakistan’s Politics: The Zia Years, and Governance in Pakistan(co-author).*

“Pakistan looks favorably on China’s relations with the Islamic world and Pakistan itself plays a key role in promoting China’s relations with the Islamic world. China has a strong relationship with Muslim countries in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, supporting their quest for sovereignty and independence. China provides a strategic option for Muslim countries and they do not have to depend on the West or the United States. So China, especially today, is a very important player and offers an alternative worldview, an alternative strategic path to development. In the ten years since the BRI was launched, China has invested over 1 trillion dollars in over 3,000 different projects in different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. This is a very large number. The BRI is not just about developing trade and investment, it is also an alternative worldview. China today is the leading trading partner, especially for countries in the Global South. Unlike some other countries, such as the United States, China, as a developing country, is building relationships on the basis of common heritage and history and a shared pursuit of a better tomorrow. In this context, China, with its diplomatic power and economic relations, can stabilize our region, especially Afghanistan, along with Central Asia, Türkiye, Iran and Pakistan. There is absolutely no contradiction, no conflict between the Chinese system, worldview and ideology and what Muslims advocate and practice. It is all about connectivity, about cooperation. It is all about working together for a better tomorrow without masters and oppressed.”

**Mushahid Hussain Sayed, Chairman of the Pakistan Senate Defence Committee,
answered the questions of Ayça Neslihan Örs.**

How does/how do you Pakistan view China’s growing engagement with the Islamic world, especially in terms of enhancing strategic autonomy and altering regional cooperations?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: Pakistan views China’s engagement with the Islamic world in a very positive light and Pakistan itself has played a very key role in promoting China’s engagement with the Islamic world.

If you would remember that at the Islamic foreign minister’s conference, which was held on 24 March 2022 in Islamabad, Pakistan was hosting the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) foreign ministers and we specially invited, and this happened for the first time, the foreign minister of China, his Excellency Wang Yi, to be the keynote speaker at this Islamic foreign minister’s conference in Islamabad in March 2022.

And that was very pivotal moment because China has a good outreach to the Muslim world.

And earlier in the 1970s, when Pakistan played a bridge between Washington and Beijing in 1971 to promote normalization and rapprochement between China and the US. When doctor Kissinger flew from Islamabad to Beijing in July 1971 as special envoy of President Nixon, we were the bridge between the two countries.

And after that, in the late seventies and mid seventies, Pakistan also helped facilitate China's relations with Iran and China's relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, because all these friends of Pakistan and they wanted to normalize relations with China after the US had done so, we played the role of facilitator.

In 1965, China was the first country, after the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to recognize and support the PLO.

I might add that China itself has had a longstanding role in the Islamic world. In 1965, China was the first country, after the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to recognize and support the PLO, and they have supported Muslim liberation movements. And so China has a track record. And plus China has a strong relationship with Muslim countries in Asia and Africa and in the Middle east, supporting their quest for sovereignty, for independence. And we feel that this is very good for regional autonomy because China's role presents a strategic option for Muslim

countries, and they do not have to be dependent on the west or the United States for that. So China, especially now, is a very relevant player and presents an alternative worldview, an alternative strategic path to development.

Success of the BRI against Hegemonism

In light of the emerging shared aspirations among emerging economies facilitated by the Belt and Road Initiative, such as promoting multilateralism and resisting hegemonic agendas, what steps is Pakistan taking to align with or contribute to these broader objectives in global affairs?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: In the context of this alternative strategies of development, especially in the past ten years, Pakistan was the first country among the first countries to join in on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was launched by President Xi Jinping in Astana in Kazakhstan in September 2013. And later on, in November 2013, the maritime Silk Road was launched in Jakarta and Indonesia. So Pakistan joined in, and we have the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, which is a major flagship pivot of the BRI.

I would like to add that the BRI is probably the most important diplomatic and developmental initiative of the 21st century. It includes today over 150 countries, over 30 organizations, and in the last ten years, since the launch of the BRI, China has invested approximately over little over \$1 trillion in 3000 different projects in different countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America, Europe and the Middle east. So this is huge. And this is an alternative worldview, because it's not just providing trade and investment. China



With Pakistan's participation, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the pivot flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative (Figure: CPEC, 2017).

is today the leading partner of trade for countries, especially in the Global South.

Out of 193 members of the United Nations, 130 have more trade with China than they have with the United States, from Solomon islands to Saudi Arabia, from Panama to Pakistan, and from Azerbaijan to Australia. So this is extremely important. This role and backing up is an institutional mechanism, for example, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank AIIB, which is launched in Beijing. So I think that an alternative worldview is emerging and BRI is leading

that. And this is opposing the hegemony, the domination, the control of Western countries, particularly the United States. And one key element of this engagement is also de-dollarization, because out of 193 members of the United Nations, 68 of them have said that: "We would like to have trade now globally, regionally and bilaterally with different countries with own currencies other than the dollar". So this is a very positive development and this is an outcome of the BRI, of which Pakistan is a key component.

