

# Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux: From Estrangement to Pragmatism

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## Abstract

Pakistan-Russia relations have a complex history of divergences, contradictions and ambiguities that heightened during the Cold War and subsequent era of Afghan *Jihad*. However, the gradual rapprochement that paved the way for institutionalised engagement started after Pakistan joined the war against terrorism. Based on secondary review of academic and online sources, this article explores how relations between the two countries evolved from estrangement to institutional engagement, with a special focus on why this relationship is significant for both. Economic, energy, defence, counterterrorism, and socio-cultural domains are the important variables that are discussed. Given existing geopolitical compulsions like Moscow’s quest for playing a decisive role in Afghanistan’s security calculus; Pakistan’s pursuit for coming out of the United States’ straitjacket and finding alternative regional partners offer the reasons, challenges and outlook in shaping prospective ties. It is argued that Pakistan-Russia ties are likely to improve in the future, especially in terms of economic, defence and counterterrorism cooperation.

**Keywords:** Bilateral Relations, Cold War, Defence Cooperation, Counterterrorism, Geopolitics, Regional Fragility.

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## Introduction

Pakistan-Russia relations can be best summarised as a narrative of mutual misunderstandings, miscalculations and wasted opportunities due to the shifting policies of the two states under geopolitical realities of the Cold War period. History testifies to the fact that their relations have remained low key with only a few exceptions of economic, trade and investment cooperation during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>1</sup> The post-9/11 era has renewed opportunities for warming bilateral relations wherein both states can act rationally under their common strategic and economic interests on matters involving regional and international sensitivities, specifically the Afghanistan quagmire and terrorism. More specifically, it is the post-2014 regional security environment of Central and South Asia, particularly rise of the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISK)<sup>2</sup> in Afghanistan, which is now steering the two countries' convergence of interest. ISK in Afghanistan has raised serious security concerns for Russia, paving the way for enhanced cooperation with Pakistan.

Russia acknowledges Pakistan's indispensability for bringing enduring peace and stability in Afghanistan. Stronger ties with Islamabad may also create multilateral economic space for Moscow in the United States (US)-led unipolar world. Moreover, both desire economic collaboration for projects in Central Asia;<sup>3</sup> and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) by the Kremlin can help lessen Pakistan's dependence on Western aid, particularly in view of the US' 'stalled military sales to Pakistan'<sup>4</sup> as

<sup>1</sup> Rehan Aqil Khan, "Pakistan– Russia Relations and Future Prospects," *Opinion 2*, no. 2 (2014): 14-25 (14-16), <http://www.ndu.edu.pk/afwc/pub/OPINION-Vol.2-No.2.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Regional affiliate of the Islamic State (IS).

<sup>3</sup> "Pakistan, Russia to Go for FTA, Currency Swap Agreement," *Express Tribune*, November 8, 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/289029/pakistan-russia-to-go-for-fta-currency-swap-agreement/>.

<sup>4</sup> Frud Bezhan, "Trump's Tool Kit: U.S. Options for Pressuring Pakistan," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, August 24, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/trump-pakistan-strategy-pressure/28695060.html>. Also see, "Pakistan Considers Canceling U.S. F-16 Deal, Buying from Jordan," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, June 15, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-considers-cancelling-us-f16-fighter-jet-deal-buying-used-planes-jordan/27798427.html>.

well as minimise the latter's international isolation and diversify its diplomatic focus beyond China. Given Russia's role as a major world power, its importance as a regional partner for Pakistan cannot be overstated. Another reason behind the reset in relations is President Putin's policy of expanding his country's influence over its immediate (the Baltics, Caucasus and Eastern Europe), and distant (South Asia and Middle East) regions of interest.<sup>5</sup>

Determinants of this relationship also include inter-regional economic prospects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)<sup>6</sup>, Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC),<sup>7</sup> and its successor the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).<sup>8</sup> The emerging strategic disequilibrium, especially in South Asia; Pakistan's crucial role in Afghanistan's security; containment of Russia's resurgence; US sanctions on Pakistan; and the growing threat of extremism are also likely to endanger the stability of South and Central Asia, in particular, and the Eurasia region, in general. Indubitably, challenges are visible in determining the structure of this rapprochement. For instance, the US and India have expressed displeasure over this deepening relationship.

Based on secondary review of academic sources, this article explores how Pakistan-Russia relations evolved from estrangement to institutional engagement, with a special focus on why this relationship is significant for both. Economic, energy, defence, counterterrorism, and socio-cultural domains are the important variables that are studied. Given existing geopolitical compulsions like Moscow's quest for playing a decisive role in Afghanistan's security calculus independent of the US;

<sup>5</sup> Nazir Hussain and Khurshid Ali Sangay, "The Russian Resurgence and South Asian Region," *IPRI Journal* XII, no. 2 (2012): 15-34, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/art2nazs12.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> LehmanBrown, "The Belt and Road Initiative" (paper, LehmanBrown International Accountants, Beijing, 2017), <https://www.lehmanbrown.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/The-Belt-and-Road-Initiative.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Georgios L. Vousinas, "Eurasian Economic Community: Towards Integration. Economic Challenges and Geostrategic Aspects," *Modern Economy* 5 (2014): 951-966, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/me.2014.59088>. EurAsEC (2000) [its successor Eurasian Economic Union (2014)] is a regional integration initiative of Russia. It is an economic bloc consisting of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Russia.

<sup>8</sup> EEC, *Eurasian Economic Integration: Facts and Figures* (Moscow: Eurasian Economic Commission, 2016), <https://bit.ly/2hi6ZBN>.

Pakistan's pursuits for coming out of the US straitjacket<sup>9</sup> and finding alternative regional actors offer the reasons, challenges and prospects in shaping prospective ties. It is argued that Pakistan-Russia ties are likely to improve in the future, especially in terms of economic and defence cooperation and enhanced collaboration in the area of counterterrorism.

### **From Estrangement to Institutional Engagement: A Historical Perspective**

After the creation of Pakistan, the country could have chosen either to align with the communist bloc or the capitalist camp based on its colonial legacy.<sup>10</sup> Decision-makers thought the level of economic support they were seeking in the Cold War era could not be accessed from Moscow. Moreover, Pakistan had to weigh its rising concern of procuring military/defence assistance in view of its volatile eastern border.<sup>11</sup> It was Pakistan's quest to seek balance of power and to counteract hostile India's designs that shaped a pro-US approach as the centrepiece of its foreign policy during this time.

Despite joining the Western camp, diplomatic relations with the then-Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) were established in 1948.<sup>12</sup> In 1965, President Ayub Khan visited the USSR for the first time.<sup>13</sup> During this era, Moscow played a key mediatory role in the

<sup>9</sup> Muhammad Nawaz Khan and Beenish Altaf, Pakistan-Russia Rapprochement and Current Geo-Politics, *IPRI Journal* XIII, no.1 (2013): 125-134, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/std4naww13.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 79-89 (80), [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/Pak-russia%20relations,%20opportunities%20Nazir\\_Vol\\_19\\_Issue\\_1\\_2012.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/Pak-russia%20relations,%20opportunities%20Nazir_Vol_19_Issue_1_2012.pdf).

<sup>11</sup> Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," *IPRI Journal* XIII, no. 2 (2013): 63-86, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/art4han.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> Ardeshir Cowasjee, "A Recap of Soviet-Pakistan Relations," *Dawn*, March 12, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/612610>.

<sup>13</sup> Syed Waqar Ali Shah and Shaista Parveen, "Disintegration of Pakistan – The Role of Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR): An Appraisal," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 53, no. 1 (2016): 171-190 (171), [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/13%20Paper\\_v53\\_1\\_16.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/13%20Paper_v53_1_16.pdf).

Tashkent Agreement (1966), which ended the Indo-Pak war.<sup>14</sup> This was followed by the first ever visit of Prime Minister Kosygin to Pakistan on April 17, 1968.<sup>15</sup> During the 60s, Pakistan was offered to join ‘Kosygin’s plan for a regional economic grouping, comprising Afghanistan, India, Iran, Pakistan and the Soviet Union, and Breznev’s idea of an Asian Collective Security arrangement.’<sup>16</sup> Pakistan did not accept this security proposal because it ‘saw that Russian motives behind the proposal were to contain Chinese influence in the region and also to jeopardize its friendship with China.’<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the Kremlin made it clear to Islamabad that ‘without its [Pakistan] support, it would be very difficult for the former [Russia] to maintain its position in Asia.’<sup>18</sup> This put an end to the short-lived period of friendly relations between the two countries. This was also the time when policymakers in Pakistan started asserting that it was Indo-Soviet joint ventures under the Treaty of Friendship, Peace, and Cooperation of August 1971, which encouraged India to dismember Pakistan’s Eastern Wing into today’s Bangladesh.<sup>19</sup> Pakistan’s bilateral relations with Soviet Russia began to worsen even further.

