

Geo-Political Realignment: The Evolution of Pak-Russia Strategic Partnership



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Abstract: *The evolution of the Pakistan-Russia strategic partnership is a complex interplay of geopolitical, geo-economics, and geostrategic factors, profoundly influenced by the changing dynamics of global power competition. This research aims to trace the historical background of Pakistan-Russia relations and analyze the drivers contributing to the emergence of their strategic partnership. Using offensive realism as a theoretical framework, the study examines the convergence of interests between the two nations, particularly in the realms of global security dynamics, regional strategic balancing, defense collaboration, Afghanistan, and counterterrorism. Furthermore, it delves into the energy, economic, and trade dimensions of their partnership, highlighting the significance of energy security, food security, and economic cooperation. By elucidating the multifaceted nature of the Pakistan-Russia strategic partnership, this research provides insights into how both countries navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape and forge a mutually beneficial alliance amidst new great power competition.*

Keywords: Geo-Politics, Realignment, Strategic Partnership, Russia, Pakistan. Offensive Realism

Introduction:

Once fierce enemies, Pakistan and Russia are now becoming closer to one another due to the altered 'geopolitical landscape' (F. H. Khan, 2021). It represents a major shift in South Asia's and by extension, Eurasia's geopolitics (Zaidi & Saud, 2021). Due to Cold War dynamics, both countries' relations were historically distant (Clary, 2022). However, since the early 2000s, those ties have steadily thawed, leading to a noticeable turn in recent years towards strategic partnership (F. H. Khan, 2021). This relationship deviates from earlier alignments and partnerships by involving economic ties, defense cooperation, and diplomatic interaction (Clary, 2022). This dynamic partnership is significant on several levels. From a geopolitical perspective, it provides Pakistan with a

substitute for its traditional dependence on Western nations for defense and economic assistance, expanding its range of strategic alternatives amid intricate regional dynamics (Azizian & Vasilieff, 2003). Whereas, it gives Russia more opportunities to exert influence in South Asia while balancing its interests with those of the United States and India (Indo-US Entente) (Clary, 2022). Furthermore, the Partnership tackles common issues including economic growth, counterterrorism, energy and food security, Afghanistan, and regional stability, strengthening economic prosperity and mutual security.

This issue was chosen because it continues to be relevant today and has the ability to significantly alter the regional geopolitical landscape. For politicians, analysts, and academics alike, it is

imperative to comprehend the motivations, difficulties, and consequences of this collaboration as both nations' commitment grows. Analyzing the reasons underlying each country's strategic realignment and its future course offers important insights into how regional security architectures and global power dynamics are changing. In spite of the increasing attention from academia and policy makers, there is still a discernible lack of study on the long-term viability and possible obstacles of the collaboration between Pakistan and Russia. Further research is needed to determine how the geopolitical realignment and the evolving Pakistan-Russia strategic partnership will affect existing global and regional alignments in the context of renewed great power's competition via the offensive realism lens. Filling up these gaps will help us comprehend the partnership's trajectory and its implications for regional and global stability in a more nuanced way.

Offensive Realism: A Theoretical Framework

Offensive Realism pioneered by John J. Mearsheimer, provides a lens through which we can understand the dynamics of international politics, particularly in the context of great power competition. According to Mearsheimer, states are driven by a relentless pursuit of power, with the ultimate goal being to maximize their share of global power relative to other states. This pursuit is fueled by a number of factors: the absence of a central authority to enforce peace, the inherent offensive capabilities possessed by states, and the perpetual uncertainty surrounding the intentions of other states (Mearsheimer, 2001). In this framework, multipolar orders, where power is distributed among several major states, are viewed as particularly unstable and prone to conflict. This is because the presence of multiple great powers vying for dominance increases the likelihood of competition and confrontation, especially when powerful potential hegemon emerges. Mearsheimer argues that in such situations, it is natural for states to adopt offensive strategies to secure their own interests and prevent the rise of potential rivals (Lawson, 2015).