Given the Belt and Road Initiative's significant impact on shaping the dynamics between China and Islamic nations, how does Pakistan position itself within this framework, particularly in relation to shared historical trajectories and development needs?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: Pakistan has had a longstanding relationship with the People's Republic of China, which is also our great northern neighbor. We have a shared border and we were among the first countries in the world that recognized the People's Republic of China after it emerged internationally on the 1 October 1949. And we were the first Muslim country to recognize China in May 1950. And soon after that, we established diplomatic relations at the ambassadorial level. And since 1963, when we signed a boundary agreement with China, we have had a strategic relationship with China, which is an all

weather friendship and which President Xi Jinping has termed, very rightly, as "iron brothers". So, in this regard, Pakistan and China have a close camaraderie based on shared interests, a common worldview which is based on resisting any kind of regional or global hegemony, promoting the five principles of peaceful coexistence, especially non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and respecting each other's sovereignty. And this historical relationship has been cemented through different decades, through different eras, because, irrespective of changes in our two countries and irrespective of changes in the region and irrespective of changes in the world, the relationship remains robust and resilient.

I would like to add that in the current context of China's relationship with the Islamic countries, especially Pakistan, there is a notable international transformation taking place. The global balance of



Mao Zedong and Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, 1974. China and Pakistan have a strategic relationship of friendship under all circumstances, which Xi Jinping calls "iron brothers" (Photo: China Daily, 2021).

economic and political power is shifting from the West to the East and we are seeing the rise, the resurgence of the ancient century, led by the peaceful rise of China. Here I would like to add, since it is the historical context that is being examined, that 90 years ago, the great poet of the east, whom Pakistanis consider is the philosopher of Pakistan, Doctor Muhammad Iqbal. Doctor Iqbal had predicted two things 90 years ago. Number one, that he says: “See the sun rising from the east, and that was his reference to the emergence of the ancient century”. And then he also mentioned the famous couplet of his poem about the rise of China. He said: “Springs of hope are emerging from the Himalayas and the great Chinese nation is rising from slumber and a new world is emerging”. So this was predicted by doctor Mohammad Iqbal 90 years ago. And today, in our lifetime, we are very fortunate to see their dream coming into our reality.

The Important Difference between China and the USA

With China playing a role in mediating significant regional conflicts, such as the resolution of the Saudi-Iran confrontation, how does Pakistan view China’s capacity and effectiveness as a mediator in the Islamic world?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: China has a very important role to play, not just as a global leader, not as a global partner, but also as a great country, which is also a great civilization, that can be a bridge between countries, cultures and continents. And the role that China played in March 2023 to bring about a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is extremely important, because for decades, Iran and Saudi Arabia, two Muslim countries with whom Pakistan has good relations, they were at loggerheads.



Saudi Arabia’s Minister of State Musaad bin Mohammed Al-Aiban (left), Foreign Minister of the People’s Republic of China Wang Yi (middle), Secretary General of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani (right). The role China played in Beijing in March 2023 to bring about a rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia is crucial (Photo: CGTN, 2023).

There was a conflict, there was a confrontation, there was a cleavage between the two. And China brought about this rapprochement, which is historic, and that has been a very positive impact on the regional stability and the Muslim countries.

I also feel that China can play a similar role because China is not a hegemon, China is not a country that tries to be acting like a bully. Unlike some other countries, like the United States, China is basing its relationship as a developing country on the basis of partnerships, shared heritage and history, and a common quest for a better tomorrow. So in this context, whether there are issues like Afghanistan, which China has a border, and China can play a very good role in that. So I hope that China, through its diplomatic clout and economic engagement, can stabilize our region close to Central Asia, close to Türkiye, close to Iran and Pakistan, especially in Afghanistan. And also China can play some role, I would say, in cooperation with other countries to diffuse the Middle east situation, the crisis that is currently there in Gaza, as well as, I think, a very important crisis which is still there in Europe in conflict, which is Ukraine, because China has links with both Kiev and Moscow, China has credibility and China is not engaged in a war mongering role. So China is very well placed to play this kind of mediation role.

