

## PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS IN THE EMERGING GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

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### Abstract

*There are no perpetual friends or foes in the international diplomatic realm. Instead, the ever-changing global dynamics and regional geo-political realities not only forge new alignments but also wash away older animosities. A case in point is the revival in the Pak- Russia relations and its impact on the regional status quo namely, the state of affairs between Pakistan and India. Also, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) now falls well within this context. The present study focuses on the growing ties between Islamabad and Moscow, and the risks and opportunities that may precipitate subsequently. The qualitative and quantitative data is dealt analytically to determine how Pakistan can get the most out of this momentous development.*

**Key words:** CPEC, Pak-Russia relations, Eurasian region, South Asian regional dynamics, Geo-strategic importance of Pakistan,

A state aspires to uphold its interests amidst diplomatic dynamism and the upsurge in Pakistan-Russia relations validates this principle. Historically, however, the deterioration in Pak- US relations in the last decade has brought Islamabad and Moscow on the same page. Since China and India already have deeper ties with Russia, the addition of Pakistan in this equation will surely consolidate Russian influence in South Asia. As in the words of Yuri Fedorov Russia wants to see itself as “an influential centre of a multi-polar world”<sup>1</sup>, hence Pakistan is a part of Russian broader strategy for Central Asian countries.

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<sup>1</sup> Yuri Fedorov, “Russia: ‘New’ Inconsistent Nuclear Thinking and Policy” in Muttiah Alagappa, ed., *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

Russian diplomatic interests in Pakistan have taken a significant leap under President Vladimir Putin. Instability in Afghanistan could spill over into ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia, and since Pakistan is integral to any lasting peace, it is but logical for Kremlin and Islamabad to see eye to eye on regional security. Hence, development of relationship between Moscow and Islamabad will mitigate these challenges.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, this alignment with Pakistan does not lessen Indian significance for Russia. For the Russian Federation, India is still a major regional player. The position of Pakistan in Russian eyes is improving due to its significant strategic location, which makes it a gateway to Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia.<sup>3</sup>

In 2011, President Vladimir Putin enthusiastically backed Pakistan for full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). He also offered technical assistance for the development of Thar Coal Project, power plants in Muzaffargarh and Guddu, and expansion of Karachi Steel Mills.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, thanks to the sizeable Muslim population in Russia, Pakistan supported Russian objectives for joining Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).<sup>5</sup> Another reason for the blossoming of this comradeship has been India's increasingly close ties with Washington, which automatically created warmth between Pakistan and Russia.<sup>6</sup>

### **The beginning**

The birth of Pakistan coincided with the advent of Cold War. Naturally, superpower confrontation pulled the infant nation, strategically located near the Persian Gulf, into its vortex. Nevertheless, although leaning to the West, the political leadership decided to keep a low profile and did not tie the country to any security arrangement. The Soviet Union did not appear enthusiastic about the partition of Indian subcontinent. Its Communist

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<sup>2</sup> Vladimire Moskalenko & Petr Topychkanov, *Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Centre, 2014), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options", *Journal of Political Studies*, Vol. 19, no. 1 (2012): 84.

<sup>5</sup> Nazir Hussain and Quratulain Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings", *Central Asia*, no.72 (June 2015): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings", *IPRI Journal* 13, no.2 (Summer 2013): 73.

ideology failed to impress the Pakistani political elites. Being mindful of local temperament, it deemed Soviet materialism distasteful.<sup>7</sup>

Henceforth, Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the first Governor General of Pakistan did not receive warmth and cooperation from Soviet Union. Although the diplomatic relations between the two countries were established in May, 1948<sup>8</sup> yet Pakistan being a fledgling state, surrounded by various problems, found it incapable of opting for any specific power bloc.