This theory helps explain why states like Russia

and Pakistan might seek to realign their foreign policies in response to shifting global and regional power dynamics. Both countries perceive a need to strengthen their positions in the face of New Cold War (Lucas, 2014), and shifting alliances i.e., Indo-US Entente (Rehman, 2006), leading them to explore new partnerships and avenues of cooperation. Pakistan's strategic realignment, particularly amid strained relations with the US, underscores efforts to diversify foreign policy options. Meanwhile, Russia encounters challenges in its relations with the West, particularly evident in the Ukraine Crisis, and faces obstacles in its ties with India, the burgeoning alignment between Russia and Pakistan reflects a significant alteration in regional dynamics. This realignment prompts deeper engagement between Pakistan and Russia across various domains including defense, energy, and infrastructure development. Overall, Mearsheimer's theory of Offensive Realism offers valuable insights into the underlying motivations and behaviors of states in the international arena, shedding light on the complex interplay of power, security, and strategy.

Soviet Union's Policy Towards South Asia:

The partition of British India in August, 1947, into two separate States (India and Pakistan) happened alongside the onset of the Cold War. As these newly independent nations-states emerged from colonial rule, they grappled with the challenge of aligning themselves with either the United States or the Soviet Union, as the world shifted into a bipolar world order. India retained and prioritized strategic independence over military partnerships (F. H. Khan, 2021). Despite officially adhering to a nonaligned stance, India actively engaged with the Soviet Union (Mohan, 2006). Conversely, Pakistan, as the comparatively weaker and economically challenged state, aligned itself with US-led military alliances throughout the Cold War era (Sattar, 2013, p. 40). While Pakistan experienced economic and military advantages from Western alliances, it also faced repercussions, enduring Soviet backlash and hostility due to its pro-Western orientation.

The Soviet Union's policy in South Asia was shaped by three main factors: its antagonistic relationships with China and the United States, and its post-1979 involvement in Afghanistan (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 343). Concurrently, Pakistan's active support for US strategic goals during the Cold War led to deep-seated distrust between the Soviet Union and Pakistan across three distinct periods. Initially, Pakistan entered into four agreements with the US: the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement of 1954, the SEATO pact of 1954, the Baghdad Pact of 1955, and the Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement of 1959 (Sattar, 2013, p. 51). Therefore, Islamabad granted the US access to air bases and intelligence resources on Pakistani territory, enabling surveillance of the Soviet Union (Saeeda, 2021).

Notably, Tensions further escalated with incidents like the U-2 reconnaissance flights from PAF Camp Badaber near Peshawar, piloted by Francis Gary Powers. The aircraft, which had departed from Peshawar, Pakistan, was shot down near Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) by a surface-to-air missile in May, 1960. (Fensch, 2001). Consequently, Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union, as a superpower, consistently opposed Pakistan's interests in various international forums, including its stance on Kashmir at the United Nations (Sattar, 2013, p. 64). Furthermore, Soviet leaders' visits to India, Afghanistan, and Burma in late 1955 underscored Moscow's endorsement of New Delhi's stance on Kashmir and Kabul's policy on Pashtunistan (Belokrenitsky, 2023), further straining relations with Pakistan.

Secondly, In the 1970s, Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating President Nixon's historic summit, which fostered reconciliation between China and the United States (Smith, 2011). In response, the Soviets enacted retaliatory measures by formalizing the India-Soviet Mutual Friendship treaty in August 1971 (Donaldson, 1972). This treaty not only extended political but also strategic support to India during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 95). The outcome was a significant blow to Pakistan, leading to its humiliating surrender in East

Pakistan and the subsequent emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation.

Lastly, following the Soviet's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, motivated by concerns over preserving a pro-Soviet regime and countering Islamic insurrection, Moscow's decision shocked international opinion, prompting widespread condemnation, including from Islamic states (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 98). In response, the United States and Pakistan formed a new alliance to conduct an asymmetric warfare campaign aimed at defeating the Soviets in Afghanistan (Jaffrelot, 2016, p. 223). However, the occupation of Afghanistan proved costly for the Soviet Union, akin to the United States' experience in Vietnam. Moscow's entanglement in Afghanistan during this period contributed significantly to the Soviets' strategic overreach and ultimately led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Arguably, the US engagement in Afghanistan during the 1980s can be seen as a form of retribution for the American setback in Vietnam, a conflict where the Soviets supported the opposing side. Similarly, Pakistan's involvement can be viewed as a response to its partition in the 1971 war, which was supported by the Soviet Union. Essentially, both Pakistan and the Soviet Union indirectly influenced each other's downfall during the Cold War era. This historical context continues to loom large, even as Russia and Pakistan endeavor to cultivate a new relationship.

