

# THE TRAJECTORY OF PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: EMERGING CONTOURS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

Misbah Arif\* & Raja Qaiser Ahmed\*\*

## Abstract

*Changes in Russia's foreign policy demonstrate Moscow's effort to integrate itself into the Asia Pacific region. This research analyzes the international, regional and domestic factors responsible for change in Moscow's foreign policy and studies its likely implications for Pakistan. At the international level, this change is an attempt to balance against the American led unipolar world. At the regional level, Russia wants to curb the increasing American influence and is thus actively participating in regional affairs and strengthening ties with the regional states. Increasing engagement with South Asian nations as a part of this strategy would not only affect the regional security complex, but will also impact Pakistan. Pak-Russia emerging entente will provide multi-faceted opportunities to Pakistan in the fields of trade, energy and defense. Pakistan needs to diversify its foreign policy by opening up for Russian engagement based on mutual interests and reciprocity.*

**Keywords:** Russia, Pakistan, Eastward Policy, Mutual Interests

## Introduction

**D**uring the Cold War, there was a constant struggle between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union to maximize their spheres of influence in the South Asian region. With the disintegration of the USSR, both Moscow's influence and interests declined in the region for obvious reasons, but now, with the changing geo-strategic environment, Russia is trying to regain its lost status. Russia is actively engaging with Pakistan

---

\* Misbah Arif is an independent researcher with postgraduate degree in International Relations and visiting faculty at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi.

\*\* Raja Qaiser Ahmed is a lecturer in the School of Politics and International Relations of Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, Pakistan and previous visiting Research Fellow at Columbia University.

and other states to project its influence in the region. These evident changes in the Russian foreign policy towards the South Asian region will have implications for all the regional states. Likewise, the changing regional dynamics are re-shaping the contours of security architecture in South Asia. Additionally, the conflicting interests of the extra-regional actors, primarily the U.S., Russia, and China make South Asia the most volatile, complex, unpredictable and ambiguous region in the world. The research aims to analyze the determinants of Moscow's foreign policy as well as the dynamics of evolving Pak-Russia equation and its impact on Pakistan.

This paper uses the theoretical explanation given by structural realism to understand the said subject. Structural realists argue that balancing is inevitable but its exact timing remains unpredictable. John Mearsheimer is of the view that states should maximize their power in order to attain hegemony since the best way to survive in an anarchic world is to maximize one's power relative to others. According to him, power is not an end in itself, it is a means towards the ultimate end of state-survival. Material capabilities of a state determine its power and its sphere of influence. Sources of power can be many, depending upon the internal capabilities of a state. The list includes military might, socio-economic well-being, scientific and technological prowess, political clout or demographic strengths; different combinations of these attributes might be uniquely contributive to different states' international stature. States, being unaware of other states' foreign policy objectives are bound to strive to acquire certain capabilities to ensure their survival.

John Mearsheimer claims that state policies and capabilities go hand in hand. Thus, Russian capacities will dictate its policies. Russian interests, capabilities and presence in the region is far less than that of the U.S. It will face numerous challenges in order to materialize its policy and achieve the desired objectives. The neo-realists make two claims: first, power is an integral factor in determining end goals of states, and second, a multi-polar global order is more unstable and conflict-ridden than a bi-polar one. Therefore, the re-emergence of a multi-polar world will trigger insecurity and instability at the international level.<sup>1</sup> All these arguments can be applied to the present day geo-political scenario, where states' capabilities define their influence.

### **Russian Foreign Policy: An Overview**

The domestic situation as well as the external geopolitical and geo-economic environment influence policy formulation in Moscow. Russia's desire of regaining its lost status has constantly driven its foreign policy

---

<sup>1</sup> John Mearsheimer, "Back to Future: Instability in Europe after the Cold War," *International Security* 15, no.1 (Summer 1990): 5-56.

since the demise of USSR. Thus, Moscow, along with Beijing, promotes the idea of 'multi-polarity'.

The prevailing strategic environment since the 1990's has affected Russia in many ways: first, it opened avenues for accountability and criticism in the domestic sphere;<sup>2</sup> second, it increased the number of actors taking part in policy formulation process; third, these changing domestic politics and economic concerns influenced the country's priorities, and last but not the least, the administration tried maintaining an intransigent foreign policy orientation so as to cover up for its failures at domestic front. The post-Cold War era saw the end of Soviet totalitarianism and move towards apparently democratic government.

The current foreign policy objectives of Moscow revolve around economic security, defense capabilities and power projection beyond its borders; the relation between domestic capabilities and foreign policy formulation being evident in this case. The internal capabilities have helped Russia translate its words into actions. There are various important domestic and international factors which play a significant role when looking at policy-making process in Russia.