The decisive moment came in Pakistan's foreign relations when Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan visited United States on May 3, 1950, in response to its formal invitation. It may be an unfortunate event on part of Pakistan that Soviet Union's invitation to the Prime Minister for 15<sup>th</sup> August 1949 came before US invitation. But the date coincided with the second anniversary of India's independence thus Pakistan proposed August 17 while the Soviets suggested end of October or early November. In response, Pakistan proposed November 5, 1949. However, the dates were not finalized and despite the best intentions for this opportunity the visit did not materialize in Liaquat Ali Khan's lifetime and thereafter. Since then Pakistan remained an ally to US in the region and non-aligned India chose to be in Russian bloc. The hopes for robust bilateral ties further died with Pakistan decided to join the US backed South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO).<sup>9</sup>

In 1955 Khrushchev undertook his tour of Asia – India, Afghanistan and Burma and openly supported India on the Kashmir issue. However, in March 1956, Khrushchev's close confidante, Anastas Mikoyan visited Pakistan and in the same year a parliamentary delegation of Pakistan led by Mohammad Ayub Khuhro visited Moscow.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Khan Abdul Wali Khan, *Facts are Facts: The Untold Story of India's Partition* (New Delhi: Vikas Publication, 1987), 14.

<sup>8</sup> Nazir Hussain and Quratulain Fatima, *Pak-Russia Relations*: 2.

<sup>9</sup> Sarfraz Khan, and Noor Amin, "An Overview of Pak - Soviet/Russia Relations", *Central Asia*, no.71 (Winter 2012): 3-4, available at [http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue\\_71/001\\_sarfraz.html](http://www.asc-centralasia.edu.pk/Issue_71/001_sarfraz.html); <https://www.dawn.com/news/1020592>.

<sup>10</sup> <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=Yea-DAAAQBAJ&lpg=PA111&ots=mzoncZoxkg&dq=Anastas%20Mikoyan%20invitation%20to%20Pakistani%20leaders%20in%201956&pg>.

Although it was the beginning of contacts between the two but Soviet Union never supported Pakistan on territorial disputes with neighbors due to Pakistan's involvement in anti-Soviet military alliances.

The real impetus to reinforced ties is attributed to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who visited Russia in 1960 as Minister of Fuel Power and Natural Resources and concluded a Fuel and Power Agreement. The USSR provided 120m roubles for a period of 12 years. Along with experts 75% of the amount was provided in the form of equipments, and it was agreed that Pakistani experts would be trained in this field. Many of today's oil fields in Pakistan resulted from the efforts of Soviet geologists.<sup>11</sup>

After the 1965 war between India and Pakistan on Kashmir issue, besides UN efforts, the Soviet leader Aleksey Kosygin managed to bring both the countries to an agreement known as the Tashkent Declaration which was signed by President Ayub Khan and Lal Bahadur Shastri on January 4, 1966.<sup>12</sup>

In late 1970's the USSR and People's Republic of China were in competition for the ideological leadership in their sphere of influence and Kissinger's secret visit to Peking via Pakistan perturbed USSR. The Soviets were of the view that Pakistan had aligned with their enemies – US and China. Therefore, agitated, the USSR openly backed India in assisting the insurgency in East Pakistan. The conflict eventually resulted in the creation of Bangladesh.<sup>13</sup>

Although Russia Pakistan relations have always been transitory, granting loans, technical assistance, boosting trade relations in 1966-67 and launching thermal projects and inauguration of Steel Mills in 1973, were few main initiatives taken by Russia to sustain some sort of normalcy in the relationship.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [www.bhutto.org/1957-1965-speech37.php](http://www.bhutto.org/1957-1965-speech37.php).

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.stimson.org/tashkent-declaration>.

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13117-russias-pakistan-volte-face.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

**Bilateral relations**

The then Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Moscow in 1999. It was the first visit to Russia by a Pakistani head of government since 1974. In 2003 President Musharraf also paid a visit to Moscow. The first visit from any Russian high official took place in 2007 when Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan, 16 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. President Asif Ali Zardari visited Russia in 2011 and several Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) were signed between both states in the areas of energy, agriculture and air services. In 2012 a Russian delegation came to Pakistan and signed three MOUs. They covered the expansion of Pakistan Steel Mills, the energy sector, and the railways department. After that General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, then Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, visited Russia in October 2012 and met several top Russian Army officials and politicians. In this meeting, discussions held on development of defense relationships.<sup>15</sup> After General Kiyani's visit Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov visited Pakistan in October 2012. He held meetings and made important statements on Pakistan-Russia relationship.<sup>16</sup>