After the disintegration of USSR, In the mid-1990s, Russia and Pakistan endeavored to recalibrate their relationship, but their efforts yielded limited results. During this period, Pakistan found itself grappling with US nuclear sanctions imposed under the Pressler amendment to US nonproliferation legislation, enacted in 1990 (Shaikh, 2002). These sanctions prohibited economic and military aid to Pakistan unless the US president annually certified Pakistan's non-possession of nuclear weapons. Concurrently, Pakistan faced pressing needs for military modernization, feeling abandoned by the US, which had utilized Pakistan for its Cold War objectives and subsequently distanced itself. Furthermore, Pakistan was left to confront

the aftermath of the Afghan War largely on its own.

In this regard, a new era started, marking a pivotal stage in Russo-Pakistani relations at the onset of the 21st century. This period witnessed four notable peaks, characterized by significant diplomatic engagements: Firstly, in April 1999, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's historic visit to Moscow marked the first such visit by a Pakistani Prime Minister in 25 years (Hanif, 2013). This milestone was followed by the visit of President General Pervez Musharaff to Russia in 2003, as well as presidential visits in 2009 and 2011 by Asif Ali Zardari. More recently, Prime Minister Imran Khan's two-day visit in February 2022 signaled continued diplomatic engagement between the two nations. Due to these diplomatic efforts, the overall bilateral relationship experienced an improvement from its initial phase. This progress was evidenced by an increase in trade volume, successful resolution of Pakistan's small debt to Russia, and agreements such as the construction of the 'Pakistan Stream' pipeline with Russian assistance, aimed at transporting significant quantities of LNG from Karachi to Lahore's industrial hub.

Post-Cold War Russo-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagements:

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Pakistan and Russia identified avenues to embark on a fresh chapter of improved relations. Both nations undertook a comprehensive reassessment of their previous strategies and launched several foreign policy initiatives aimed at fostering closer and more amicable ties. The advancements are evident in the series of bilateral diplomatic visits and the subsequent signing of agreements. These diplomatic endeavors encompassed a series of visits to Pakistan by Russian officials, including Vice President Alexander Rutskoy in December 1992, Foreign Minister Kozyrev in April 1993, and First Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin in May 1994 (Bakshi, 1999). In reciprocation, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Akram Zaki visited Russia in 1992, and Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali traveled to Moscow in July 1994, during which an important protocol was

signed, facilitating regular consultations between the foreign ministers of both countries (Hanif, 2013). Moreover, in September 1995, a Russian parliamentary delegation visited Pakistan, led by Alexander Vengerovsky, who disclosed Russia's readiness to supply military hardware to Pakistan (Singh, 2016). Despite occasional interruptions, such as concerns over Pakistan's support for the Taliban government, which Russia feared might incite separatism in some Central Asian States (CARs) and within Russia itself (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 344), both nations persisted in their efforts to enhance their relations.

Moreover, in 1999, Nawaz Sharif as Prime Minister of Pakistan, embarked on a significant visit to Russia, during which he finalized several trade and industry agreements, marking a pivotal moment in bilateral relations (Singh, 2016). This visit, hailed by Russian President Boris Yeltsin as the commencement of a "new chapter," set the stage for regular exchanges between representatives of both nations. In September of the same year, a special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pakistan, expressing confidence in Pakistan's potential to contribute to regional stability by addressing issues such as international terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and religious extremism (Azizian & Vasilieff, 2003). A key milestone occurred in 2001, prior to the 9/11 attacks, when an agreement was reached for the sale of sixteen MI-17 military cargo helicopters to Pakistan following a visit to Russia by the ISI Chief, General Mehmood, serving as President Musharraf's special envoy (Sehar, 2018). Since then, Pakistan and Russia have actively pursued diplomatic initiatives to strengthen bilateral ties, characterized by sustained high-level interactions between the two nations.