After a long time, Russia has emerged as a challenge to the U.S. and is asserting itself globally. Russia-U.S. relations have undergone transition as the latter's policies are challenging the former's power and prestige. The increasing influence of the U.S. in the countries bordering Russia is viewed as an immediate national security threat by Moscow. Installation of democratic governments in Russia's vicinity aids the West in undermining the increasing Russian sphere of influence. Russia's strengthening ties with the West, China and Iran are all focused on countering the U.S. in Russia's "Near Abroad."<sup>3</sup> The desire to build profitable economic relations and increased sphere of influence has directed Russian involvement towards Asia and the Middle East. Similarly Russian policy towards China has changed over time in line with its global ambitions. Both Russia and China are competing against the U.S. However, despite competition in the political, economic and strategic sphere, Russia and the U.S. need each other to fight against terrorism and to curb nuclear proliferation.

Although Russian foreign policy seems aimed at countering interests of Washington only, but that is not the only force driving Moscow's decisions. The first and foremost objective set by Moscow is to strengthen its economy which is an important determinant of internal capabilities. Russia's economic development is mandatory to ensure

---

<sup>2</sup> Bobo Lo, *Russian Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: Palgrave, 2002): 27.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Blank, "The NATO Russia Partnership: A Marriage of Convenience or a Troubled Relationship?" *Strategic Studies Institute U.S. Army War College*, November 2006.

domestic stability. A growing and prosperous economy is a pre-requisite in today's world for attaining long-standing international prestige.

Structural realists discuss anarchy and self-help and their respective role in shaping international relations and policy formulation. Kenneth Waltz has discussed the structure of the international system and the distribution of capabilities in terms of power. His focus remains on systemic level of analysis rather than state-level or individual-level. In Waltz's world, the structure of the international system dictates state behaviour.<sup>4</sup> Structural realism provided a great analytical tool for discussing bipolarity, role of leadership and patterns of attitude of the two competing blocks during Cold War. Likewise, the offensive-versus-defensive realism debate also contributed in understanding the role of military capabilities in relation to foreign policy. For defensive realists, state survival is the utmost priority whereas for offensive realists maximizing power in an anarchic world is the prime concern.<sup>5</sup>

With disintegration of the United Socialist Soviet Republics (USSR) a number of questions were raised over the validity of the theory of structural realism since it provided no space to explain the internal determinants responsible for disintegration. Since the end of bipolarity, Russia has constantly criticized the unipolar world and is supportive of a multipolar order that promotes equality of all states.<sup>6</sup> Material capabilities dictate the influence of a state. Russia's policy formulation is very complex as it is influenced by Russia's perception of itself as the world's largest country, but constrained by its own limited economic capabilities. Also, the experience of disintegration has taught that issues related to economy and domestic politics must be addressed to have a sustained power-maximization campaign.

Despite Russian decline after the end of Cold war, it has always been viewed as a major International player given its nuclear-weapon-state status, its natural resource potential and it being the world's largest country by landmass. Soon after disintegration, by 1991, Russia revisited its conception of national interests and re-adjusted its policies vis-à-vis other states since it now faced newer kinds of political, economic and societal challenges. Russia enjoyed a limited international influence amid the evolving global distribution of power due to decline of its capabilities;

---

<sup>4</sup> Kenneth Waltz, "Neorealism: Confusion and Criticism," *Journal of Politics & Society* XV, 2-5, (2004), [http://archive.helvidius.org/2004/2004\\_Waltz.pdf](http://archive.helvidius.org/2004/2004_Waltz.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, "Security Seeking under Anarchy: Defensive Realism Revisited," *International Security* 25, no. 3 (Winter 2000/01), 128-130. Doi:10.1162/016228800560543

<sup>6</sup> Liu Ying, "The Discourse and Possibility of Forming China-Russia Alliance and Its Challenge to the Regional Order in the Asia Pacific," The International Studies Association, June 2016, <http://web.isanet.org/Web/Conferences/AP%20Hong%20Kong%202016/Archive/a5c538f0-9c29-4a50-929c-22899464f6e4.pdf>

the US outnumbered Russia in terms of political, economic and strategic assets and potential.

### **Eastward Hedging: New Dispensation of the Russian Policy**

In 2010, Russian president Vladimir Putin announced his policy of “Turn to the East” in order to increase interaction with Asian states in economic, military and political domains.<sup>7</sup> This was a year ahead of the U.S.’ “Rebalancing” initiative. Many perceived Russia’s realignment with the Asia Pacific as a tactical move. Russian foreign policy is mainly focused on efforts to materialize a multi-polar world against the existing American-led unipolar order. In this regard, Putin’s 2007 speech in Munich, 2008 war with Georgia, the Syrian crisis, the Crimean annexation, and growing strategic ties with China offer a few proximate manifestations of the changing policy.<sup>8</sup> Enlargement of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and interests of the West in the southern republics of the former USSR acted as catalysts for Russia’s reorientation. It is not a sudden change in policy; it was initially proposed back in 1995 when the Defense Minister of Russia, Pavel Grachev, stated that it was obvious for NATO’s eastward encroachment to automatically result in Russia’s eastward expansion in search of new allies.<sup>9</sup>