The government of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto attempted to compensate the traumatic fall of Dhaka coupled with the ‘duplicity of the US’<sup>20</sup> by

<sup>14</sup> Tashkent Agreement, India-Pakistan, January 10, 1966, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Tashkent-Agreement>.

<sup>15</sup> Shah and Parveen, “Disintegration of Pakistan – The Role of Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR): An Appraisal,” 179.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>19</sup> Khan, “Pakistan– Russia Relations and Future Prospects,” 16.

<sup>20</sup> See, Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, *The Regional Imperative: The Administration of U.S. Foreign Policy towards South Asian States under Presidents Johnson and Nixon* (New Delhi: Concept Publishers, 1980), 147-48; and Raghavendra Mishra, “Revisiting the 1971 ‘USS Enterprise Incident’: Rhetoric, Reality and Pointers for the Contemporary Era,” *Journal of Defence Studies* 9, no. 2 (2015): 49-80. The US’ delays in provision of military supply to Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 wars with India developed a perception in the country that Washington was not a trustworthy friend, especially the US taskforce of the Seventh Fleet along with a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier did not reach the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 war. Besides, on August 3, 1971, the US House of Representatives passed the Gallagher and Church/Saxbe Amendments to the Foreign Aid Bill and suspended economic assistance till resolution of the East Pakistan crises.

assuming the Look East policy under bilateralism.<sup>21</sup> This led to temporary improvement in relations, as evident by the state visit by Bhutto in 1974, recorded as the first Pakistani Prime Minister to visit Moscow.<sup>22</sup> However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979<sup>23</sup> terminated this short-term improvement of relations,<sup>24</sup> dragging Pakistan into the proxy war of the US against the former USSR.

Following Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and America's unanticipated abandonment coupled with sanctions under the Pressler and Glenn Amendments, forced Islamabad to reconsider its view of Moscow.<sup>25</sup> Eventually, the following decade witnessed a gradual convergence, as manifested in the bilateral exchange of high-level official visits between the two countries.<sup>26</sup> An important visit in this regard came in April 1999 of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Moscow after nearly 25 years.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, when Pakistan backed the Taliban in Kabul,<sup>28</sup> fighting against the pro-Russia Northern Alliance, relations became cloudy. However, the obvious turn in revitalising relations came when the country became part of the US-led War on Terror (WoT) in 2001, thereby de-aligning itself from the then-Taliban regime. The formal drive to

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<sup>21</sup> Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options," 5.

<sup>22</sup> "Pak-Russia Relations," *Jahangir's World Times*, October 4, 2014, <http://jworldtimes.com/jwt2015/magazine-archives/jwt-2014/october2014/pak-russia-relations/>.

<sup>23</sup> Lester W. Grau and Michael A. Cress, eds., *The Soviet-Afghan War: How a Superpower Fought and Lost* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002), 1.

<sup>24</sup> Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," 68.

<sup>25</sup> "US Created Taliban and Abandoned Pakistan, says Hillary," *Dawn*, April 25, 2009, <https://www.dawn.com/news/847153>. Also see, Ferrukh Mir, *Half Truth* (Bloomington: iUniverse, 2011), 402-403, and John Gennace, "US-Pakistan Relations after the Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan: The Bush and Clinton Years," *Daily Journalist*, January 21, 2017, <http://thedailyjournalist.com/the-historian/us-pakistan-relations-after-the-soviet-withdrawal-from-afghanistan-the-bush-and-clinton-years/>.

<sup>26</sup> Khan, "Pakistan– Russia Relations and Future Prospects," 16-18.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> "The Taliban," *Mapping Militant Organizations* (Stanford: Stanford University, 2016), <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/367>. The Afghan Taliban got rise in 1994 and its fall was witnessed in 2001. "Three countries recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan between 1997 and 2001 such as Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates."

institutionalise relations emerged when then-President Musharraf met Vladimir Putin at the multinational security summit in Almaty on June 4, 2002.<sup>29</sup> This led to formation of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and, the Joint Working Group on Strategic Stability<sup>30</sup> during the same year to handle possible challenges to regional stability like extremism, terrorism, human trafficking, narcotics smuggling, and arms control. Another modest move was observed in 2011 when the ‘joint session of Parliament criticised the US unilateralism in the arbitrary Abbottabad raid killing Osama bin Laden in May 2011 and in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) airstrikes on Salala Check Post killing 24 Pakistani soldiers. Subsequently, Islamabad’s new foreign policy guidelines visualised reaching out to Moscow.’<sup>31</sup> It was in 2013 when both countries launched an all-inclusive collaboration, and celebrated 65 years of diplomatic relations on initiating the first strategic bilateral dialogue.<sup>32</sup>

### Significance of ‘Pakistan’ for Moscow

Pakistan is important for us in trade and economy and is an important country of South Asia and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and can play an important role in the promotion of peace and security in the region.

- Vladimir Putin<sup>33</sup>

Moscow’s current inclination to Islamabad is in line with its conceptual ‘multi-vectored pursuits in South Asia’<sup>34</sup> indicated by

<sup>29</sup> “President Vladimir Putin met with Pakistan’s President Pervez Musharraf,” *President of Russia*, June 4, 2002, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27120>.

<sup>30</sup> Hussain, “Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options,” 86.

<sup>31</sup> Kamran Yousaf, “In a First, Pakistan, Russia to Hold Joint War Games,” *Express Tribune*, September 12, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1180917/first-pakistan-russia-hold-joint-war-games/>.

<sup>32</sup> Tahir Mahmood Azad, “Pakistan-Russia Strategic Partnership: New Horizons for Cooperation” (brief, Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad, 2016), <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Final-Issue-brief-Tahir-Azad-dated-26-12-2016.pdf>; and Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, Russia to Enhance Cooperation,” *Dawn*, October 22, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1139575>.

<sup>33</sup> “Pakistan, Russia to Go for FTA, Currency Swap Agreement,” *Express Tribune*.

President Putin's readiness to acclimatise his country's foreign policy to the shifting regional milieu. In fact, Moscow is proactively exploring prospective markets to export its military equipment and investments to sustain its economy buoyancy. Pakistan may likely be a potential buyer of Russian military hardware, besides offering Moscow investment opportunities in infrastructure, industrial sectors, agriculture, particularly drip irrigation and desert farming in areas suffering acute water shortage.

Russia also acknowledges Pakistan's indispensability in stabilising Afghanistan. Continuous violence and instability in Kabul is threatening Central Asia and North Caucasus – Russia's backyard. Likewise, falling global oil prices in 2014<sup>35</sup> leading to substantial revenue decline in energy-exporting states have possibly pushed the Kremlin to explore more venues in politico-economic and strategic realms with other regions of the world, including South Asia.

### **Islamabad's Lucidity**

Changing geopolitical dynamics in South Asia as evident in the growing instability in Afghanistan,<sup>36</sup> greater role of India in the region under the US umbrella,<sup>37</sup> and Pakistan's quest for maintaining the delicate strategic equilibrium in the region and economic imperatives of the country are factors which are shaping the Pakistan-Russia relations, specifically in view of the US' unilateral actions and tightening conditions, more

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<sup>34</sup> Himani Pant, "The Changing Contours of Russia's South Asia Policy" (brief no. 193, Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, 2017), [http://cf.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ORF\\_IssueBrief\\_193\\_India-Russia.pdf](http://cf.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/ORF_IssueBrief_193_India-Russia.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> Tim Bowler, "Falling Oil Prices: Who are the Winners and Losers?" *BBC News*, January 19, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/business-29643612>.

<sup>36</sup> Saima Perveen, Jehanzeb Khalil, Manzoor Ahmad and Jehangir Khalil, "Post 2014 Spillover Effects of Afghanistan's Crisis on Pakistan's Foreign Policy," special issue, *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 1, no.1 (2015): 1-8 (2), [http://www.sbbwu.edu.pk/journal/special%20issue/2.Post\\_2014\\_Spillover\\_Effects\\_of\\_Afghanistan\\_s\\_Crisis\\_on\\_Pakistan\\_s.pdf](http://www.sbbwu.edu.pk/journal/special%20issue/2.Post_2014_Spillover_Effects_of_Afghanistan_s_Crisis_on_Pakistan_s.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> "Full Texts of Donald Trump's Speech on South Asia Policy," *Hindu*, August 22, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/full-texts-of-donald-trumps-speech-on-south-asia-policy/article19538424.ece>.

precisely under Trump's new South Asia policy.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, Washington's unilateral action in the Abbottabad raid and drone strikes, 'redefining rules of engagement' in the WoT,<sup>39</sup> indefinite presence of US forces in Afghanistan,<sup>40</sup> suspension of the Coalition Support Fund (CSF)<sup>41</sup> and military assistance, and blaming Pakistan for providing safe havens to the Afghan Taliban<sup>42</sup> are the reasons Pakistan is striving to diversify its foreign relations, seek viable alternative solutions<sup>43</sup> and rethink its rules of economic, foreign and defence engagements<sup>44</sup> in order to eventually dismiss the impression that Pakistan is a US-proxy in the region. Pakistan's ties with Russia are also likely to strengthen its position at multilateral forums like the Heart of Asia Conference and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and help the country in evolving a more

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.; Muhammad Nawaz Khan, "Pak-US Ties: War of Words to Actions," *Regional Rapport*, January 9, 2018, <http://regionalrapport.com/2018/01/09/pak-us-ties-war-words-actions/>; and "US Pushes Motion to Put Pakistan on Global Terrorist-Financing Watchlist," *News International*, February 14, 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/280637-us-pushes-motion-to-put-pakistan-on-global-terrorist-financing-watchlist>. Since the strained Pakistan-US relations are seen in continuing mistrust and mutual suspicion, therefore it seems that the US would pursue harder approach towards Islamabad in its war against terrorism that is evident in Trump's new SA policy followed by his alleged accusation on Islamabad of "lying and deceit" and providing safe havens to terrorists," especially the Haqqani network. Resultantly, the new US administration has suspended the Coalition Support Fund and security assistance to Pakistan, and "it pushed motion to put Pakistan on global terrorist-financing watch list."