Post-9/11 Pak-Russia Diplomatic and Strategic Engagements:

Following the seismic shifts triggered by the events of September 11, 2001, which altered the geostrategic environment both globally and in South Asia. Pakistan's pivotal policy shift post-9/11, abandoning support for the Taliban and actively engaging in the global "war on terror" in Afghanistan (Sadiq, 2016, p. 204),

contributed significantly to improving relations with Russia. Musharraf's cooperation with the anti-terrorism coalition paved the way for his visit to Moscow in February 2003, resulting in modest outcomes, including agreements on internal security, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic cooperation (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 354). Although Pakistan aspired to participate in a joint gas pipeline project involving Russia, Iran, and India, no such agreement materialized. While Musharraf assured Russia that Pakistani territory would not harbor terrorist activities, notably citing Chechnya as a domestic issue (Kaushiki, 2019), his public expression of interest in Pakistan joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was met with reserved response from Russia, despite previous positive reactions to India's potential membership. Ultimately, both India and Pakistan were granted observer status at the SCO summit in Shanghai in 2005, later becoming full members in June 2017 (Shaumyan, 2018), with Russia's support for India and China's backing for Pakistan.

Shortly after President Medvedev assumed office in Russia, amid domestic political pressure, Musharraf stepped down from the presidency in August 2008, and Asif Ali Zardari succeeded Musharraf as president in September 2008. The interactions between Medvedev and Zardari reflected a notable warmth, suggesting an upward trajectory in Russian-Pakistani relations. Prior to their inaugural standalone summit in Moscow in May 2011 (Kremlin, 2011), the two leaders convened on four occasions during multilateral gatherings, with the Sochi meeting in September 2010 being particularly significant. The Sochi summit convened leaders from Russia, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan in a quadrilateral format to deliberate on the Afghan situation (Purushottam, 2010). During a joint appearance with Zardari, Medvedev advocated for regular political dialogue and the expansion of bilateral economic cooperation. They signed agreements in energy and agriculture sectors and pledged joint efforts to combat terrorism and drug trafficking.

Additionally, in 2011, Pakistan Army Chief

General Ashfaq Kayani made a significant visit to Moscow, where he presented Pakistan's new approach and defense requirements to Russian officials. Kayani advocated for Russia to reconsider its policy of prohibiting arms sales to Pakistan (Nawaz, 2011). Following the army chief's visit, Pakistan Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafiq Butt traveled to Moscow in August 2012, reciprocated by Russian Air Chief Viktor Bondarev's visit to Islamabad in April 2013. In 2014, after a visit to Islamabad by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, Moscow ended its embargo on offensive weapons sales to Pakistan, culminating in an agreement for the delivery of four Mi-35M Hind-E assault helicopters (Farooq et al., 2018). This decision signaled a shift in Russia's strategic interests in the evolving geopolitics of South Asia. Until 2014, Russia had refrained from engaging in significant military cooperation with Pakistan (Donaldson & Nadkarni, 2019, p. 353).

Furthermore, In October 2014, Russia and Pakistan initiated their inaugural joint counter-narcotics exercise, followed by a subsequent exercise in December 2015. In September-October 2016, the two nations conducted their inaugural bilateral tactical exercises, named Friendship-2016, at Pakistan's special forces training center in Cherat, marking the public unveiling of their military relations. In March 2017, a high-level Russian military delegation visited Pakistan's tribal areas bordering Afghanistan to study Pakistani border management and counterterrorism strategies (Qazi & Bashir, 2022). Subsequently, in August 2017, Pakistan received an additional four Mi-35M Hind-E helicopters from Russia (Gady, 2017). Following these acquisitions, Russia and Pakistan embarked on a series of joint military exercises, including the Arabian Monsoon naval drills in 2014 and 2015. Notably, in 2017, during the Pakistan Navy-led Aman naval exercise involving 35 countries, Russia's largest antisubmarine warship, Severomorsk, participated for the first time (Ali, 2017). Furthermore, both militaries engaged in joint exercises, starting with the Friendship-2017 military exercises, which involved approximately 70 military mountaineers from

Pakistan and the Russian mountain infantry division of the Southern Military District (G. J. Khan, 2021). These exercises were held in the mountainous terrain near the Nizhny Arkhyz settlement in Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia, in September 2017.