Geopolitics and the global strategic environment, especially events like the Ukrainian crisis have become hallmarks in the implementation of this policy. President Putin, in his 2013 national address proposed that the resources of a state and its private businesses should be devoted towards the progress of the state and achievement of its desired goals. He highlighted the development of Siberia and the Far East as the most urgent tasks to be accomplished in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> Similar statements were made by the Prime Minister in 2014 to the effect that economic links with the Asia Pacific region are useful in an environment where Russia is facing difficulties in other markets.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Ian Storey, “What Russia’s ‘Turn to the East’ Means for Southeast Asia,” *Perspective*, no. 67, Singapore, December 3, 2015.

[https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2015\\_67.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2015_67.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Alexander Korolev, “Russia’s New Pivot to Asia: The Emergence of a new Geopolitics,” *Asia Pacific Memo*, October 8, 2015, <http://www.asiapacificmemo.ca/russias-new-pivot>

<sup>9</sup> ITAR-TASS, Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty, November 22, 1995, <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1141056.html>

<sup>10</sup> Poslaniye , Address of the President to the Federal Assembly,” December 12, 2013 news.kremlin.ru/transcripts/19825.

<sup>11</sup> Sovesshchaniye, Meeting on the Development of Cooperation with the Countries of the Asia-Pacific Region,” May 12, 2014, [government.ru/news/12293](http://government.ru/news/12293).

Today, Russia's military presence in Asia is at an all-time high since the end of Cold War. This is not the first time Russia has turned towards the East; it previously made such foreign policy changes with changing geopolitics. Leaders like Gorbachev highlighted the significance of developing relations with China in particular and other states in general. The rationale behind this shift in Moscow's policy towards the East is evident: Moscow wants to regain its lost status. Like the U.S. and other countries, Moscow is also of the view that a major global shift from the West to the East is inevitable due to the presence and interests of great powers in this region. Russia is focusing on projecting its influence beyond its border and bridge the gap between its own policies towards Asia and Europe.

There are a number of triggers behind the current policy such as: Putin's rejection of partnership with the West, the 2008 global financial crisis, political and social underdevelopment in the Russian Far East (RFE), opening of new zones of exploration, and the general belief in the 21<sup>st</sup> century being the 'Asian century' or the 'Pacific century'.<sup>12</sup> All these factors were further exacerbated by the Ukrainian crisis. It is generally believed in Russia that problems can be easily resolved through rational policymaking by the state. Russians believe that this policy will serve Russia's national interests through discovering new opportunities in Asia and avenues for development. Moscow and Beijing are also enjoying a good relationship and cooperating in economic and political spheres.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century political landscape offers a new image of Moscow as a Euro-Pacific country, not only as a Eurasian or European one.<sup>13</sup> The geographical location of Russia makes it a Eurasian country but its active political participation in affairs of the Pacific region makes it a Euro-Pacific power. Russia is a resource-rich country, having the largest natural gas reserves. Its significant coal and oil reserves are main contributors to exports and constitute an estimated 24 percent of Russian Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>14</sup> Numerous Asian countries import oil, gas and defense equipment from Russia, including New Delhi, Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul, and Moscow intends to pull up its traded volume with the Asia Pacific region. Russia is also a chief arms exporter to many countries, especially

---

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Fortescue, "Russia's 'Turn to the East': a Study in Policy Making," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 32, no. 5 (June 2015):1-32. doi: 10.1080/1060586X.2015.105175.

<sup>13</sup> "Going East: Russia's Asia-Pacific Strategy, Russia in Global Affairs," Report by the Russian National Committee of the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific, December 25, 2010, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Going-East-Russias-Asia-Pacific-Strategy-15081>.

<sup>14</sup> Masaaki Kuboniwa, Shinichiro Tabata and Nataliya Ustinova, "How Large is the Oil and Gas Sector of Russia?" Research Report, *Slavic Euroasia Studies* Soppero, Japan no. 11, (2006), [http://133.50.171.227/coe21/publish/no11\\_ses/contents.html](http://133.50.171.227/coe21/publish/no11_ses/contents.html).

China<sup>15</sup> and is expanding its arms sales to Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia in the Asia Pacific.<sup>16</sup>

Since 1996, Russian foreign policy has been quite diverse. Many Asian players, including China, Japan, India, Pakistan, and members states of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), have provided a conducive environment for achieving Russian objectives. Russia, being a Eurasian power, must pursue a multi-vector approach in foreign relations and play a vital role in both Western and Eastern affairs if it wishes to secure its stature as a strategic great power.<sup>17</sup> So, in addition to forwarding the political rhetoric of a multi-polar world, Russia needs to act proactively in the eastern hemisphere.<sup>18</sup> China and Russia, being important regional players, also share same concerns regarding this uni-polar world and U.S. dominance.