In 2013, Russia and Pakistan commenced the strategic dialogues, which provided the institutional framework for their renewed contacts. In April 2013, Russian Air Chief visited Pakistan, followed by three significant milestones in succeeding years. In August 2014, after Air Chief, Russian Naval Chief also visited Pakistan followed by the visit of Russian Defense Minister, Sergey Shoigy in November 2014, the first visit by a Russian Defense Minister to Pakistan in 45 years, which resulted in Defense Cooperation Agreement between both countries.<sup>17</sup> The agreement provides for the exchange of information on politico-military issues; cooperation for promoting international security; intensification of counter-terrorism and arms control activities and sharing experiences in peace-keeping operations. In 2014, Russia also lifted up its arms embargo on Pakistan. Here, it is pertinent to mention that in the year 2014 the US surpassed Russia in its arms sale to India and became the biggest defense partner of India.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Express Tribune, October 4, 2012.

<sup>16</sup> Express Tribune, October 4, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> Dawn, April 2, 2017.

<sup>18</sup> <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com>

In 2015, Russian Army Chief visited Pakistan followed by its Intelligence Head in 2016 to discuss initiation of joint ventures for intelligence and against terrorism. They also signed a technical cooperation accord for arms supplies and cooperation in weapons development. Moreover, in September 2016, troops of Russian Special Forces also visited Pakistan for military exercises.<sup>19</sup> Pakistan and Russia also held joint naval exercises in February 2017. After the joint venture the Russian Deputy Chief of General Staff Colonel General Israkov Sergi Yuryevich, visited Miranshah, the administrative headquarter of North Waziristan Agency and nominated an honorary consul to KPK province, which borders the Afghan province Nangarhar where IS-K has established its headquarter.<sup>20</sup>

During the visit of the then Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif in June 2015, both the countries concluded the \$153 million Mi-35 attack helicopter deal. These helicopters are particularly suited for mountainous terrain and can be deployed “round the clock” in adverse weather conditions.<sup>21</sup>

In April 2018, Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa paid a visit and met Colonel General Olag Salyukov in Moscow. General Salyukov, contrary to US and Indian stance, acknowledged Pakistan’s achievements in the fight against terrorism and contributions to regional peace and stability.<sup>22</sup>

### **Development cooperation**

Relations between the two have been improving, although not with a faster pace, in October 2015 both of them signed a MoU for laying the North-South Gas Pipeline from Karachi to Lahore to connect Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) terminals with a capacity of 12.4 billion cubic meters per year. Russia nominated its state-owned RT Global Resources, a subsidiary of Rostec Corporation for project execution.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, *Renaissance of Pakistan-Russia Relations* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016), 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Dawn*, February 28, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> *The Express Tribune*, April 16, 2018.

<sup>22</sup> *The Express Tribune*, April 25, 2018.

<sup>23</sup> <https://isgs.com.pk/projects/nsgp>; *Dawn*, October 16, 2015.

However, due to US sanctions on some of the Russian firms, Rostec has also come under sanctions; thus, the Chinese companies became partner of the project and completed the \$2bn gas pipeline through the Silk Road Fund. China established the \$44.5 billion Silk Road Fund in 2014 to fund the construction of power plants, rail lines, ports and other infrastructure in countries along the route of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>24</sup>

Moreover, Russia's Gazprom International and Pakistan's Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) in 2017 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Moscow. The MoU is aimed at mutual cooperation, joint ventures and use of state-of-the-art technology that would aid exploration and development in Pakistan. Russia has also shown its interest to invest \$8 billion in Pakistan's energy sector.<sup>25</sup>

Another MoU had been signed between the Russian firms Inter Rao and Himmash Apparat and the KPK Oil and Gas Company (KPOGCL) to set up a medium sized refinery in Kohat district of KPK.<sup>26</sup>

Apart of cooperation in energy sector, the Russian telecom giant, VimpelCom invested \$1 billion by purchasing Mobilink and Warid.<sup>27</sup> Russian Federation is also financing the mega energy project, CASA-1000, providing electricity to Pakistan and Afghanistan through Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>28</sup> On the other hand, Pakistan allowed Moscow to access the Gawadar Port for its exports.