<sup>39</sup> Adam Linehan, "What Mattis' New Rules of Engagement Mean for The War in Afghanistan," *Task & Purpose*, October 4, 2017, <https://taskandpurpose.com/what-mattis-new-rules-of-engagement-mean-for-the-war-in-afghanistan/>.

<sup>40</sup> Nora Kelly, "Full Transcript: Donald Trump Announces His Afghanistan Policy," *Atlantic*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/08/full-transcript-donald-trump-announces-his-afghanistan-policy/537552/>; and "Why is Russia Warming up to Pakistan," *Times of Islamabad*, February 27, 2018, <https://timesofislamabad.com/27-Feb-2018/why-is-russia-warming-up-to-pakistan>.

<sup>41</sup> "Ambassador to US Says Withheld Coalition Support Funds were 'Reimbursement', not 'Assistance'," *Dawn*, July 22, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1346930>.

<sup>42</sup> "Trump Accuses Pakistan of 'Lies and Deceit,' Threatens to Cut Aid," *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-us-trump-acuses-lies-deceit-threatens-pull-billions-aid/28949804.html>.

<sup>43</sup> Hussain and Sangay, "The Russian Resurgence and South Asian Region," 31.

<sup>44</sup> Sabena Siddiqi, "The Russia Pakistan Equation," *Katehon*, June 1, 2017, <http://katehon.com/article/russia-pakistan-equation>.

‘regional approach’ to resolve the Afghan conundrum.<sup>45</sup> Moscow’s importance for Islamabad lies in its strong credentials as a regional and world power, its leading role in SCO and its privileged right to veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

## **Vital Areas of Pakistan-Russia Cooperation**

### *Economy*

In 1956, Russia and Pakistan established trade relations under an agreement in which Pakistan exported cotton, jute and leather,<sup>46</sup> and the Soviet Union founded Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM) on December 30, 1973 with a loan of USD 200 million.<sup>47</sup> In 1999, both countries also agreed to establish an Inter-Governmental Commission for Trade and Economy; concluded a bilateral agreement on trade and economic cooperation to replace the 1956 agreement.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, in 2009, the Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, and Scientific and Technical Cooperation was formed.<sup>49</sup> Likewise, to stimulate commerce and tourism the Pakistan-Russia Business Forum (PRBF) was

<sup>45</sup> “International Afghanistan Peace Conference Starts in Moscow,” *Express Tribune*, April 14, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1383473/international-afghanistan-peace-conference-starts-moscow/>. Pakistan’s efforts, with the cooperation of Russia and China, were evident in the International Afghanistan Peace Conference held in Moscow on April 14, 2017.

<sup>46</sup> George Ginsburgs, *The Soviet Union and International Cooperation in Legal Matters*, Law in Eastern Europe no. 38 (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1988), 73, and Nazir Hussain and Quratulain Fatima, “Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings,” *Central Asia*, no.72 (2013): 1-15 (6).

<sup>47</sup> “A Look Back at History of PSM,” *Express Tribune*, November 10, 2013, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/630036/a-look-back-at-history-of-psm/>; and Hanif, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints,” 14-15.

<sup>48</sup> Adnan Ali Shah, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Post-Cold War Era,” *Strategic Studies* XXI, no. 2 (2001).

<sup>49</sup> “Pakistan, Russia Agree to Promote Trade, Investment,” *Dawn*, May 12, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/628117>; and “Russian – Pakistani Relations,” Consulate General of the Russian Federation in Karachi, [https://web.archive.org/web/20130315070730/http://www.rusconsulkarachi.mid.ru/RUS\\_SIA-PAKISTAN.htm](https://web.archive.org/web/20130315070730/http://www.rusconsulkarachi.mid.ru/RUS_SIA-PAKISTAN.htm).

established in 2009,<sup>50</sup> followed by the Business Council for Promotion of Trade with Pakistan in 2011.<sup>51</sup>

Pakistan can also seek FDI in technology, research, innovation and energy. To this end, a Russian delegation visited Pakistan in September 2012 and concluded Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) to invest in PSM, metallurgy, railways, power, science and technology.<sup>52</sup> These MoUs were aimed at enlarging and up-grading PSM to increase its productivity from one to three million tonnes,<sup>53</sup> and the up-gradation of Pakistan Railways, improving railroad infrastructure and, developing trans-regional rail links with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Iran.<sup>54</sup> These economic linkages were further institutionalised during the fourth meeting of the IGC in 2015 with the formation of five Joint Working Groups (JWGs) on trade and finance; energy; food and agriculture; banking; and industries.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, the State Bank of Pakistan and the Central Bank of Russian Federation signed an MoU in Moscow on January 15, 2018 for ‘promoting cooperation in the fields of financial systems’ development, payment systems, financial infrastructure, and financial institutions’ supervision.<sup>56</sup> At present, Pakistan exports cotton yarn, fabrics, rice, nuts, textile goods, sports goods, leather, leather products, pharmaceutical

<sup>50</sup> Abdul Rauf Tabani, “Message of President of the Pakistan-Russia Business Forum” (speech, Karachi, June 12, 2009), Pakistan Russia Business Forum, <http://www.prbf.org/speeches4.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Hussain and Fatima, “Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings,” 9.

<sup>52</sup> “Russian Businessmen Interested to Invest in many Projects of Pakistan,” *Nihao-Salam*, October 3, 2012, accessed September 14, 2017, <http://www.nihao-salam.com/news-detail.php?id=Mjc3Mw==>.

<sup>53</sup> “\$1 Billion Pakistan Steel Mills Expansion in Four Years,” *MESTEEL*, October 13, 2004, <http://www.mesteel.com/cgi-bin/w3-mysql/goto.htm?url=http://www.mesteel.com/countries/pakistan/steelnews19.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> “Pakistan, Russia Sign MoUs in Power, Railways and Steel Sectors,” *News International*, October 3, 2012, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/388589-pakistan-russia-sign-mous-in-powerrailways-and-steel-sectors>.

<sup>55</sup> Board of Investment, GoP, “Pakistan, Russia Agree to Form Five Working Groups” (Government of Pakistan, 2015), <http://boi.gov.pk/ViewNews.aspx?NID=758>; and “Pakistan, Russia Agree on Forging Multidimensional Partnership at SCO Summit,” *Geo News*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/170041-pakistan-russia-agree-on-forging-multidimensional-partnership-at-sco-summit>. Since the inception of IGC, five meetings have been held, the latest one in November 2017.

<sup>56</sup> “Russian Central Bank, SBP Sign MoU,” *Dawn*, January 16, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1383183>.

products,<sup>57</sup> tangerines and potatoes to the Russian Federation.<sup>58</sup> Russian exports to Pakistan include fertilisers, paperboard, raw ferrous and ferrous products.<sup>59</sup>

Pakistan-Russia trade has witnessed a gradual rise from USD 95 million in 1980<sup>60</sup> to USD 660 million in 2018.<sup>61</sup> According to Yuri Kozlov, Russia's trade representative, trade between both countries is expected to grow up to approximately USD 750-800 million by the end of 2019.<sup>62</sup> To further strengthen economic relations, Islamabad and Moscow are considering signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA).<sup>63</sup> In this regard, Pakistan's Ministry of Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs, coupled with other relevant ministries, were tasked to prepare recommendations when Islamabad accepted Moscow's proposal to enter into a FTA during the former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Astana during the 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Heads of the State Council of the SCO on June 7, 2017.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Hussain and Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," 8.

<sup>58</sup> Muhammad Naseer, *Export of Kinnow*, report (Karachi: Trade Development Authority of Pakistan, Government of Pakistan, 2010), 21, [https://www.tdap.gov.pk/doc\\_reports/TDAP\\_REPORT\\_ON\\_EXPORT\\_%20OF\\_KINNOW.pdf](https://www.tdap.gov.pk/doc_reports/TDAP_REPORT_ON_EXPORT_%20OF_KINNOW.pdf).