The emergence of regionalism and the current regional architecture of Asia-Pacific provided Moscow a platform to get into regional organizations along with other key players. The emergence of regional organizations such as Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) limit states' action by enmeshing them into institutionalized codes of conduct given by multilateral regional-security and regional-economic organizations.<sup>19</sup> As a consequence, bilateral relations of Russia with both China and India have dramatically strengthened. China and Russia established Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 which has constantly expanded since then.

In 2014, amid the changing geo-political environment, Russia devised new set of strategies in the aftermath of imposition of economic sanctions. Policy changes were designed to achieve domestic and foreign policy objectives. It started finding opportunities/foreign investors for the development of the Russian Far East (RFE) and Eastern Siberia where the pace of development had been slow because of the demographic imbalances between Russia's east and west. Rising tensions between the West and Russia have made the latter vie for economic integration with nearby Asian economies.

Prior to 2014, the mainstay of Moscow's policy were the former Soviet states and Western countries. Afterwards, Russia started looking for new energy markets in its east. China, being the fastest growing energy

---

<sup>15</sup> "Facts and Details," China, <http://factsanddetails.com/china.php?itemid=286&catid=8&subcatid=52>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> "Russia's New Foreign Policy Concept: Key Aspects," *NewTimes.az*, March 12, 2013, at <http://newtimes.az/en/politics/1465/#.UWJFraLimVN>

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Ambrosio, *Challenging America's global preeminence: Russia's quest for multi-polarity*, (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing, 2005):100-101

<sup>19</sup> Paradorn Rangsimaporn, "Russian Perceptions and Policies in a Multipolar East Asia under Yeltsin and Putin," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 9, (2009): 209.

market appeared a great opportunity that Russia was bent upon utilizing to pursue to new-set agenda of becoming an integral player in Asian politics by means of expanding trading relations and economic interdependencies. This was a need too, since major Russian oil and gas companies like Rosneft and Gazprom were having a tough time facing economic sanctions. They were looking for new opportunities and rising Asia Pacific economies, surrounded by great-power politics, presented one.

Russia's tilt towards the East is aimed at cutting down its economic dependence on the West. Since coming to office in 2012, President Vladimir Putin's policies in Asia have largely remained China centric. Many see Sino-Russia cooperation as formation of a new revisionist axis trying to target the West's supremacy at all fronts.<sup>20</sup> However, Russia, for avoiding the label of a China-dependent state started looking for engagement alternatives in Asia for putting its natural resources, energy, technological and military potentials to best use.

### **Pakistan-Russia Relations: A Historical Perspective**

Pak-Russia relations have gone through many ups and downs, lack of trust being a major factor in having cold relations. While Pakistan moved into Western camp, Russia cultivated ties with Pakistan's declared rival i.e. India. For this reason, Russia's changing policy towards Pakistan is being viewed as a new beginning for both states. Pakistan, due to its advantageous geostrategic location, nuclear arsenal, and demographic strength appears an appropriate option for Russia in an effort to diversify its foreign policy.

The 2014 Defence Cooperation Agreement between both states is regarded as a "milestone" in their relationship.<sup>21</sup> The document called for Pak-Russia cooperation in promoting international security, curbing terrorism, and exchanging information on politico-military issues, among other guidelines. Russia has provided around U.S. \$1 billion to Pakistan for energy projects; arms embargo has been lifted and Mi35 attack helicopters have been sold to Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> These initiatives indicate that both states are willing to come closer to each other keeping in view the changing geopolitical and geostrategic realities.

The relationship between the two countries has gone through

---

<sup>20</sup> Dimitri K. Simes, "How Obama Is Driving Russia and China Together," *National Interest*, June 24, 2014, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-obama-driving-russia-china-together-10735>.

<sup>21</sup> Sudha Ramachandran, "New Era in Russia Pakistan relations," *The Diplomat*, December 3, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/new-era-in-russia-pakistan-relations/>

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

tough times because of misinterpretations.<sup>23</sup> Policy differences have always proven to be a major hurdle in cooperation since Islamabad joined the anti-Soviet, Western club during the Cold War. Another reason for cold relations, was a consequence of the first. Moscow developed a close equation with India and became its major arms supplier; given that Pakistan's foreign policy was India-centric, this made Pakistan's security dilemma even more acute – hence the ingrained mistrust in Pakistan-Russia (USSR) equation.