### **Economic and trade relations**

As far as trade relations between Russia and Pakistan are concerned, Pakistan's share in total foreign trade with Russia is not significant, though bilateral trade is gradually gaining momentum, but is not yet considerable. Russia comes at 33<sup>rd</sup> in terms of imports to Pakistan and 28<sup>th</sup> in exports. However, there is an upward trend in last few years.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> *The Express Tribune*, December 20, 2017.

<sup>25</sup> *Daily Times*, April 29, 2018.

<sup>26</sup> *Dawn*, August 8, 2017.

<sup>27</sup> *Daily Times*, April 29, 2018.

<sup>28</sup> [timesofPakistan.pk/business/2012-02-28/russia-to-provide-500m.../52463/](https://timesofPakistan.pk/business/2012-02-28/russia-to-provide-500m.../52463/).

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.globalvillage.com>

In 2012, Pakistan's export to Russia was only \$210 million which comprised of 0.04% of total Russian import. During 2010-2011, Pakistan was the biggest potato exporter to Russia and exported 125,000 tons of potato. Apart from potato, Pakistan also exports orange, vegetables, textiles, leather goods and other fruits to Russia in bulk. The major issues in establishing healthy trade relations are bureaucratic hurdles, unprofessional attitude and low-quality products. Unlike the past, the economic relations between Pakistan and Russia are improving. Now the trade volume has grown and reached \$ 660 m in the first ten months of 2018.<sup>30</sup>

The Russia-Pakistan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, which was created to aid the development of mutual cooperation in the fields of trade and economy, science and technology and education, has been playing a constructive role in this regard. To date, five meetings have been held between the officials of the two countries - the last being held in November 2017, in Moscow, where both sides agreed to deepen cooperation on matters of mutual interest.<sup>31</sup>

During the visit of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Mian Nawaz Sharif to Russia in April 1999 the Intergovernmental Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation was signed. One of the main results of the signed agreement was establishment of the effective institutional mechanism for bilateral interaction – the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.<sup>32</sup>

In its 4th session which was held in Islamabad on November 18-20, 2015, it proved very important in terms of further development of Russia-Pakistan trade and economic ties. This session has also initiated discussion on opening an FTA between Pakistan and Eurasian Economic Commission

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<sup>30</sup> Nazir Hussain & Quratulain Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," *Central Asia*, no.72 (June 2015): 6; *The Express Tribune*, December 29, 2018.

<sup>31</sup> Almas Haider Naqvi & Yasir Masood, "Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernible Trends and Future", *Strategic Studies* vol.37, no.4 (Winter 2017): 30.

<sup>32</sup> <http://issi.pk/issue-brief-on-pakistan-russia-strategic-partnership-new-horizons-for-cooperation/>



(EEC) within the areas of energy exploration, education, power generation, agriculture, drugs control and financial sector.<sup>33</sup>

Within the IGC framework the First Pakistan Russia Investment Forum was held in which over 80 Russian businessmen, officials and experts from various sectors participated. As a result, the prospects of widening the scope of bilateral trade became much more distinct. The IGC's 5th plenary session was held in Moscow on November 30, 2017 which has added pace to dynamic development of economic relations.<sup>34</sup>

Moreover, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and the State Bank of Pakistan have signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Banking Cooperation on January 15, 2018, aimed at promoting cooperation in disciplines of financial systems, financial infrastructure and financial institutions supervision. The development of banking sector will definitely boost bilateral trade.<sup>35</sup>

A visit of the delegation of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan to Moscow and Saint Petersburg in September 2015 discovered new exciting opportunities for business links with Russian counterparts. A follow-up trip of a group of Pakistani businessmen also visited to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, two industrially developed regions of Russia, in 2016 promises to open new vistas for bilateral trade cooperation between the two regions.<sup>36</sup>

The Agreement between the Government of Saint-Petersburg and the Government of Sind on Cooperation in the Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Fields signed on October 23, 2017, is also a sign of enhancement in friendly relations. The Saint-Petersburg – Sind Business Forum was also established.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Almas Haider Naqvi & Yasir Masood.

<sup>34</sup> Speech by Alexey Dedov, Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, December 10, 2018 available at <http://www.dnanews.com.pk/economic-cooperation-russia-pakistan-achievements-challenges/>

<sup>35</sup> *Dawn*, January 16, 2018.