Moreover, In February 2018, Pakistan's foreign minister visited Moscow, where several issues of mutual concern were discussed (Ahmed, 2022). Subsequently, in April 2018, General Qamar Bajwa, the third consecutive Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, paid a visit to Moscow, culminating in the establishment of the Joint Military Commission between the two nations (Khan, 2019). Concurrently, in the same month, high-level security discussions were held in Moscow, with the participation of national security advisors from both countries. Notably, the Pakistani delegation included defense officials from the Strategic Plans Division, hinting at potential discussions on strategic and nuclear matters (Khan, 2018).

Following these developments, the frequency of military delegation exchanges between Moscow and Islamabad surged. For example, in August 2018, a Pakistani naval delegation led by Vice Admiral Kaleem Shaukat visited Russia, resulting in the signing of a memorandum of understanding on naval cooperation. In September 2018, against the backdrop of ongoing tensions between India and Pakistan, military contingents from both nations participated in SCO joint exercises held on Russian soil (Bashir & Gul, 2021), signaling a positive gesture. Concurrently, as Pakistan-Russia relations progressed, the termination of Pakistan's participation in the United States' International Military Education Program by President Donald Trump prompted swift action (Ali & Stewart, 2018). In response, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement," marking the first instance of Pakistani military officers receiving training in Russian military institutions (Kurita, 2019). Although Pakistan and Russia do not publicize the nature of their cooperation as openly as Pakistan does with China, their collaborative trajectory is discernible. With dwindling US military support under the Trump

administration, Pakistan remains proactive in maintaining open channels with Moscow and Beijing.

Moreover, in April, 2021, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's two-day Islamabad's visit marked a significant step in bilateral relations, as it was the first visit by a Russian foreign minister to Pakistan since 2012. With discussions focusing on the Afghan situation, bilateral ties, economic cooperation, counter-terrorism efforts, and the socio-economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, both countries aimed to deepen their strategic partnership. Furthermore, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov delivered a significant message from President Vladimir Putin to Pakistani leadership, offering unequivocal support and cooperation in various areas. Described as a "blank cheque," Putin's message conveyed Russia's readiness to assist Pakistan in corridors, defense, or any other form of cooperation necessary (Yousaf, 2021). This pledge underscores a burgeoning relationship between the two countries, with existing collaborations like the North-South gas pipeline project and potential investments estimated at \$8 billion across different sectors (Chia & Haiqi, 2021). This shift in dynamics stems from Pakistan's strategic realignment, especially in light of strained relations with the US, prompting efforts to diversify foreign policy options. As Russia's ties with India face challenges, the alignment of Russia, China, and Pakistan gains momentum, presenting a shift in regional dynamics.

Furthermore, in 2022, Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Moscow signals Pakistan's growing affinity towards Russia, introducing a fresh dynamic to South Asian geopolitics (Mohan, 2022). Despite the timing coinciding with Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Imran Khan continued his two-day visit to Moscow, culminating in a meeting with President Vladimir Putin at the Kremlin (Gul, 2022). This occurred amidst Western efforts to isolate Putin for his actions. While, Imran Khan defended his decision to pursue the visit, citing Pakistan's economic interests as a primary motive, stating, "We went there because we have to import 2 million tons of wheat from Russia. Plus, we have

signed agreements with them to import natural gas because Pakistan's own gas reserves are depleting (Gul, 2022)." This underscores Pakistan's strategic interests in securing vital resources and fostering economic partnerships, even amidst geopolitical tensions. Furthermore, Pakistani leaders have refrained from condemning Russia's military intervention in Ukraine (Singh, 2023), instead emphasizing the importance of pursuing a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's visit to Moscow in 2023 followed Imran Khan's, with the understanding reached during delegation talks emphasizing trade, energy cooperation, and regional stability. Discussions encompassed Pakistan's efforts for peace in Afghanistan, its stance on South Asian security, and human rights concerns in Indian-administered Kashmir. The visit underscored the warming relations between Pakistan and Russia, highlighted by agreements on crude oil supply and plans for comprehensive energy cooperation, amidst Pakistan's urgent economic needs and a shifting geopolitical landscape (MOFA, 2023). Analysts suggest that Pakistan's strained ties with the United States have contributed to its alignment with China and Russia, a trend accentuated by the prioritization of economic interests and diplomatic discretion amidst geopolitical complexities.

Convergence of Interest: Pakistan and Russian Geo-Political Realignment:

The strategic partnership between Russia and Pakistan is propelled by a variety of factors, encompassing economic, political, geostrategic, and security Dimensions.