<sup>59</sup> Hussain and Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," 8.

<sup>60</sup> "Russia Eyes \$ 600 million Trade with Pakistan," *Pakistan Today*, December 27, 2012, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2012/12/27/russia-eyes-600-million-trade-with-pakistan/>.

<sup>61</sup> "Pakistan-Russia Trade Likely to Reach \$800m," *Express Tribune*, December 29, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1876880/2-pakistan-russia-trade-likely-reach-800m/>; and Almas Haider Naqvi and Yasir Masood, "Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernable Trends and Future," *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (2017): 18-38 (30), [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-SS\\_Almas\\_and\\_Yasir-\\_No-4\\_2017.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-SS_Almas_and_Yasir-_No-4_2017.pdf); and "Pakistani-Russian Bilateral Trade in 2015," *Russian Exports*, August 11, 2016, accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.rusexporter.com/research/country/detail/4868/>.

<sup>62</sup> "Russia-Pakistan Bilateral Trade to Reach US\$800 million by Year End: Yuri Kozlov," *Mettis Global*, December 28, 2018, <https://mettisglobal.news/russia-pakistan-bilateral-trade-to-reach-us800-million-by-year-end-yuri-kozlov/>.

<sup>63</sup> Ghulam Abbas, "Pak-Russia Seek Trade Liberalisation," *Pakistan Today*, December 8, 2011, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2011/12/08/pak-russia-seek-trade-liberalisation/>.

<sup>64</sup> Asif Bhatti, "Pakistan, Russia to Sign Free Trade Agreement," *Geo News*, June 22, 2017, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/146752-pakistan-russia-to-sign-fta>; and "PM Nawaz Arrives in Kazakhstan to Attend SCO Summit," *Express Tribune*, June 8, 2017,

These economic prospects are likely to be cemented under transnational mega projects like the BRI and its pilot project China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), EurAsEC,<sup>65</sup> the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation,<sup>66</sup> and Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IP).<sup>67</sup> Pakistan's geostrategic location is central to the restoration of the Silk Route and Eurasian integration;<sup>68</sup> and its significance in Pan-Eurasian assimilation cannot be sidelined in Kremlin. Hence, it is not surprising that Russia has shown interest in becoming part of the CPEC project, manifested in the Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Alexey Y. Dedov's statement, 'Russia 'strongly' supported CPEC as it was important for Pakistan's economy and also regional connectivity.'<sup>69</sup> Any Indian endeavours to sabotage the initiative could likely be counteracted by Moscow's formal presence in the project as a strong stakeholder. This was

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<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1430418/pm-nawaz-arrives-kazakhstan-attend-sco-summit/>.

<sup>65</sup> Alexander Mercouris, "Putin's Grand Strategy: The Greater Eurasia Project," *Duran*, June 30, 2016, <http://theduran.com/putins-grand-strategy-greater-eurasia-project/>; and Marlene Laruelle, "Russia's Eurasianist Soft Power in Central Asia" (Moscow: Eurasian Studies, 2017), <http://greater-europe.org/archives/3190>. This is an encouraging sign for a potential collaboration with the BRI and CPEC that would increase Pakistan's importance for Russia. Creating anarchy and establishing peace are two competing forces in the global political arena which states use for maintaining their unilateralism, while at the same time achieving regional economic integration through multilateralism. It seems that the US and India are struggling to maintain their *status quo* power and hegemonic status evident in the US intervention in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Afghanistan, and India's stubbornness in not resolving the Kashmir dispute. On the other hand, Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran believe in regional integration in which regional peace is prerequisite for achieving economic integration through initiatives like BRI, CPEC and EurAsEC.

<sup>66</sup> ADB, *Proposed Multitranchise Financing Facility Islamic Republic of Pakistan: Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Corridor Development Investment Program*, report (Mandaluyong: Asian Development Bank, 2017),

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/project-documents/48404/48404-002-rrp-en.pdf>.

<sup>67</sup> Naqvi and Masood, "Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernable Trends and Future," 25.

<sup>68</sup> Yasir Masood, "Rekindled Pak-Russia Relations," *Express Tribune*, August 9, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1159081/rekindled-pak-russia-relations/>.

<sup>69</sup> Sachin Parashar, "Russia Supports China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project: Russian Envoy Alexey Y. Dedov," *Economic Times*, December 19, 2016, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/russia-supports-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-project-russian-envoy-alexey-y-dedov/articleshow/56037725.cms>.

reflected in the 15<sup>th</sup> Russia, India, China Foreign Ministerial Meeting in December 11, 2017,<sup>70</sup> where Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov 'advised Delhi to find ways to join the CPEC and benefit from the BRI.'<sup>71</sup>

### ***Energy***

A prominent area of cooperation during the Cold War was energy. Moscow established an oil consortium 'Pakistani Oilfields' in 1958;<sup>72</sup> and the Oil and Gas Development Company Limited (OGDCL) by lending Rubles 27 million in 1961.<sup>73</sup> The same trend was witnessed in the post-Cold war era when both signed MoUs in 2012 that involved extending technical assistance to the Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants, the 500 mega watts (MW) New Jamshoro power plant (GENCO) and Tarbela-4 project.<sup>74</sup> Other MoUs pertained to electricity transmission projects from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan (CASA-1000).<sup>75</sup> Efforts are still underway for establishing the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and involving Russia in coal gasification technology for the Thar coal project.<sup>76</sup> Likewise, in 2015, in order to construct the North-South gas

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<sup>70</sup> Embassy of India, Moscow, Russia, "15th Russia-India-China Trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting New Delhi," press release, December 11, 2017, [https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/15th\\_Russia\\_India.php](https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/15th_Russia_India.php).

<sup>71</sup> Ume Farwa, "Pakistan-Russia Relations on Upward Trajectory," *Asia Times*, December 19, 2017, accessed January 9, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/pakistan-russia-relations-upward-trajectory/>.

<sup>72</sup> Hussain and Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," 7.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>74</sup> "Pakistan, Russia Sign MoUs in Power, Railways and Steel Sectors," *News International*.

<sup>75</sup> Muhammad Farooq Afzal, "Pakistan-Russia Relations Warm up," *Business Recorder*, June 12, 2013, <https://fp.brecorder.com/2013/06/201306121198009/>; "Interconnection Grid to be Built between Pakistan and China," *Business Recorder*, April 1, 2016, <https://fp.brecorder.com/2016/04/2016040131376/>; and "Russia Reportedly Ready to Participate in CASA 1000 Project," *Asia Plus*, June 13, 2017, <https://news.tj/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20170613/russia-reportedly-ready-to-participate-in-casa-1000-project>. Reportedly, Moscow has recently showed its interest to finance in the CASA project during the international exhibition XPO 2017 in Astana.

<sup>76</sup> Board of Investment, GoP, "Pakistan, Russia Agree to Form Five Working Groups."

pipeline from Lahore to Karachi, Russia agreed to invest USD 2 billion.<sup>77</sup> Russian firm Gazprom International won the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) pipeline contract in 2016.<sup>78</sup> On January 31, 2017, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Oil and Gas Company Limited and a Russian consortium of investors (Inter-Rao Engineering and Himmash Apparat partnered with Orpheus Energy) concluded an agreement to establish an oil refinery having capacity to purify 200,000 barrels oil per day.<sup>79</sup> Gazprom International and OGDCL concluded another memorandum on July 3, 2017, which would bring around USD 4 billion capital inflows to Pakistan.<sup>80</sup> The more recent of these projects are especially important for the Kremlin in the backdrop of its trailing oil and gas market in Europe because of sanctions. The country manages huge gas reserves in Iran and is keen to export gas to Pakistan but US opposition had been delaying the project.<sup>81</sup> The mutual leanings in Pakistan-Russia relations have unfolded opportunities for striking lucrative business deal, benefitting both states. This was evident in the sideline meeting between former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev at the Council of the Heads of Government (CHG) summit of the SCO in December 2017, where they agreed on the construction of an offshore gas pipeline.<sup>82</sup> Resultantly, both countries signed an agreement to conduct a feasibility study for building the USD ten billion offshore gas pipeline on September 27, 2018.<sup>83</sup> Such investments will potentially meet Pakistan's

<sup>77</sup> "Pakistan, Russia Sign Agreement for Construction of North-South Gas Pipeline," *Dawn*, October 16, 2015, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1213460>.

<sup>78</sup> Zafar Bhutta, "Russia's Gazprom and OGDC of Pakistan Sign Joint Venture Deal," *Express Tribune*, July 7, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1452021/russias-gazprom-ogdc-pakistan-sign-joint-venture-deal/>.

<sup>79</sup> "Russia to Establish Oil Refinery in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan," *Times of Islamabad*, February 1, 2018, <https://timesofislamabad.com/01-Feb-2018/russia-to-establish-oil-refinery-in-khyber-pakhtunkhwa-pakistan>.