<sup>36</sup> Speech by Alexey Dedov, Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, December 10, 2018 /

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

Pakistan-Russia Business Forum (PRBF) was already working since 2009 and there is chance of phenomenal growth between the two countries and PRBF is playing a pivotal role to encourage partners at both ends. PRBF is the fundamental platform that will promote bilateral relations in trade, social cultural, educational, technical, scientific, industrial, tourism etc. between Pakistan and Russian federation.<sup>38</sup>

There is room to sign a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), which will finally lead to Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries. As both showed their willingness to sign an FTA. After signing FTA, it will be easy for both the countries to have access to each other's market by reducing the duties on items of special interest e.g. Russia can consider in reducing the duties on Pakistan's consumer goods specially textile products, Fruits & Vegetables, rice and sports goods, where as Pakistan can reduce the duties on imports from Russia specially on iron and steel products, agricultural machinery and engineering goods. This will help in reducing the cost of production in Pakistan.<sup>39</sup>

#### **Joint military exercises**

Moscow and Islamabad have enhanced military to military relations. The first Russia-Pakistan Counter-narcotics Exercise was held in October 2014 followed by a second exercise in December 2015. The first ever joint military exercise, Druzhbha (a Russian word meaning “friendship”), was conducted between the two armies from September 24-October 10, 2016 in the Pakistani province of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), a year after the local branch of Islamic State (IS), known as ISK-P after the name of Khorasan Province, unleashed its regional terrorist operations. Despite the strong Indian objection to these exercises due to attack on Uri military camp they proceeded as per schedule.

The second joint exercises were held in 2017, in Russia's north Caucasus republic of Karachayevo Cherkessia, with a focus on counter-terrorism operations, hostage and rescue, cordon and search operations. Earlier, Pakistan Army along with Chinese, Egyptian, Venezuelan and Belarusian armies participated in Russian Army war games 2015 in Russian Far East.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> <https://prbf.org/>

<sup>39</sup> <https://fp.brecorder.com/2017/06/20170612187641/>.

<sup>40</sup> *Dawn*, October 22, 2018.

The third joint military exercise Druzhba III, were held in 2018 in Cherat, KPK and at the National Counter Terrorism Center (NCTC) in Pabbi, KPK, to boost counter-terrorism cooperation to tackle the growing threat of Islamic State (IS) from Afghanistan. In August 2018, Moscow and Islamabad also held the first meeting of Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC) and signed a defense agreement for an unprecedented contract with Islamabad which opens the doors for the very first time for Russian military training of Pakistan army officers.<sup>41</sup> The JMCC is the highest forum of defense collaboration between both the partners.

Russia also participated in the Aman-17 international naval exercise hosted by Pakistan in February 2017. Pakistan Navy has been biennially hosted the multi-national maritime exercise since 2007 and now 6<sup>th</sup> exercise of AMAN series is scheduled in the first quarter of 2019. In Aman 17, held in the waters of Arabian Sea at the Pakistan Naval Base at Karachi Port, the navies from Japan, Turkey, UK, USA, Malaysia, Australia, Maldives, Russia, China, Indonesia and Sri Lanka participated.<sup>42</sup>

### **Afghan turmoil**

Afghanistan was the long standing reason for Russia Pakistan animosity, both were in opposite camps during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Peshawar was the headquarter to supply arms and ammunition and also for the deployment of Taliban, and paradoxically this again is one of the key reasons for their new friendship as despite Pakistan's tremendous support to Coalition Forces US, which is neck deep in its longest war, which has completed 17 years on October 5, 2018 and costing more than \$ 122 billion, is not satisfied with the efforts made by Pakistan for counter terrorism either in Afghanistan or at home. Now, Pakistan, the frontline state against the USSR is working closely with Russian Federation to find a political solution in Afghanistan and curbing the presence of IS-K from Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

Russian concerns for Taliban can only be catered through Pakistan who was the staunch supporter of Taliban and the threat of IS-K can also be tackled with the help of Pakistan because both of them are victims of it. As a matter of fact, Russia has severe security concerns from ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> *Daily Times*, February 10, 2017.

<sup>43</sup> *Khaleej Times*, August 10, 2018.