Geostrategic and Security Dimensions

1. Global Security Dynamics

In the evolving landscape of global security dynamics, the partnership between Pakistan and Russia holds strategic significance. With the emergence of China and the resurgence of Russia, the global geo-strategic environment is shifting away from the post-Cold War unipolar era towards renewed great power competition (Lovelace, 2016). This shift has led to

adjustments in the strategies of major players such as the United States, Russia, and China. Therefore, The US National Security Strategy of 2017 highlights the challenges posed by China and Russia to American interests, prompting the US to pledge countermeasures against their growing political, economic, and military influence worldwide (Trump, 2017). Additionally, the US is advocating for alliances like AUKUS and QUAD to function as an Asian equivalent of NATO, which Russia perceives as adversarial due to NATO expansion towards its borders and conflicts in regions like Ukraine, Syria, and Afghanistan. Russia's concerns about these alliances, includes the risk of nuclear proliferation, the resurgence of alliance structures resembling SEATO in the Asia-Pacific region, and potential regional strategic shifts impacting economic dynamics (Yanovsky, 2023). Amidst these challenges and intensified great power competition, Russia's foreign policy aims to assert its status as a Great Power while advocating for a multi-polar world order (Herd, 2010, p. 8). In this context, Russia seeks alliances with countries sharing its vision and interests. As Russian influence wanes in Indian decision-making due to Indo-US entente, it opens up space for other geopolitical dynamics to emerge. Whereas, Pakistan's tensions with the US, coupled with America's strategic pivot towards India in the context of global power competition, creates a natural alignment of interests between Pakistan and Russia. Furthermore, Pakistan's National Security Policy for 2022-2026 underscores its commitment to redefining its partnership with Russia, particularly in sectors such as diplomacy, energy, defense cooperation, and investment (National Security Division, 2022). This convergence is driven by mutual interests in countering American influence in the region and maintaining strategic balance. Additionally, it could reshape regional dynamics and power structures, impacting the broader geopolitical landscape.

2. Regional Strategic Balancing

In the evolving dynamics of global power competition, particularly within the Indo-Pacific region, the United States is strategically aligning

with India to counterbalance China's growing influence (T. A. KHAN, 2023). This strategic partnership between the US and India has profound implications for South Asia, as it introduces a critical imbalance in the regional power dynamics. As India strengthens its ties with the US, its traditional relationship with Russia undergoes a shift, diminishing Russian influence in South Asia (Carafano, 2023). This realignment prompts both Pakistan and Russia to reassess their strategic positions. Both nations recognize the need to collaborate strategically to mitigate the potential repercussions of this shifting balance of power. For Pakistan, maintaining a stable regional environment and safeguarding its security interests become imperative amidst India's increasing alignment with the US. Similarly, Russia, facing a diminishing influence in South Asia, seeks avenues to preserve its strategic interests in the region. Thus, the convergence of interests between Pakistan and Russia compels them to explore avenues of cooperation to counterbalance the US-India partnership, uphold regional stability, and protect their respective national interests in the evolving geopolitical landscape of South Asia. This strategic collaboration establishes in various forms, including diplomatic initiatives, defense cooperation, and economic partnerships aimed at maintaining a multipolar balance of power in the region.

3. Defense Collaboration

The dynamics of defense cooperation between Pakistan and Russia are influenced by shifting geopolitical trends. While India was traditionally a major purchaser of Russian military equipment, it has increasingly turned towards Western technology, reducing Russia's market share. Conversely, Pakistan, historically reliant on Western technology, has faced strained relations with the US and a cessation of aid, prompting it to seek alternative sources. Russia emerges as a viable option for Pakistan, facilitated by the lifting of weapons embargoes. This shift is exemplified by specific agreements, such as the purchase of multi-role and attack helicopters, and the import of Russian-made RD-93 engines for its JF-17 combat aircrafts.