<sup>80</sup> Bhutta, "Russia's Gazprom and OGDC of Pakistan Sign Joint Venture Deal."

<sup>81</sup> Farwa, "Pakistan-Russia Relations on Upward Trajectory"; and "Route Survey for North-South Gas Pipeline Completed, Tariff Being Finalized," *Associated Press of Pakistan*, January 28, 2018, <http://www.app.com.pk/route-survey-north-south-gas-pipeline-completed-tariff-finalized/>. In January 2018, the road survey of the North-South gas pipeline was completed.

<sup>82</sup> Farwa, "Pakistan-Russia Relations on Upward Trajectory."

<sup>83</sup> Israr Khan, "\$10 bn Offshore Gas Pipeline: Pakistan, Russia Sign MoU for Feasibility Study," *News International*, September 28, 2018,

energy needs, while contributing to economic buoyancy that would ultimately pave way for regional integration, specifically through transnational energy cooperation.

### ***Defence***

Historically, Pakistan has not had formal defence relations with Russia, except for the maverick helicopter deal of 1969.<sup>84</sup> The Twenty-first Century witnessed an improvement in defence collaboration in the wake of the former Russian Military Chief Col. Gen. Aleksandr Postnikov's visit in 2011<sup>85</sup> and the reciprocal visits to Moscow by former Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafiq Butt in August 2012,<sup>86</sup> subsequently by the former Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani in October 2012.<sup>87</sup> These visits laid the ground for future defence cooperation between the two sides, especially when Postnikov, floated the 'possibility of expanding defence ties by holding joint military drills, exchanging trainees and trainers and selling and buying weapons,'<sup>88</sup> which thereafter led to defence ventures in these three directions. In line with this approach, for the very first time in April 2013, Commander of the Russian Air Force Viktor Bondarev visited Islamabad to have deliberations for military deals. Major progress in defence relations was observed when the Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Islamabad to conclude

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<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/373942-10-bn-offshore-gas-pipeline-pakistan-russia-sign-mou-for-feasibility-study>.

<sup>84</sup> Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," 69.

<sup>85</sup> "Pakistan, Russia to Boost Military Cooperation," *Pakistan Today*, August 5, 2013, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2013/08/05/pakistan-russia-to-boost-military-cooperation/>.

<sup>86</sup> Pakistan Air Force, GoP, "Commander-In-Chief, Russian Federation Air Force Visits Air Headquarters," press release, April 15, 2013, [http://www.paf.gov.pk/press\\_release/uploaded/1366207051.pdf](http://www.paf.gov.pk/press_release/uploaded/1366207051.pdf).

<sup>87</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Kayani to Visit Russia from Oct 3," *Dawn*, September 29, 2012, <https://www.dawn.com/news/752938>.

<sup>88</sup> "Islamabad, Moscow Set Sights on New Era in Relations," *Dawn*, September 17, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/659642/islamabad-moscow-set-sights-on-new-era-in-relations>; and Syed, "Kayani to Visit Russia from Oct 3."

the Defence Cooperation Agreement in 2014.<sup>89</sup> Consequently, when Moscow lifted its arms embargo against Pakistan, the agreement for the sale of gunship helicopters was signed, and four Russian Mi-35M Hind-E attack helicopters were delivered on August 29, 2017, with Islamabad showing interest in buying 20 more attack helicopters.<sup>90</sup>

Joint military drills are another feature of mutual interests as evident in the 2014 and 2015 Arabian Monsoon naval drills;<sup>91</sup> followed by joint military exercises in 2016 and 2017. In 2017, the multinational joint Naval AMAN exercise was held in Karachi including 35 countries' naval forces, in which Russian Navy's largest anti-submarine warship *Sevmorsk* also participated,<sup>92</sup> substantiating the converging inclination. Both countries took part in the Friendship-2017 military exercise held on the mountain training range near Nizhny Arkhyz settlement in Karachay-Cherkessia during September 2017, with more than 70 Pakistani mountaineers and over 100 soldiers of Russia's mountain infantry division of the Southern Military District.<sup>93</sup> In early 2018, both countries agreed to

<sup>89</sup> Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement," *Dawn*, November 21, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1145875>.

<sup>90</sup> Franz-Stefan Gady, "Pakistan Receives 4 Advanced Attack Helicopters from Russia," *Diplomat*, August 29, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/pakistan-receives-4-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/>. Also see, Gabriel Dominguez, "Pakistan to Receive Four Mi-35M Helos from Russia in 2017, Says Report," *The Military and Asian Region*, December 21, 2016, <https://thaimilitaryandasianregion.wordpress.com/2016/12/24/pakistan-to-receive-four-mi-35m-helos-in-2017/>

<sup>91</sup> "Are Pakistan and Russia Forming an Alliance? Not without China, Says Expert," *Dawn*, April 1, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1324187>.

<sup>92</sup> "Naval Exercise AMAN 2017 Continues in Karachi," *Pakistan Today*, February 12, 2017, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/02/12/multinational-naval-exercise-aman-2017-continues-in-karachi/>.

<sup>93</sup> Kamal Alam, "Growing Pakistan-Russia Military Ties Reflect Central Asia's Changing Geopolitics," commentary (London: Royal United Services Institute, 2017), <https://rusi.org/commentary/growing-pakistan%E2%80%93russia-military-ties-reflect-central-asia%E2%80%93changing-geopolitics>. Also see, "Over 70 Pakistani Mountaineers Reach Russia for 'Friendship-2017' Military Exercise," *Pakistan Today*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/09/24/over-70-pakistani-mountaineers-in-russia-for-friendship-2017-military-exercise/>.

form a Joint Military Commission.<sup>94</sup> On August 7, 2018, Pakistan and Russia signed a Security Training Agreement at the conclusion of the first meeting of Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC),<sup>95</sup> which opened the doors for the forces of Pakistan to get training from Russian military institutions.

These ongoing trends indicate that the limited defence ties may gradually turn into broader defence cooperation in the future. Such a possibility appeared when Russian diplomat Pavel Didkovsky's (First Secretary of the Russian Embassy in Islamabad) indicated Moscow's backing of the criterion-based approach for new members of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) that have not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT),<sup>96</sup> which validates Islamabad's NSG membership application. However, it is yet to be seen how Moscow will incorporate this indication into its foreign policy pursuits.

The rationale behind Pakistan's quest of enhancing its defence capability is to maintain strategic equilibrium against India's massive military build-up, which has rendered South Asia's strategic environment very fragile, particularly under its Joint Doctrine Indian Armed Forces 2017.<sup>97</sup> The test of *Agni V* (Intercontinental Ballistic Missile with the range of 5,000 km)<sup>98</sup> is in pursuance of this doctrine, which has upset the

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<sup>94</sup> Shafqat Ali, "Pak-Russia Commission on Military Co-Op Set Up," *Nation*, February 21, 2018, <https://nation.com.pk/21-Feb-2018/pak-russia-commission-on-military-co-op-set-up>.

<sup>95</sup> Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Rare Military Cooperation Pact," *Voice of America*, August 8, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-russia-sign-military-cooperation-pact/4519031.html>; and "Pakistani Troops to Receive Training at Russian Military Institutes," *Times of India*, August 8, 2018, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/pakistan/pakistani-troops-to-receive-training-at-russian-military-institutes/articleshow/65322023.cms>.

<sup>96</sup> "Russia Supports Pakistan's Bid to Join Elite Nuclear Trading Club," *Express Tribune*, December 15, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1584950/1-russia-supports-pakistans-bid-join-elite-nuclear-trading-club/>.

<sup>97</sup> Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, Ministry of Defence, GoI, Joint Doctrine Indian Armed Forces (JDIAF) (Government of India, 2017), [https://bharatshakti.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Joint\\_Doctrine\\_Indian\\_Armed\\_Forces.pdf](https://bharatshakti.in/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Joint_Doctrine_Indian_Armed_Forces.pdf).

<sup>98</sup> "Agni-V Missile Successfully Test-Fired," *Indian Express*, January 18, 2018, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-test-fires-agni-5-missile-with-a-surface->

Eurasia-Pacific strategic equilibrium. India is intentionally inciting a security *impasse* with the US' blessing, rationalising the Indo-US military cooperation on the pretext of Pakistan-Sino strategic collaboration. This also 'provides an opportunity for a more inclusive implementation of the US Pivot to Asia,'<sup>99</sup> evident in the Indo-US Bilateral Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement 2016,<sup>100</sup> which sees New Delhi as Washington's crucial defence partner. This may spoil Russia's vision of multipolar Eurasian integration, while creating more regional insecurity. Moscow could be encouraged to maintain balance against such anti-integration forces by further moving towards Islamabad.