## Changing Geopolitical Scenario and Imperatives of Cooperation

The two counterparts, i.e. Russia and Pakistan have different rationales for this change in policy, even though both have common goal of diversifying their foreign policies. Russia is seeking an enlarged sphere of influence and Pakistan is seeking alternatives for fulfilling its rising economic and energy sector needs. That said, there are other factors also playing a part in strengthening bilateral ties.

Historically, South Asia has been a complex region because of its inherent and never ending insecurities. It is a region of prime importance and concern due to the presence of two nuclear rivals, proximity to Afghanistan, the rising influence of China, warm-water ports, presence of the U.S., and much more. Nuclearization of India and Pakistan brought more complexity to a region having other big spoilers such as: protracted Kashmir dispute, repeated episodes of Pakistan-India military stand-offs, and rising menace of terrorism in the region.

U.S. and China have played a vital role in South Asian politics, each by supporting one of the two main rivals. India claims that its military capabilities are China-centric, while Pakistan's defensive measures are India-centric. Unfortunately, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been largely unproductive in promoting a regional approach; South Asia remains the least integrated region despite having so much in common – thanks to extra-regional states' interventions for adding to this complexity.

Afghanistan, which is a gate-way to energy-rich Central Asian Republics (CARs), is a country where interests of the regional and great powers converge. Instability in Afghanistan is counter-productive since it spills-over to CARs, and from there has a potential to spill-over to other neighbouring states. Given this fear, Russia has realized the geopolitical significance of Pakistan in stabilizing Afghanistan<sup>24</sup>, which is a vital

---

<sup>23</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 79.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia's Quite Rapprochement with Pakistan," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 9, no. 107 (June 6, 2012), [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39462&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39462&no_cache=1).

requirement for bringing stability to the entire region and to in the adjoining areas. Islamabad is key to settlement in Afghanistan as many of the extremists have hide-outs and safe-havens close to Pakistan's border regions where Pakistan army has access; it has conducted successful operations to clear-out the area of these restless elements. Thus, Russia finds a common ground with Pakistan in bringing stability in Kabul.

## Politics of Energy and Bilateralism

Russia is the largest producer of oil and gas in the world.<sup>25</sup> Pakistan seeks Russian investment in the energy sector for meeting the domestic energy needs. The Russian giants like Rosneft and Gazprom can greatly help in developing Pakistan's oil and gas potential. Russia has offered Pakistan the export of 5000 MW electricity through Kyrgyzstan-Afghanistan route<sup>26</sup> that will fulfill its energy needs to some extent.

The Gwadar Port has great economic significance and holds a special position for Moscow. Gazprom is expected to join the energy grid of Asia; proposals to link Russia and CARs to Gwadar through a north-south energy corridor already exist.<sup>27</sup> This sounds attractive for Pakistan too as it will connect Pakistan with China, Russia and the Central Asia. Russia will also get long-sought access to sea transit routes for trade. Russia is also interested in Central Asian and South Asian (CASA) power project and Thar Coalfield Project for promoting trade in electricity between the two regions.

Russia is also willing to invest in Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants in Pakistan and the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAPI) gas project.<sup>28</sup> TAPI is a 1,640 km long gas pipeline – with an estimated cost of \$7.5 billion, it has been delayed due to a constant tussle between the U.S., Russia and other members. TAPI is estimated to bring 3.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per day from Turkmenistan to Pakistan.<sup>29</sup> Russia is also interested in the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project as it proposed Gazprom to take part in this project and Pakistan welcomed the offer. According to one source, many other Russian companies like Techno prom

<sup>25</sup> Energy Information Administration, Data includes crude oil, lease condensate, natural gas plant liquids, and refinery processing gain, February 11, 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=22392>.

<sup>26</sup> "Russia Offers Pakistan for Exporting 5000MW Electricity," *Dawn*, September 20, 2013, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1044116>.

<sup>27</sup> Farooq Hameed Khan, "Pakistan Russia: Can Old Rivals be Strategic Partners?" *News*, September 10, 2012, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-17390-Pakistan-Russia-can-old-rivals-be-strategic-partners>.

<sup>28</sup> "From Chicago to Shangre La and Beijing", *Politact*, June 4, 2012. <http://politact.com/analysis-of-perception-and-perspective/from-chicago-to-shangri-la-and-beijing.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Ramtanu Maitra, "Improved Pakistan Russia Relations A Necessity for Stability in Eurasia," *EIR* February 24, 2012.

export, Rostec Global Resources, Rushydro International, Stochinsky Institute of Mining etc. have also shown interest in engaging with Pakistan.”<sup>30</sup>

Previously, Russia supported Pakistan’s Oil and Gas Development Company Limited, which was authorized for oil and gas exploration. Now Russia’s Magnitogorsk Iron and Steel factory is also interested in increasing production capacity of Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) from one million to three million tons of production per year.<sup>31</sup> Russian companies can be a great help in purification of gas, modernization of oil and gas infrastructure and building various generating units in Pakistan like Tarbela and Jamshoro.