How do you assess the importance of China's development cooperation with countries across West Asia and North Africa, and what implications do you believe this holds for the future of Pakistan-China relations?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: Pakistan China relations began in the context of a major global change after the World War II. This was in April 1955 in Bandung in Indonesia. There was the first conference of Asian and African countries hosted by Doctor Sukarno of Indonesia, and this is called the Afro Asian Solidarity Summit. And Pakistan China relations were

cemented because that was the first meeting between leaders of Pakistan, our prime minister and the prime minister of China, then premier Zhou Enlai, that met in Bandung. And the Afro-Asian solidarity spirit permeated that conference and our relationship. And now, in the context of North Africa and the Middle east, when we see two parallel trends, there is the retrenchment of American influence and clout, and there is the concurrent rise of China.

So in that context, China has a very key role to play, because the China role in the region in Middle East or North Africa, or visa vis Pakistan, in Southwest Asia, is neither tactical nor temporary nor transactional. The American approach is very, very transactional. And this linked with a situation that emerges where they need something from other countries, then they reach out for support. Otherwise then they forget about their own friends also. So China has a more strategic perspective, a more enduring and durable perspective, and a perspective that is, as the Chinese say, based on win-win cooperation. In other words, that China gains also and the other countries also gain. So it's mutual and mutuality of interest, especially in trade, in investment, in education, for example, there are 28,000 Pakistani students studying in China. 8000 are doing their PhDs. So that's very positive for Pakistan.

There is an overlap between the CCP's values and socialism and Islamic values

Do you think that there is a contradiction or conflict between the socialist ideology that determines China's regime and Islam? Is Islam anti-communist as preached by Western ideology?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: In my view, there is no contradiction at the ideological level between the role of the Communist Party of China, which espouses Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought,



Nanguan Mosque in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region. "Islam does not believe in a caste system or a class system, neither does Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong's thought." (Photo: CGTN, 2020).

and the Islamic ethos, the religious ethos of Muslim countries. In fact, there are commonalities in lot of values that permeate the societies of China and Pakistan and Muslim countries, because the Muslim countries also feel strongly about family values, about societies being knit together by common values that are not just material. And China too is based on Confucianism. The Chinese culture, the Chinese civilization, the Chinese heritage, which talks of family values, harmony, working together, equality, egalitarianism, these are values of Islam as well, because Islam does not believe in a caste system or a class system, and neither does Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought. And I feel that these are Asian values, these are Eastern values, and these are common values in the global south. And as far as the issues of anti Islam or anti communism are concerned, the United States, I think, has been the biggest violator of human rights in the Muslim countries.

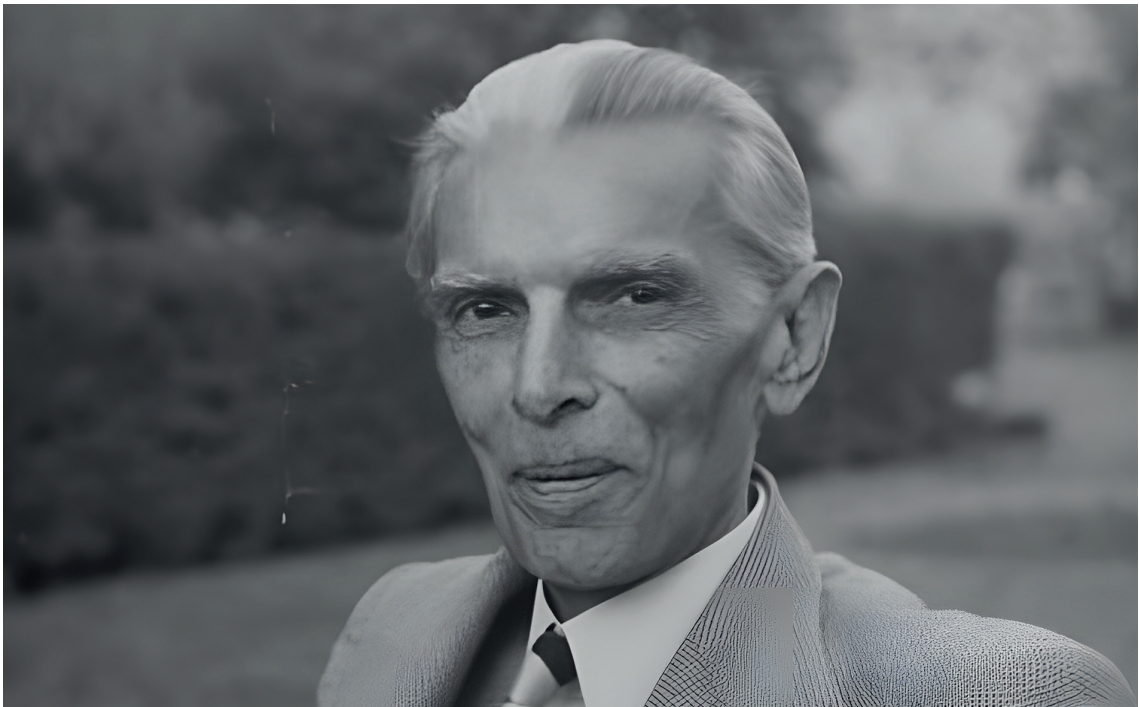
After 9-11, the United States squandered or spent over \$6.5 trillion in the so called war on terror in parts of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya and Somalia, killing over 900,000 people, making over 30 million people homeless or displaced persons or refugees, and throwing over 324,000 bombs, missiles and drones on the Muslim countries. So it is the United States which claims to be a Christian power or they say we are also believers of the same God. But the way they have acted as an imperialist power in most of the Muslim countries, I think that shows that unlike China, which strategic culture is based on peace and harmony, while the US is running a permanent war machine, the war economy that is targeting now in at least the last 20 years, Muslim countries. So we can see the interesting contrast. In my view, there is absolutely no contradiction, no conflict between the Chinese system and worldview and ideology and what the Muslims profess and practise.