This marks a significant diversification of Pakistan's defense procurement. In addition, in response to the termination of Pakistan's participation in the United States' International Military Education Program by President Donald Trump, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement," marking the first instance of Pakistani military officers receiving training in Russian military institutions (Kurita, 2019). Moreover, the cooperation extends beyond transactions to joint military exercises, including counterterrorism drills and naval exercises (Ali, 2017). Despite Indian objections, Russia's participation underscores its commitment to deepening ties with Pakistan. Nevertheless, the joint military exercises and various military exchanges between Pakistan and Russia remain relatively fresh. At most, they facilitate enhanced tactical and operational coordination and foster a deeper understanding of each other's strategic concepts, symbolizing the evolving military ties (F. H. Khan, 2021). It's inevitable that over time, Russia and Pakistan will exert strategic and doctrinal influence on each other's perspectives. This trajectory suggests a growing strategic alignment between Russia and Pakistan, driven by mutual interests and geopolitical considerations.

4. Afghanistan

The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan on August 15, 2021, has catalyzed a strategic convergence between Pakistan and Russia, as both nations recognize the imperative of establishing lasting peace in the region. Dissatisfied with the efficacy of Washington's approach, they share a conviction that regime stability and political reconciliation among all Afghan factions is pivotal for sustainable peace. Recognizing Afghanistan's pivotal position amidst myriad threats, ranging from instability to refugee influx and the spread of extremism, Islamabad and Moscow have engaged in concerted efforts for regional stability and security. Collaborative endeavors, exemplified by initiatives like the Moscow Framework and the International Afghanistan Peace Conference, underscore their commitment to fostering inclusive governance and thwarting terrorist

resurgence (Haider, 2023). As Russia seeks to carve out a distinct geopolitical role independent of US influence, Pakistan advocates for constructive engagement with the Taliban to avert humanitarian crises and ensure respect for human rights (Yusuf, 2021). The post-US withdrawal era presents a pivotal juncture for both nations to advance their mutual interests in counterterrorism and regional stability, offering a pathway for pragmatic cooperation amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics.

5. Counter Terrorism and Extremism:

The cooperation between Pakistan and Russia on counterterrorism and extremism is rooted in a shared policy perspective regarding the threat posed by Al-Qaida, TTP and the Islamic State (ISKP) in Afghanistan. Both countries view the ISKP as the primary security challenge. This alignment in policy is a key point of convergence between Moscow and Islamabad. Both Russia and Pakistan have expressed concerns that the Islamic State in Afghanistan is capitalizing on the displacement of fighters from Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, both Russia and Pakistan advocate for counterterrorism measures that respect the sovereignty of regional States. ISKP's recent attacks in Moscow, as well as its targeting of Shia communities and Chinese interests in Pakistan, highlight the ongoing threat posed by the group and underline the importance of cooperation between Russia and Pakistan in countering terrorism and extremism. In summary, the cooperation between Pakistan and Russia on counterterrorism and extremism is based on their mutual recognition of the Islamic State's threat in Afghanistan, their shared assessment of its origins, and their commitment to counterterrorism strategies that uphold international sovereignty.

Energy, Economic and Trade Dimensions

1. Energy Security

Russia, renowned as an 'energy superpower,' leads in natural gas and is the world's second-largest oil exporter (Rutland, 2008). Historically, it has been a key energy supplier to the EU. However, Europe's shift towards decarbonization, coupled with the energy crisis from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, prompts

concerns about diversifying energy sources (Tichý & Dubský, 2024). Consequently, Russia is exploring partnerships with Asian nations to compensate for strained ties with Europe, aiming to secure new markets for its energy exports. Whereas, Pakistan faces a significant energy crisis, heavily reliant on imported fuel like oil and LNG. With a limited refining capacity and domestic oil production meeting only 20% of its needs, the country spends billions annually on oil and refined products imports. Natural gas, comprising 38% of its energy mix, falls short of meeting domestic demand, resulting in a supply-demand gap (Sattar, 2024). To address this, Pakistan is diversifying its energy supplies and has recently started importing Russian gas and [oil](#). In January 2023, a prominent Russian delegation visited Pakistan to discuss oil and gas supply, aiming to bolster economic ties. This meeting, involving Energy Ministers, focused on providing discounted energy and exploring avenues for enhanced trade relations (Jamal, 2023). A similar visit occurred in December 2022, highlighting the shared importance both nations place on energy cooperation. Additionally, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Bilawal Butto Zardari, visited Russia in early 2023, underscoring the significance of energy collaboration (MOFA, 2023). The spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maria Zakharova, noted that Russian and Pakistani companies are actively addressing supply-related issues, signaling a commitment to strengthening energy trade between the two countries. In continuation of the efforts to enhance Pak-Russia energy trade, the first shipment of Russian crude arrived in Pakistan in June 2023, marking a significant milestone. Approximately 750,000 barrels of oil were exported during two test shipments (KIZILAY, 2023). Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif hailed the arrival of Russian oil supplies as a transformative moment for the country. Additionally, in September, 2023, Pakistan received its inaugural shipment of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from Russia. Moscow delivered 100,000 metric tons of LPG to Pakistan through Iran's Sarakhs Special Economic Zone (S. Khan, 2023), further