The first strategic dialogue between Pakistan and Russia was held in 2013.<sup>32</sup> The dialogue laid down an institutional framework for closer bilateral ties in almost all sectors including politics, economy and defense, among others. On 21<sup>st</sup> October, 2014, the second round of strategic dialogue was held in Pakistan to enhance bilateral collaboration in various fields. Later, on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, Defense Ministers of both states signed an agreement to expand strategic ties.

Russian Defense Minister, during defense expo IDEAS 2014, appreciated the efforts of Pakistan armed forces in combating terrorism. In July 2015, General Raheel Sharif was welcomed with a guard of honor at a meeting with Russian military leadership; this was the second time any Pakistani Chief of Army Staff (COAS) had visited Russia. In 2015, Pakistan and Russia inked a defense deal including sale of four Mi 35 ‘Hind E’ attack helicopters. Pakistan also signed a deal to import Klimov RD-93 engines for the JF-17 Thunder aircrafts – the engines previously came through China.<sup>33</sup>

Pakistan is also looking forward to the sale of the Sukhoi Su35 jet from Russia that would augment Pakistan’s capability to conduct maritime guards and penetrate into enemy’s area. Russia’s increasing bilateral defense cooperation with Pakistan might have implications for the decades old Russo-Indian alliance. Pakistan is also looking forward to purchase of the Yak-130 combat trainer aircrafts.

A strategic alliance between Beijing and Moscow is also developing for regional peace and stability. An emerging troika will bring Beijing and Moscow even closer, only to add to Pakistan’s opportunities.

---

<sup>30</sup> “Russian Bank Offers \$1bn Credit Line to Pakistan,” *Dawn*, November 29, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1147615>

<sup>31</sup> “Russia’s Revival : Opportunities and Limitations for Pakistan,” IPRI, February 4, 2016, <http://www.ipripak.org/russias-revival-opportunities-and-limitations-for-pakistan/>

<sup>32</sup> Arif Rafiq, “Pakistan: Russia's New Best Friend?” *National Interest*, September 27, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/pakistan-russias-new-best-friend-13945?page=3>.

<sup>33</sup> Arif Rafiq, “Pakistan: Russia's New Best Friend?” *National Interest*.

## Pakistan's Foreign Policy: From Anachronism to Multilateralism

The world is moving beyond the unipolar moment towards bipolarity and multi-polarity and so is Pakistan.<sup>34</sup> Rise of India and China in Asia and strengthening of ties between China and Russia is bound to challenge the U.S. dominance in the region.<sup>35</sup>

In line with the geostrategic realities, Pakistan is bent upon diversifying its foreign policy options instead of restricting itself to a few; maintaining favorable ties with other nations will benefit Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> The ongoing tensions between Islamabad and Washington have forced Pakistan to look for options available. Incidents like the Osama Bin Laden operation in Abbottabad, Salala check post incident, and use of drones in Pakistan have made many believe that American hegemony is nearing its end and Islamabad should look elsewhere for cutting down its dependence on the US.<sup>37</sup> In 2009, Russia's state television blamed Washington of trying to destabilize Islamabad so as to blight Pakistan's historical ally, Beijing.<sup>38</sup>

## Emerging Contours and Future Prospects for Pak-Russia Collaboration

The changes taking place at the regional level, importantly the deepening India-U.S. ties, are alarming for Pakistan. Pakistan's security policies have always been India-centric because of historical animosity and un-ending strategic competition between the two. Cementing of Indo-U.S. ties has negatively affected Pak-U.S. relations, which gives an apparent upper-hand to India in Pak-India strategic equation.

In the given context, the contours of emerging Pak-Russia relations can be based on energy and trade cooperation. Pakistan can try to make Russia and the CARs part of a cooperative and interdependent equation by linking them up via TAPI with the South Asian states. These initiatives are economically practicable and can help in oil and gas explorations, construction of floating LNG terminals, North South gas pipeline from Gwadar to Nawabshah and finally modernization of oil and gas groundwork.

---

<sup>34</sup> Rajeswari Pillai Rajagopalan, *Clashing Titans: Military Strategy and Insecurity among Asian Great Powers*, Observer Research Foundation, (New Delhi: 2012)

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, "The Wary Chinese-Russian Partnership," *International Herald Tribune*, July 12, 2013: 6.

<sup>36</sup> Tim Craig, "Pakistan is Reaching out to Russia," *Guardian*, February 4, 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/03/pakistan-russia-us-obama-india>.

<sup>37</sup> Arif Rafiq, "Pakistan: Russia's New Best Friend?"

<sup>38</sup> Rossiya TV, May 13, 2009.