Pakistan's Historical and Current Role in the Global South

What do you believe is Pakistan's strategic importance in fostering a peaceful, multipolar world order that supports global cooperation and multilateralism?

Mushahid Hussain Sayed: Pakistan is placed on a very important strategic pivot in the world. Our location in the most strategic part of the world and our role historically has been very important. First of all, Pakistan's historic role, the great leader, the father of the nation of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, had said that Pakistan is the pivot of the world, placed on the frontier where the geopolitics of the

world revolves. And Pakistan's foreign policy said should be based on peace within and peace without. We emerged on the international map on the 14 August 1947 as an independent country. And we were the first to support liberation movements in North Africa. In Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, they are leaders who were fighting the liberation wars against French imperialism, French colonialism, they used to travel on Pakistani diplomatic passports. The Moroccan freedom fighter, Mohammed al Faraj, the Algerian prime minister of the government in exile, Ferhat Abbas, the leader of Tunisia, Habib Burgiba, they all travelled on Pakistan diplomatic passports and we are in United Nations mission was at the beck and call then.



Muhammad Ali Jinnah (December 25, 1876 - September 11, 1948), lawyer, politician, statesman and founder of Pakistan. He is known in Pakistan as the "Great Leader" and "Father of the Nation" (Photo: PID, 2024).

We also supported the liberation struggle in Libya, in Eritrea and we provided arms to the African National Congress of Nelson Mandela and the ZaNu PF, Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front of Robert Mugabe. So we have been in and plus the the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) of Yasser Arafat achieved recognition as the sole legitimate representative of the people of Palestine for the first time in Lahore Islamic summit in 1974. So we have had this track record and I would like to mention that Pakistan is the only non-Arab country that has taken part in two Arab Israeli wars. In 1967, Pakistani pilots were flying for the Jordanian Air Force and we shot down Israeli planes in October 1973 during the Ramazan war, which the Israelis called the Yom Kippur war. Pakistani air force pilots were flying for the Syrian air force and they shot down two Israeli planes. So we have had this track record of supporting liberation movements, supporting the struggles of oppressed peoples.

So Pakistan's role is very key in the coming Asian century. It's all about connectivity. It's all about cooperation. It's all about working together for a better tomorrow with no overlords and no underdogs.

So Pakistan, historically, has that played that role. Now, of course, the cold war is over, things are settling down. What is our role in the current context? In terms of Africa, we are playing a very key role. We are the leaders in United nations peacekeeping operations. And I would like to also mention that I have established the first Pakistani

think tank on Africa. It's called the Pakistan Africa Institute for Development and Research (PAIDAR).

And then in our own region, we are the pivot of regional connectivity. Pakistan is located between South Asia, China, Iran, Afghanistan and the central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. And all these five landlocked countries want to be land linked through the Pakistani port of Gwadar, which has been built by the Chinese and which is part of BRI and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

So our role is now in terms of geo economics, of connectivity through energy economy, ports, pipelines, roads, railways. So this is a very historic role that we are trying to play and we are also trying to promote peace and harmony. We were the first country to support, for example, Sri Lanka, which is a neighbor of Pakistan, when they were fighting terrorism without interfering in the internal affairs, and we gave them full support and they were able to crush the terrorist movement there. And we were the first country to, after 9-11 in the Muslim world, which won the inland war against terrorism through a struggle against indigenous terrorists. So Pakistan has a very clear role, a principal position, and Pakistan maintains an independent foreign policy.

And we are the first Muslim country which has nuclear weapons, which we developed through our own indigenous capability to counter what happened next door in India, because India developed it first and we had to have a matching capability. But we have, of course, shown that we have peaceful intentions. So Pakistan's role is very key in the coming Asian century. It's all about connectivity. It's all about cooperation. It's all about working together for a better tomorrow with no overlords and no underdogs. 🌸