K), which after recent attacks in Pakistan now threaten to sprawl into Central Asia, the buffer region for Russia in its southern front. Moscow is extremely worried. for increasing Islamic fundamentalism especially after the December 2017 attack in Saint Petersburg which was claimed by IS and the bomber was identified as Kyrgyz national.<sup>44</sup> Undoubtedly, if IS succeed in establishing ground in Afghanistan then through Central Asia, Russia is not far to reach.

Rightly argued by Daniel Markey, a senior professor at Johns Hopkins University that Russia is motivated in developing relations with Pakistan because of two main reasons, first to tackle the problem of Taliban and IS in Afghanistan, second to enervate the US dominion in the region. He said, “The point is that Russia and Pakistan probably have more in common with respect to the war in Afghanistan than the United States has with either — and this is a real turnaround from prior history”.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, another senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Peter Topychkanov said, “Russia is concerned about the long-term presence of the US and its allies in Afghanistan, and therefore it is in Russia’s long-term interests to have an inside view of the situation in Afghanistan”, he added, and Pakistan provides the opportunity.<sup>46</sup>

In this regard both the new friends announced a plan to establish a Commission on Military Cooperation to combat the threat of IS in the region. Although, US is of the view that IS-K is declining from Afghanistan, however, both Pakistan and Russia maintained that after getting a serious blow in Syria and Iraq the IS-K has a vast number of recruits and in this regard both of them criticized US or NATO troops for not handling the situation appropriately.

Pakistan also plays a major role in Russian concerns of combating drug trafficking from Afghanistan. In this regard, “anti drug security belts” have proposed by Russia on all sides of Afghan borders and neighboring states. These belts would prevent the illegal flow of drugs across the Afghan borders. However, this plan can only be successful with equal cooperation of other states. In this regard, Russian Federal Drug Control service started

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<sup>44</sup> <https://southasianvoices.org/pakistan-russia-cooperation-trouble-for-the-united-states/>

<sup>45</sup> *DAWN*, February 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1392060>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

negotiations with Pakistan to extend cooperation in combating drug smuggling and terrorism from Afghanistan.<sup>47</sup>

### Regional scenario

Apart from these strategic interests Russia also wants to reap the economic fruits from Pakistan's basket in the form of becoming a partner in CPEC,<sup>48</sup> and by fulfilling its long yearning desire to reach warm waters of Arabian Sea. The landlocked countries of Central Asia would greatly benefit from this opportunity. Another point of view existed in this regard is the growing Indo-American closeness and cooperation in multiple fields. Since Russia and India shared a cherished history of friendship and cooperation therefore, through Pakistan Russia could also tackle this issue, and hinder further close ties between America and India.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, Pakistan which is strategically significant country due to its vital land and sea routes, nowadays gaining special attention, regionally and internationally especially after CPEC, however, Russian bent is also another aspect for Pakistan's crucial upcoming in international debate. Like Russia, Pakistan also has to meet its ends out of this changing geo-political environment particularly Russian friendship. First it was United States' changed stance towards Pakistan that mainly pushed the latter into Russian bloc, thus Pakistan- Russia growing ties can be seen in this context also. In addition to this aspect, another dimension which pushes Pakistan towards grabbing the Russian opportunity that is the commercial gains, Russia offers Pakistan an improved arms supply, compared to those were providing earlier like Ukraine, Turkey and others.<sup>50</sup> Most importantly

<sup>47</sup> Vladimir Moskalenko & Petr Topychkanov, *Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities* (Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Centre, 2014), 10; Nivedita Das Kundu, "Russia-Pakistan Relations in the Post-Cold War Era", *Russia Beyond*, July 02, 2012, <https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/07/02/russia-pakistan-relations-in-the-post-cold-war-era-16104>

<sup>48</sup> <http://nation.com.pk/international/19-Dec-2016/india-tense-as-russia-supports-cpec>

<sup>49</sup> Tim Craig, "As the US moves closer to India, Pakistan looks to Russia", *The Washington Post*, January 28, 2015, accessed 26 October 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/as-obama-visits-india-pakistan-looks-to-russia-for-military-economic-assistance/2015/01/28/feed988f0-a58a-11e4-a7c2-03d37af98440\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/as-obama-visits-india-pakistan-looks-to-russia-for-military-economic-assistance/2015/01/28/feed988f0-a58a-11e4-a7c2-03d37af98440_story.html).