Russia is interested in joining Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in the CASA-1000 energy project, providing Afghanistan and Pakistan cheap electricity.<sup>39</sup> Kazakhstan is the biggest Central Asian Republic, the largest repository of oil and gas among CARs and thus holds a significant position in regional politics. The competing goals of China, U.S. and Russia in the region are bound to benefit Kazakhstan, but what is important is Pakistan aligning its benefit to the dividends that would accrue to Kazakhstan because of China and Russia's investment in Kazakh oil and gas supplies.<sup>40</sup> On 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2016, Ex-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif inaugurated a \$1 billion project, to be completed in 2018, aimed at procuring electricity from Central Asia to lessen Pakistan's energy shortage<sup>41</sup> and connecting Central and South Asia in the process. Pakistan is an energy-scarce country and faces multiple challenges as a consequence. Russia, with all its competencies and knowledge, can help Pakistan in diversifying paths to energy generation.

Although Pak-Russia nuclear cooperation seems farfetched now but it might be possible in future. Civil nuclear cooperation will not only strengthen bilateral ties but will also help Pakistan meet its basic needs by enabling it to formulate long-term plans for utilizing nuclear energy for civilian purposes. Ironically, in 2008, India was granted a waiver by the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for participating in civil nuclear trade with advanced countries without meeting certain set criteria.<sup>42</sup> Contrarily, Pakistan, possessing the credentials same as India, was given no such waiver. Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Ambassador Alexey Dedov, stated that he has no doubts or objections when it comes to Pakistan's case of membership for the NSG.

Furthermore, Russia wishes to benefit from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and in this regard, can contribute in bringing stability to Pakistan in many ways as discussed above.<sup>43</sup> CPEC has raised a number of concerns in India, making New Delhi anxious about various direct and indirect consequences of growing China-Pakistan nexus for

---

<sup>39</sup> Arif Rafiq, "Pakistan: Russia's New Best Friend?"

<sup>40</sup> "Regional Geo-strategic Challenges and Opportunities for China-Pakistan Cooperation," China-Pakistan Joint Think Thank, *Working Paper*, May 2013, : 13.

<sup>41</sup> "P M Nawaz, Central Asia Leaders Launch CASA1000 Project in Tajikistan," *Express Tribune*, May 12, 2016, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1102022/casa-1000-project-launched/>.

<sup>42</sup> Vladimir Moskalenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, (May, 2014): 13.

<sup>43</sup> Shaukat Qadir, "Russia Warms to Pakistan as Opportunity Knocks all over Asia," *The National*, September 20, 2015, <http://www.thenational.ae/opinion/comment/russia-warms-to-pakistan-asopportunity-knocks-all-over-asia>.

India. Now that its long-term partner Russia also seems interested in CPEC and has already enhanced engagement with China, India's concerns have multiplied. Energy projects and deals with Russian companies would increase oil supply to China and reinforce the Sino-Russia bond;<sup>44</sup> this dovetails with Chinese desire to create a front for checking US influence in areas like South China Sea.

Since 2014, Russia started to engage with Pakistan in defense and security matters. Islamabad has already acquired four MI-35M attack helicopters with the number expected to expand to twenty very soon. Kremlin went forward with the deal despite India's itching and argued that these would be used in a campaign against terrorism which is a common threat to regional and international security. Russia also supplied Pakistan several M17 helicopters back in 2002. It was unveiled in 2016 that Islamabad and Moscow were working on sales of helicopters, air defense systems and modernized tanks.<sup>45</sup> Pakistan is looking forward to increase ties with Russia in all spheres, especially regional security and counter-terrorism. Pakistan is thinking of replacing the US-made AH-1 Cobra Gunships with superior Russian gunships as the former are expensive to maintain in ongoing anti-Taliban operation while the latter are cost-effective.<sup>46</sup>

In 2013, the Russian Air Force Chief visited Pakistan. The same year Pakistan's naval ship PNS Aslat made its first port call to Moscow while PNS Rahnaward made two port calls to Russia. In April 2014, Russian naval unit of the pacific fleet made a port call to Pakistan. Russia and Pakistan also conducted a military exercise in 2016.

In 2001, Pakistan and Russia also cooperated in outer space exploration and Pakistan's telecommunication satellite, Al Badr, was launched by a Russian space vehicle.<sup>47</sup> Pakistan and Russia can cooperate further in this field as both states jointly oppose space weaponization. In this context, Russia and China came up with a new draft of a treaty on Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space (PAROS) in 2014, aiming at non-placement of weapons in outer space. Pakistan, along with China and Russia, welcomed this initiative at the Conference of Disarmament (CD).<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> "Pakistan Interested in Russian Air Defense System, Advanced Tanks," *Nation*, April 26, 2016, <http://nation.com.pk/national/28-Apr-2016/pakistan-interested-in-russian-air-defence-system-advanced-tanks>

<sup>46</sup> Naveed Ahmed, "Russia's Pakistan Volte Face, The Central Asia Caucasus," *CACI Analyst*, January 7, 2015, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13117-russias-pakistan-volte-face.html>

<sup>47</sup> Rouben Azizian and Peter Vasileff, "Russia and Pakistan: The Difficult Path to Rapprochement," *Asian Affairs* 30, no.1 (Spring 2003):48.