The aim of Moscow's grand strategic vision of EurAsEC<sup>101</sup> is an attempt towards regional integration in the Eurasian region. In contrast, New Delhi's aim of becoming a major power at the cost of regional

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range-of-5000-kms-5029731/; Indrani Bagchi, "Seychelles Allows India Military Infra on Island," *Times of India*, January 28, 2018,

<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-seychelles-sign-revised-agreement-over-building-infrastructure-on-assumption-island/articleshow/62674542.cms>; and "India Gets a Blow in its Dream of Building First Overseas Military Base," *Times of Islamabad*, March 4, 2018, <https://timesofislamabad.com/04-Mar-2018/india-gets-a-blow-in-its-dream-of-building-first-overseas-military-base>. India plans to build a military base on the remote Seychelles Island. Both countries signed a military cooperation agreement in 2003 that would allow New Delhi to use the Assumption base for 30 years. In principle, the agreement of building an Indian overseas military base was signed in 2015, and a revised agreement was signed in June 2018. The agreement would increase India's strategic reach in the Indian Ocean. Major details of the agreement are classified. Apparently, the military base would safeguard the exclusive economic zone for illegal fishing, drug trafficking and piracy but the issues such as prohibition of nuclear use and weapons storage on the Island are not public. Therefore, there is considerable controversy and dissent in Seychelles against the agreement. The fear is that India may likely use the agreement for storage of its missiles like *Agni V* on the Island. In such a scenario, there would be ramifications for Pakistan because the distance between Assumption Island and Karachi is 4475 km.

<sup>99</sup> Andrew Korybko, "3 Reasons Why Russia Should Sell S-400 Missiles to Pakistan," *Regional Rapport*, January 21, 2018, <http://regionallrapport.com/three-reasons-russia-sell-s-400-missiles-pakistan/>.

<sup>100</sup> Varghese K. George, "India, US Sign Military Logistics Pact," *Hindu*, October 18, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/India-US-sign-military-logistics-pact/article14598282.ece>.

<sup>101</sup> S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds., *Putin's Grand Strategy: The Eurasian Union and Its Discontents* (Washington, D.C.: Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2014), 179-190, <http://silkroadstudies.org/resources/1409GrandStrategy.pdf>.

security is a worrisome element, which is not only likely to disrupt the delicate strategic balance in South Asia,<sup>102</sup> but also the strategic equilibrium of Eurasia-Pacific region with the US' blessing. Arguably, it would be in Moscow's interests to stabilise South Asia's strategic imbalance by expanding defence cooperation with Islamabad, which could contribute in maintaining the greater strategic equipoise in the Eurasia-Pacific region.

### ***Counterterrorism***

The field of counterterrorism offers a lot of scope to Islamabad and Moscow in enhancing their cooperation for countering the emerging threat of violent radicalisation. In this regard, both countries have established a Bilateral Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism for regional security. Simultaneously, President Putin backs Pakistan's position on the war against terrorism, besides agreeing on mutual regional efforts for eradicating extremism.<sup>103</sup> Following the Quetta blast on the Police Training College in 2016, President Putin offered support to Pakistan in combatting terrorism, in addition to showing readiness for the sale of Russia's advanced military hardware.<sup>104</sup> In fact, achievements of the Pakistan Army to bring regional peace are recognised by Moscow contrary to the prevalent attitude of Washington, which is skeptic of Pakistan accusing it of providing safe havens to the Afghan Taliban. Despite New Delhi's opposition, a joint counterterrorism exercise

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<sup>102</sup> Especially the testing of K-4, Submarine Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) with a range capability of 3,500 km (intermediate range) by India has impacted the delicate strategic balance of South Asia. It has resulted in the nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean. The test has also taken India closer to the second-strike capability. It will ultimately lead India to enhance the range of its SLBM up to 5500 KM and more, which may allow the country in future to have the capacity of launching a strike through submarine not only on Pakistan but also the Eurasia-Pacific region (China) from the far flung area of the Indian Ocean and beyond.

<sup>103</sup> "Russia Endorses Full SCO Membership for Pakistan," *Dawn*, November 7, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/671932>.

<sup>104</sup> "Putin Offers Pakistan Help in Fighting Terrorism after Quetta Blast," *Nation*, October 26, 2016, <http://nation.com.pk/international/26-Oct-2016/putin-offers-pakistan-help-in-fighting-terrorism-after-quetta-blast>.

*Druzhbha* (Friendship) was held between Russian and Pakistani Special Operations Forces in Cherat in September 2016.<sup>105</sup> It was the very first counterterrorism military exercise.<sup>106</sup> More recently, two-week long joint military drills in the mountains of Nowshera district (Pakistan) were conducted from October 22 to November 4, 2018 to strengthen the existing military relations.<sup>107</sup>

### ***Social and Cultural***

Pakistan-USSR social and cultural relations were established in 1964 when both countries signed a one-year educational exchange programme. Another agreement was concluded on June 5, 1965. Consequently, exchange including dance performances, film shows and festivals were conducted in both countries. The Pakistan cultural show in Dushanbe (1967) was one of the landmarks.<sup>108</sup> A bilateral agreement on Cultural and Scientific Cooperation was signed in 1968 during the former Prime Minister Kosygin's visit to Pakistan.<sup>109</sup> The Soviet magazine *Tulu* was also printed from Pakistan during the 1960s.<sup>110</sup> Such activities discontinued following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Even at present, they seem to be limited, which appears to be the stumbling block in getting an insight into each other's respective values, traditions and cultures. The language barrier is also a problem. To overcome these hurdles, the following initiatives have been taken:

<sup>105</sup> "Joint Exercise with Russia Progressing Well: ISPR," *Dawn*, September 28, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1286616>.

<sup>106</sup> Ali, "Pak-Russia Commission on Military Co-op Set Up."

<sup>107</sup> "Joint Military Drill with Russia has Reinforced Our Ties: Pakistan Army Chief," *Economic Times*, November 5, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/joint-military-drill-with-russia-has-reinforced-our-ties-pakistan-army-chief/articleshow/66513026.cms>.

<sup>108</sup> M. Iqbal, Falak Sher, Rehmat Ullah Awan and Khalid Javed, "Economic and Cultural Relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union during Ayub Khan's Period," *A Journal of Pakistan Studies* 3, no. 3 (2011): 1-13 (4, 6, 7), <http://pakistaniaat.org/index.php/pak/article/view/137>.

<sup>109</sup> Shah and Parveen, "Disintegration of Pakistan – The Role of Former Union of Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR): An Appraisal," 179.

<sup>110</sup> Hafeez Malik, ed., *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 194.

- Moscow State University and Pakistan’s National University of Modern Language (NUML) appointed Urdu-language and Russian language faculty, respectively.
- An agreement on student exchange was concluded between the Punjab University and the Moscow State University.<sup>111</sup>
- In 2012, the first Urdu-Russian dictionary was published by Pakistan-based Russian Dr Tashmirza Khalmirev.<sup>112</sup>
- A Pakistan Study Center has been established in Moscow.<sup>113</sup>
- Association of Pakistani Graduates from Russia is quite active in the country.<sup>114</sup>
- Voice of Russia held the 4<sup>th</sup> All-Pakistan Voice of Russia Conference in Lahore in December 2013.<sup>115</sup>
- A well-reputed restaurant in Moscow ‘Gandhara’ is famous for showcasing the Gandhara civilisation and Pakistani food.<sup>116</sup>

The growing renaissance in social and cultural ties between the two countries is another sign of strengthening relations.

### **Russia’s Balancing Act in South Asia**

Washington’ backing of India as the regional power has raised serious concerns in Pakistan since it strengthens the perception among policymakers that the US’ traditional role as balancer between India and

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<sup>111</sup> Hussain and Fatima, “Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings,” 10-11.

<sup>112</sup> “Urdu-Russian Dictionary Launched,” *News International*, August 3, 2012, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/377691-urdu-russian-dictionary-launched>.

<sup>113</sup> “Pakistan Study Centre Opens in Moscow,” *Pakistan Times*, July 16, 2012, <http://archive.is/pQhV#selection-415.0-415.38>.

<sup>114</sup> Hussain and Fatima, “Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings,” 9-11.

<sup>115</sup> “Pakistani Listeners of ‘The Voice of Russia’ Run Conference in Lahore,” *Voice of Russia*, December 15, 2013, accessed January 12, 2018, [https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2013\\_12\\_15/Pakistani-listeners-of-The-Voice-of-Russia-run-conference-in-Lahore-9360/](https://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/news/2013_12_15/Pakistani-listeners-of-The-Voice-of-Russia-run-conference-in-Lahore-9360/).

<sup>116</sup> Hussain and Fatima, “Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings,” 9-11.