<sup>50</sup> Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the US", *Strategic Studies*, 38 no. 2 (Summer 2018): 98, available at <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/6-SS-Muhammad-Taimur-Fahad-Khan-No-2-2018.pdf>.

Pakistan is now a member of SCO and to join Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) Pakistan is trying to get support from Russia (as Russia opposed Pakistan's entry to NSG). Becoming a member of these multilateral organizations matters a lot for a "middle-ranking power with limited global and economic clout", like Pakistan.<sup>51</sup> Finally increasing Indo- American close ties is also a cause for Pakistan to choose Russian option, for in the contemporary regional and global geo-politics, Pakistan also needs to search for new friends and allies.

Contemporary South Asia is quite interesting these days, where India, China, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia and US all appearing as intertwined and interconnected with each other in one way or the other. Like for Pakistan, China is considered as 'all weather friend' and 'a brother'.<sup>52</sup> Hence China seems to be like a bridge between Russia and Pakistan, its two close friends. The Pakistan-Russia friendship in this context will be enduring and beneficial for all three. This emerging triangle of Russia-China-Pakistan is going to shake not only the region but the world at large. In this particular context India, the immediate neighbor of Pakistan and the trusted friend of Russia should worry a little! This "triangle"<sup>53</sup> on one side if opens the doors of numerous opportunities for Pakistan beside benefiting the other two then on the other hand, it could also challenge the US hegemony in South Asia, due to the presence of two world powers like China and Russia. This speculation may lead to another, in the form of US-India close ties and collaboration to create internal chaos and anarchy in Pakistan to destroy the supposed triangular axis. In this scenario, the role of Afghanistan is very important for all the stake holders in the region.

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<sup>51</sup> <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/pakistan-finds-friend-russia>

<sup>52</sup> Uma Purushothaman, "The Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement: Should India Worry?", ORF, issue brief no 117, November 2015, 4, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ORFIssueBrief\\_117.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ORFIssueBrief_117.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Rashid Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement", *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 73, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/4-SS\\_Rashid\\_Siddiqi\\_No-2\\_2017.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/4-SS_Rashid_Siddiqi_No-2_2017.pdf)

### **Implications for Kashmir**

According to Russian President Vladimir Putin, “There is no other country in the world with which Russia has such ‘deep cooperation’ in delicate areas including missile technology, and its benefits from cooperation with India”.<sup>54</sup> No doubt the reliable friendly terms between Russia and India shared a relationship of mutual trust and cooperation. Thus, such cordial relations, at the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit at Astana, Kazakhstan, offered to help Pakistan and India in resolving their disputes especially, Kashmir. Islamabad whole heartedly welcomed a UN Security Council’s permanent member’s intention to solve this overdue issue.<sup>55</sup>

However, since the beginning it remained a practice that Moscow largely supported India in United Nations Security Council (UNSC) by constantly vetoing Kashmir resolutions, therefore, the growing closeness between Moscow and Islamabad cast a shadow on Indian hopes in this regard, because seeking China’s favor in UNSC will not be a big deal for Russia, in the mirror of China-Pakistan ‘all weather’ friendship! Indeed, these doubts take ground from the recent changes in regional dynamics and it mainly depends on Russian preferences in South Asia. Similar recent development appeared when for the first time six-nation Speaker’s Conference held in Islamabad in December 2017, where the issuance of joint declaration signed by Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and Turkey exemplifying the changing regional balance in South Asia. The declaration not only supported Pakistan’s point on Kashmir but also emphasized that “for ensuring global and regional peace and stability, the issue of Jammu and Kashmir needs peaceful resolution by Pakistan and India in accordance with UN Security Council resolutions”.<sup>56</sup>

The fresh vibe in Moscow-Islamabad relations therefore created perturbed stimuli in New Delhi. India was always held the view that Kashmir issue should be settled bilaterally between the two countries, while Pakistan wished to welcome other regional and international powers to intervene and resolve this Gordian knot.

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<sup>54</sup> <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1425491/growing-ties-pakistan-will-not-affect-relationship-india-putin/>

<sup>55</sup> *Dawn*, June 16, 2017.