<sup>48</sup> "Proposed Prevention of An Arms Race in Space Treaty," *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, <http://www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/proposed-prevention-arms-race-space-paros-treaty/> (accessed date May 15, 2016)

Pakistan's position on the issue was further clarified as the Pakistani delegation reiterated its support for an effective mechanism, and its willingness to take any steps to deal with space weaponization in order to ensure global peace and security.<sup>49</sup> PAROS needs to materialize timely because otherwise, it would be problematic to stop states from following suit if anyone acts in defiance. Russia and Pakistan also took part in the Joint Consultative Group on Strategic Stability.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The regional political dynamics offer ample avenues for Pak-Russia cooperation in all aspects including economic, societal, cultural and strategic. Pakistan is in need to diversify its policy options to secure itself amidst the changing strategic scenarios. Engagement with and assistance from Russia is significant for dealing with emerging challenges, including – but not limited to – the fear of economic meltdown and foreign efforts promoting disintegrative tendencies, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan.

As indicated in this research, there are a number of avenues that can be exploited for deepening Pak-Russia engagement. Certain recommendations are being proposed in this regard, which might act as a considerable input for policy-makers dealing with the matter at hand.

First and foremost, mutual and shared benefits must be the centrepiece of this engagement instead of harming other entities. It must also be understood that engaging Russia to diversify policy options is not synonymous to compromising ties with old partners, since that would run counter-productive to the very goal. Secondly, in order to have a long-standing engagement, the two sides must act politically mature so as to understand the other's constraints at any given time. Only then small distortions, such as cancellation or delay of planned official visits would be appropriately dealt with. Third, the principle of un-called-for interference in other's internal affairs must not be forgotten for having a sustained partnership. Talking of the avenues of cooperation, Afghanistan appears to be a good starting point of interest for both states. Pakistan and Russia can work together by jointly devising an effective strategy to defeat extremism and militancy in Afghanistan. This is the only path that would lead to peace and stability in the country. Pakistan needs to get Russia interested in its market potential by showcasing the opportunities that lie within, if it wishes to engage Russia economically. This however, must not be done at the expense of other significant historic partners, including both the US and China. Pakistan offers a big market for selling Russian oil and gas

---

<sup>49</sup> "Pakistan Calls for Boosting Efforts to Prevent Outer Space Weaponization," *Samaa TV*, October 25, 2015, <http://www.samaa.tv/pakistan/2015/10/pakistan-calls-for-boosting-efforts-to-prevent-outer-space-weaponization/>

resources; therefore, continued energy cooperation shall bring mutual benefits to both. Additionally, Russia can be of great help to Pakistan for improving domestic industrial capacity which it badly requires. Though Russia is not amongst the most developed world economies, it is far ahead of Pakistan and had been a great power in the past – its assistance to Pakistan in setting up traditional and basic industrial infrastructure can have a tremendous effect. Russian help can be sought in matters of socio-economic development and societal security such as education and public health sectors, fighting infectious diseases and raising nutritional profile of population; particularly the underprivileged areas of interior Sindh, Baluchistan and KPK must be focused.

Defense and space cooperation appears to be a major area of mutual interest, where Pakistan must seek Russian collaboration. Moreover, Russian help can be taken for connecting the Gwadar Port with national railway lines so as to reduce the time and cost of transporting heavy goods from South to Central Asia. Moreover, deepening state to state relations demand a greater degree of civil society interaction between the two, since stronger inter-governmental ties would only sustain on the basis of stronger people-to-people contacts.

Pakistan needs to be aware of the dividends of having a trilateral China-Pakistan-Russia axis, which can help in bringing closer South, Central and East Asia, in the best interests of the three partners and the regions at large. For that, Pakistan should continue to strive for getting China and Russia included as full members in SAARC, which would also alter the organization's fate.

For all these strategies and plans to bear fruit, Pakistan first needs to put its own house in order: domestic peace and harmony is of utmost importance. Only then, Pakistan would be able to develop and execute its own independent world view based on its specific identity, national interests and strategic values. Russia and Pakistan must utilize their membership in various international and multilateral fora to advance their mutual interests. Pakistan's membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provides it a great chance to enhance ties, both at governmental and people-to-people levels. Pakistan needs to act smart in SCO to garner Russian support for reducing if not resolving India-Pakistan tensions which have cost regional peace and stability so far.