Pakistan might have ended, thereby creating a vacuum in the region. To fill this vacuum, it appears that Moscow has assumed the role of performing this delicate act to ensure that its diplomacy towards Islamabad and New Delhi remains pertinent.<sup>117</sup> It not only seeks to preserve its traditional ties with New Delhi, a key US strategic partner, but also built linkages with the pro-China Pakistan. In the past, Russia has been favouring India at the UNSC while frequently vetoing resolutions on the Kashmir dispute. However, more recently in December 2017, it signed the joint declaration issued at the Six-nation Speaker's Conference in Islamabad supporting Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. The declaration underscored that for ensuring global and regional peace and stability, the dispute of Jammu and Kashmir needs a peaceful resolution in accordance with the UNSC resolutions.<sup>118</sup>

Thus, Moscow is engaging diplomatically with Islamabad and New Delhi, with the former progressively getting substantial place in its foreign policy reflected in the statement of Zamir Kabulov, Presidential Special Envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan 'urging that Russia's South Asia policy should expand beyond its historic Indian-centric links to equally include into its fold the Muslim-majority countries such as Pakistan.'<sup>119</sup> There appears to be a strategic shift in the language coming out of the Kremlin vis-à-vis Kashmir moving away from calls for 'dismantling the terrorist infrastructure in Jammu and Kashmir in 2002,'<sup>120</sup> to declaring in 2017 that 'Russia will use its influence to get Pakistan to stop alleged attacks in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan is taking immense steps to stabilize the situation in the country.'<sup>121</sup> Pakistan accepted Putin's

<sup>117</sup> Andrew Korybko, "Indian Fears: Is Russia Joining Pakistan China in CPEC?" *Global Village Space*, February 25, 2017, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/indian-fears-is-russia-joining-pakistan-china-in-cpec/>.

<sup>118</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "Why Russia no Longer Cares for Friendship with India," *DailyO.in*, March 29, 2018, <https://www.dailyo.in/politics/china-russia-vladimir-putin-xi-jinping-pakistan-collusion-india/story/1/23153.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Korybko, "Indian Fears: Is Russia Joining Pakistan China in CPEC?"

<sup>120</sup> Mark A. Smith, *Russia's Relations with India & Pakistan*, Russian Series no. 4/24 (Surrey: Conflict Studies Research Centre, 2004), [https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/96157/04\\_Sep.pdf](https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/96157/04_Sep.pdf).

<sup>121</sup> "Growing Ties with Pakistan will not Affect Relationship with India: Putin," *Express Tribune*, June 2, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1425491/growing-ties-pakistan-will-not-affect-relationship-india-putin/>.

intermediary offer for reducing the India-Pakistan tensions following India's aggression along the Working Boundary and the Line of Control (LoC).<sup>122</sup> US President Trump's Afghan strategy relying on a military solution instead of a negotiated settlement was also criticized by Russia which supported Islamabad's crucial role in regional security.<sup>123</sup> It has been asserted that Islamabad is 'a key regional player to negotiate with... Putting pressure (on Pakistan) may seriously destabilize the region-wide security situation and result in negative consequences for Afghanistan.' Likewise, during the Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Amritsar, Russian diplomats dismissed Indian and Afghan lambasting against Pakistan remarking, '...it is wrong to criticize Pakistan.'<sup>124</sup> Such diplomatic overtures are indicative that both countries are seeing 'each other as complementary partners for regional balance.'<sup>125</sup>

### **New Geopolitical Realities and Regional Fragility**

The emerging geopolitical realities are likely to influence the contours of Pakistan-Russia relations. First, the rise of China from a lingering agrarian economy to a global industrial giant, and the resurrection of Russia have dramatically changed the global geopolitical and economic landscape. They have transformed the scope of cooperation and conflict, along with generating strategic opportunities and challenges. For instance, with the imposition of economic sanctions against Moscow by the US and the European Union (EU) in wake of the East Ukraine crisis and the Crimean

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<sup>122</sup> "Regional Peace: Pakistan Welcomes Russia's Mediation Offer on Kashmir," *Express Tribune*, June 15, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1436324/pakistan-welcomes-putins-offer-mediate-islamabad-new-delhi/>.

<sup>123</sup> "Russia Warns Trump against Piling up Pressure on Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, August 24, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1490141/new-us-afghan-plan-futile-course-russian-foreign-minister/>; and Ali, "Pak-Russia Commission on Military Co-Op Set Up."

<sup>124</sup> "Russia Rejects Indian, Afghan Criticism on Pakistan," *News International*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/169900-Russia-rejects-Indian-Afghan-criticism-on-Pakistan>.

<sup>125</sup> "Russian Honorary Consulate to Renew Pak-Russia Diplomatic Ties: Jhagra," *Pakistan Today*, February 21, 2018, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/02/21/russian-honorary-consulate-to-renew-pak-russia-diplomatic-ties-jhagra/>.

annexation,<sup>126</sup> Moscow is finding recourse with Beijing and other countries including Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. However, Washington is driving hard to deprive Russia of its European energy market,<sup>127</sup> while at the same time firming US support to the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) gas pipeline project.<sup>128</sup> These competing interests over energy between the US and Russia encouraged the latter to widen its zone of foreign relations and include Pakistan in its 'multivector' pursuits in South Asia. Also, given greater Indo-US alignment, in the coming years, Moscow's role as a major defence arsenal supplier to India may become weaker.<sup>129</sup> In this case, Pakistan could be one of the prospective options for Russia.

Second, there has been an ideological shift in Moscow's stance towards the Afghan Taliban by acknowledging them as a reality not to be dismissed, as demonstrated in a statement of Zamir Kabulov in 2015 remarking, 'our interests are the same as the Taliban in fighting Daesh.'<sup>130</sup> This shift is also drawing Moscow closer to Islamabad and seeing the latter as a major stakeholder in the Afghan conundrum. Moscow is anxious to play a decisive role in the post-2014 regional security calculus independent of the US, specifically in the context of spillover from Afghanistan's instability. Moreover, the Moscow Conference on

<sup>126</sup> Aleksandar Vasovic and Adrian Croft, "U.S., EU Set Sanctions as Putin Recognizes Crimea 'Sovereignty'," *Reuters*, March 17, 2014, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis/u-s-eu-set-sanctions-as-putin-recognizes-crimea-sovereignty-idUSBREA1Q1E820140317>; and Ali, "Pak-Russia Commission on Military Co-Op Set Up."

<sup>127</sup> Zafar Bhutta, "North-South Pipeline: Pakistan, Russia Reach LNG Price Accord," *Express Tribune*, December 1, 2016, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1249730/north-south-pipeline-pakistan-russia-reach-lng-price-accord/>.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> "US Narrows Gap with Top Supplier Russia, Arms Sales to India Soar 5-Fold," *Business Standard*, March 17, 2018, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-narrows-gap-with-top-supplier-russia-arms-sales-to-india-soar-5-fold-118031700139\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-narrows-gap-with-top-supplier-russia-arms-sales-to-india-soar-5-fold-118031700139_1.html). According to the SIPRI 2018, Moscow had a 62 per cent share of Delhi's arms imports during 2013-17, less than the 79 per cent in 2008-12. On the other hand, arms sale from Washington to Delhi is increasing every year. During 2013-17, arms sales increased five times.

<sup>130</sup> Indrani Bagchi, "Respect State to State Relations: Afghanistan to Russia," *Times of India*, December 14, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/south-asia/respect-state-to-state-relations-afghanistan-to-russia/articleshow/55985159.cms>.

Afghanistan frustrated New Delhi given the evolving convergence between Russia, China and Pakistan, which appears to be awarding enhanced role to Pakistan in the future of Afghanistan. Whether US troops completely or partially leave Afghanistan under the current negotiations taking place,<sup>131</sup> Pakistan needs to plan ‘a regional recalibration of its foreign policy towards Moscow and Beijing after the suspension of the US security assistance.’<sup>132</sup>

Third, the rise of the Daesh in Afghanistan has set alarm bells ringing. Extra-regional forces in the country may employ Daesh as a proxy to undermine resurging Russia, China and Pakistan.<sup>133</sup> This perception is gaining traction in the wake of reports validating the arrival of thousands of Daesh miscreants from Syria, which is believed to be a move to destabilise the broader region.<sup>134</sup>

Fourth, the logic behind cooperative ties between Moscow and New Delhi is multifaceted and compelling as witnessed in their upgraded Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.<sup>135</sup> The Indo-Russia defence calculus equally enjoys privileged status. While defence sales may be declining, New Delhi remains Moscow’s largest weapons importer,<sup>136</sup> which may prevent the latter’s foreign policy formulation from seeking broad spectrum *entente* with Islamabad. Simultaneously, Moscow’s traditional support of India for permanent membership of the UNSC, NSG and the Nuclear Elite Club could have serious implications for Pakistan’s

<sup>131</sup> Mujib Mashal, “U.S. and Taliban Agree in Principle to Peace Framework, Envoy Says,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/28/world/asia/taliban-peace-deal-afghanistan.html>.

<sup>132</sup> “Pakistan’s Recalibration of Foreign Policy towards Russia, China,” *Times of Islamabad*, January 30, 2018, <https://timesofislamabad.com/30-Jan-2018/pakistan-s-recalibration-of-foreign-policy-towards-russia-china>.