<sup>56</sup> <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/difficult-times-ahead-for-russia-india-ties/>

## Conclusion

In spite of growing relationships between both countries, there are certain factors which try to hamper bilateral relations. Russia is not willing to compromise or antagonize India in strengthening relations with Pakistan. Although, over the past few years, India and US are getting remarkably closer but still Russia does not intend to upset its main South Asian partner.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, it is extending relations with Pakistan very carefully and unwilling to invoke Indian suspicion in this partnership. Therefore, apart from security and strategic cooperation, overall Russian businesses and companies are reluctant to make huge investments in Pakistan. In addition, China's strong presence in Pakistan also plays major role in the cautious approach of Russia.<sup>58</sup>

Nevertheless, it goes without saying "no pains no gains", hence Pakistan should also see the other side of the picture where the think tanks and analysts have pointed out some concerns regarding this fledgling Russo-Pak friendship. First of which is Russian identity that is in the words of Vladimir Baranovsky, the Director of the Center for Situation Analysis, Moscow, "Russia is neither the West nor the East" instead it is 'special'.<sup>59</sup> This gives a kind of 'existential ambivalence' to Russian foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> In particular Russia lacks cohesive and focused South Asia strategy. It is basically an over-arching and general strategy for the region, where economic and political stability would contribute to meet Russian ends in South Asia. Indian factor in this regard cannot be ignored, since India is a trusted ally of Russia, and a huge buyer of military arms exemplifying around \$2 billion worth military apparatus is bought every year from Russia. India is also a partner of Russia in different multilateral organizations and economic forums like SCO, RIC (Russia, India and China), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Hence one thing is certain Russia is not going to compromise its valuable relationship with India in favor of Pakistan.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Vladimir Moskalenko & Petr Topychkanov, *Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities*.

<sup>58</sup> Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, *Renaissance of Pakistan-Russia Relations* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2016), 4.

<sup>59</sup> Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: A Part of Europe or Apart from Europe?" *International Affairs* 76, no. 3 (2000): 443-458.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, 445.

<sup>61</sup> Petr Topychkanov, "Where Does Pakistan fit in Russia's South Asia Strategy?" *Russia & India Report*, Carnegie Moscow Centre-Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Jan



At the same time due to its geographical importance US despite all the displeasure and anger, does not want to leave its old ally and same is the case with Pakistan. For Pakistan's survival it is important for it to be in US camp because all the International financial institutions are under US command and Russia, right now is not in a position to provide hard currency or soft loans.

Thus, question arises "where does Pakistan fits in Russia's South Asia strategy?"<sup>62</sup> Truly stating Pakistan and Russia have very limited opportunities for joint businesses and investments especially in the absolute presence of China in Pakistan's market. It is also important to see that Russia has agreed to provide S-400 air defense system to India, to extend the BrahMos missiles ranges up to 600km<sup>63</sup> which will enable India not only to target Pakistan at any place in the country but to control the air space also. It could also be not ignored that Russian good faith turned towards Pakistan only in the aftermath of Ukrainian crisis. Similarly, lifting arms embargo, and providing military assistance, and supplying military equipments only after when Russia became the second biggest arm supplier to India, after the US,<sup>64</sup> and Indian closeness to the US that resulted in the withdrawal of India from the joint Indo-Russian defense program for the co-development and production of the Sukhoi/HAL Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft. Pakistan should consider these developments in constructing its strategic framework.

Since Russia Pakistan friendship is largely the outcome of US-Pakistan deteriorating relations, hence it is greatly dependent on the future course of Pakistan-US relations. Thus Pakistan should not over-estimate this likely short term friendship with Russia due to above discussed reasons. Since the incentives behind this new relation are global dynamics, security concerns, and above all need of the time. It is still to see a lot about the durability and nature of this Russo-Pak relationship.

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16, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/2017/01/16/where-does-pakistan-fit-in-russia-s-south-asia-strategy-pub-67696>

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

Pakistan should come out from its India centric defensive foreign policy and realize its human potential and its geo-strategic importance. There is hope that Russia as a partner and friend of both the South Asian foes can play its role to solve the long overdue Kashmir problem. Pakistan should develop friendly relations with all the countries on equal footing instead of serving the interests of one against the other. Pakistan should play its cards wisely and should not accept opportunities as a fait accompli.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> *Daily Times*, October 16, 2017.