<sup>133</sup> Kamran Yousaf, “Pakistan, Russia and China Inch Closer to Formal Alliance,” *Express Tribune*, April 3, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1372490/pakistan-russia-china-inch-closer-formal-alliance/>.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Hanif, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints,” 81-82.

<sup>136</sup> “US Narrows Gap with Top Supplier Russia, Arms Sales to India Soar 5-Fold,” *Business Standard*, March 17, 2018, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-narrows-gap-with-top-supplier-russia-arms-sales-to-india-soar-5-fold-118031700139\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/us-narrows-gap-with-top-supplier-russia-arms-sales-to-india-soar-5-fold-118031700139_1.html).

strategic calculus. When it comes to India, Moscow is playing its cards very cautiously realising on the one hand that if it ‘continues to snub Pakistan in favour of India, it would ultimately run contrary to the interests of Russia’s security’,<sup>137</sup> while on the other hand stressing that ‘Moscow did not complain about India’s close cooperation with the US and so India also should not complain about much low level of cooperation between Russia and Pakistan.’<sup>138</sup> Here, equally pertinent are the comments made in 2012 by Ruslan Pukhov, ‘Delhi’s attempts to diversify its supplies of new weapons increasingly from Western countries are making Russia flinch. Moscow has explained to Delhi... that it can also diversify its military-technical ties by means of a rapprochement with Pakistan.’<sup>139</sup>

## Future Outlook

Building on the above, the prevalent geopolitical landscape seems to be quite feasible for laying the foundation of progressive relations between Pakistan and Russia. Contrary to the past, when Islamabad used to ally with the US at international forums, it now has the option of reaching out to Russia as a prospective diplomatic associate. This could be parallel to accessing the other major power China, in garnering support for Pakistan’s position on issues such as human trafficking and terrorism at multilateral fora.<sup>140</sup> Institutional engagement with Moscow may enable the country to procure the relatively cheaper Russian defence equipment for

<sup>137</sup> Sergei Strokan, “Pakistan and Russia Move Closer toward Military Cooperation,” *Russia Beyond*, October 10, 2012, [https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/10/pakistan\\_and\\_russia\\_move\\_closer\\_toward\\_military\\_cooperation\\_18965.html](https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/10/pakistan_and_russia_move_closer_toward_military_cooperation_18965.html).

<sup>138</sup> Sachin Parashar, “Russia Throws its Weight Behind China-Pakistan Corridor, Keeps India on Tenterhooks,” *Times of India*, December 19, 2016, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/russia-throws-its-weight-behind-china-pakistan-corridor-keeps-india-on-tenterhooks/articleshow/56053869.cms>.

<sup>139</sup> Joshua Kucera, “Fearing Afghanistan, Russia Gets Closer to Pakistan,” *Eurasianet*, October 11, 2012, <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66040>.

<sup>140</sup> Atia Ali Kazmi, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Evolving Geopolitics and Strategic Options,” *Hilal*, December 1, 2017, <https://www.hilal.gov.pk/eng-article/pakistan-russia-relations:-evolving-geopolitics-and-strategic-options/Mzk3.html>. On the other hand, “Moscow Appreciates Islamabad’s Balanced View on Syria, Ukraine, and Common View on Afghanistan.”

which the US tended to charge higher prices than the international market and that too tied with US-dictated conditions.

In 2011, Moscow – central member of the SCO – explicitly ‘backed Pakistan’s bid to join.’<sup>141</sup> Pakistan and India became full members during 17<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Heads of the State Council Summit 2017 in Astana.<sup>142</sup> Moscow is backing SCO to address issues like terrorism, separatism and extremism through a combined regional approach. Therefore, despite tense relations between Pakistan and India, ‘the latter’s legal expert’s delegation took part in a three-day meeting of Legal Experts Group of Shanghai Cooperation Organization-Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure hosted by the former in May 2018.’<sup>143</sup> Besides, Pakistan and India, for the first time, participated in a multi-nation military exercise codenamed Peace Mission 2018 held from August 24 to August 29, 2018 in Russia.<sup>144</sup> For Pakistan, the SCO is an appropriate forum that may advance its financial interests, specifically in curbing its energy crisis. Using the platform, Pakistan could attract Russia’s security support to fortify its domestic security and defence proficiencies, especially in countering terrorism. Moscow may act to ensure rules-based order in an attempt to resolving outstanding territorial conflicts. This approach could encourage the country to maintain a delicate balance between India and Pakistan for regional stability.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Rashid Siddiqi, “Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement,” *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (2017): 58-73, [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).

<sup>142</sup> Aamir Ilyas Rana, “Historic Day: Pakistan Joins SCO at Astana Summit,” *Express Tribune*, June 9, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1431365/pakistan-becomes-full-member-shanghai-cooperation-organisation/>.

<sup>143</sup> “3-Day RATS-SCO Legal Experts Meeting Concludes in Islamabad,” *Radio Pakistan*, May 25, 2018, <http://www.radio.gov.pk/25-05-2018/3-day-rats-sco-legal-experts-meeting-concludes-in-islamabad>.

<sup>144</sup> SM Hali, “Peace Mission 2018-Bringing Antagonists Together,” *Daily Times*, September 1, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/291048/peace-mission-2018-bringing-antagonists-together/>; and Dawood Rehman, “SCO Peace Mission 2018: Pakistan, India Conduct First Joint Anti-Terror Exercise in Russia,” *Daily Pakistan*, August 24, 2018, <https://en.dailypakistan.com.pk/headline/sco-exercise-peace-mission-2018-pakistan-india-conduct-first-joint-anti-terror-exercise-in-russia/>.

<sup>145</sup> Ivan Kessler, “Russian South Asia Complexity,” *Regional Rapport*, March 6, 2017, <http://regionalrapport.com/2017/03/06/russian-south-asia-complexity/>.

The sudden rise of Daesh in Afghanistan has made it indispensable for Russia to seek cooperation of convenience between Taliban and Moscow and likewise between Islamabad and Moscow. The much-desired goal of achieving stable peace in Afghanistan has necessitated enlarged Russia-Pakistan diplomatic collaboration.

Moscow also has the potential to interlink the EurAsEC initiatives with the BRI. After joining CPEC, Moscow may be able to perform an objective role in South Asia. It may enable Pakistan to capitalise on the potential inflow of Russian investment in infrastructure, mechanical goods, chemical products, agriculture,<sup>146</sup> metal industry and technological advancement. This will depend, of course, on the manner in which Pakistan succeeds in bargaining for more benefits with Russia by providing it access 'to the warm waters of Arabian Sea.'<sup>147</sup> On the counterterrorism front, both states have to evolve collective level of trust and collaboration in sharing actionable intelligence and expertise.

## Conclusion

The architects of Russia-Pakistan bilateral relations need to be conscious that their ensuing mutual collaboration should not to be overshadowed by India. The most pragmatic course of action is to ensure a gradual move in building a step-by-step relationship for developing long-term strategic commitments at subsequent phase instead of hastening into a fragile and inconstant partnership.

To develop economic ties, Islamabad has to attract Moscow's commercial interests into CPEC's special industrial zones (SEZs), besides promotion of regular exchange programmes in the domains of private, commercial and trade sectors. In this regard, the Pakistan Mission to Moscow may consider appointing a Commercial Counselor<sup>148</sup> dedicated to

<sup>146</sup> Saddam Hussein, "Russia and Pakistan's Reluctant Romance," *Diplomat*, February 25, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/02/russia-and-pakistans-reluctant-romance/>. Pakistan can offer a 'US\$ 16 billion market in the agriculture sector alone.'

<sup>147</sup> Hussaan Tariq, "Are Those Winds of Change We Detect in Pak-Russia Relations?" *Pakistan Today*, April 10, 2017, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/04/10/are-those-winds-of-change-we-detect-in-pak-russia-relations/>.

<sup>148</sup> At present, this seat is vacant in the trade wing of Pakistan's embassy in Moscow.

trade delegations, organisations and exhibitions. Moreover, Pakistan may consider connecting the Gwadar Port to Moscow via rail link through Central Asia. Opening respective branch banking systems in Pakistan and Russia would be a propellant in increasing business-to-business connections.

In the defence domain, a Joint Pakistan-Russia Commission on Defence Cooperation may provide a platform for convening annual meetings for training, military drills on broader land-sea-mountain warfare, exchange of military delegations, and up-gradation of heavy mechanical industries, thus, enhancing shared ventures in these spheres.

Likewise, devising means of permanent interactivities between Pakistan-Russia parliamentarians, government functionaries, academia, students, and media entities could act as a stimulant to bring about the desired turnaround in bilateral relations. The way forward lies in a pragmatic and robust foreign policy based on viable diplomatic options duly estimated on need assessment principles. This may help diversify Pakistan's alliances by cultivating relations not only with major powers like Russia, but also with other significant stakeholders sharing commonality of interests. ■