solidifying the burgeoning energy partnership between the two nations. This successful exchange underscores the potential for expanded energy cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. With ongoing efforts to address supply-related challenges and the positive reception of Russian energy imports, both countries are poised to deepen their collaboration further. As Pakistan seeks to overcome its energy crisis and Russia aims to diversify its export markets, future prospects for increased energy trade between the two nations appear promising.

2. Food Security

Pakistan, ranking as the world's fifth-most populous nation and the third-most populous in Asia, relies heavily on wheat, its primary staple food, with an annual per capita consumption of 125kg, surpassing neighboring countries. Despite this, wheat productivity has plateaued in recent years, experiencing only a modest 10% increase over the past decade (Afzal, 2023). Compounded by the impact of the 2022 floods on wheat sowing in regions like Sindh, Balochistan, and South Punjab, the country's wheat production is estimated at 26.81 million tonnes this year, falling short of the 28.4 million-tonne target. Consequently, Pakistan, once a wheat exporter, has transitioned to a net importer, with projected wheat imports of 2.6 million tonnes to fulfill domestic demand (Afzal, 2023). In the preceding marketing year 2021-22, Ukraine served as Pakistan's main wheat supplier, exporting 1.3 million tonnes to the country. However, the disruption caused by the Russia-Ukraine war resulted in the loss of this importer for Pakistan, consequently elevating Russia to the position of the top wheat exporter to the country. In November 2022, Pakistan's government sanctioned a deal valued at approximately \$112 million to import 300,000 tonnes of wheat from Russia, aiming to address its domestic shortfall. Now Pakistan is the fifth-largest importer of Russian wheat (Hussain, 2022). In 2023, there was a substantial surge in Russian grain exports to Pakistan, showing a remarkable 5.5-fold increase. This surge has resulted in Russian grain accounting for 70% of Pakistan's total grain imports. In a reciprocal trend, Pakistani rice exports to Russia saw a

decline. In 2022, Pakistan's rice exports to Russia amounted to only US\$1.76 million, a considerable decrease from US\$21.6 million in 2010. This decline was partly due to a ban imposed by Russia in 2019, citing pest interception concerns in rice. However, the ban was lifted in 2021, with only four compliant rice mills permitted to export to Russia. To expand this trade, the Department of Plant Protection, with support from the Rice Exporters Association of Pakistan (REAP), undertook measures to upgrade 15 additional mills to meet the quality standards outlined by the Russian Federation. As a result, a total of 19 rice enterprises from Pakistan are now eligible to export rice to the Russian Federation. In a nutshell, Both Pakistan and Russia can address each other's food security needs. As this partnership develops, it holds the potential to become mutually beneficial in ensuring food security for both nations in the future.

3. Economic and Trade Cooperation

Pakistan and Russia have seen fluctuations in their bilateral ties, but recent cooperation has bolstered economic relations, marked by increased governmental dialogues. Despite this, Pakistan faced a trade deficit of \$468 million in 2020, with bilateral trade often favoring Russia. Efforts to resolve past disputes, including a \$93.5 million settlement in November 2019, paved the way for Russian investments in Pakistan, particularly in the energy sector. Subsequent engagements, such as the 8th Session of the Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission in January 2023, further solidified ties, resulting in agreements on customs cooperation, exchange of documents, and airworthiness standards. Pakistan export, primarily in rice, citrus, leather apparel, and medical instruments, while Russia exports mainly wheat, dried legumes, and coal briquettes to Pakistan. still, there is ample room for enhancing Pakistan-Russia bilateral trade and strengthening economic ties through further collaboration and investment initiatives. With ongoing efforts and mutual cooperation, both countries can unlock greater potential for trade growth and economic prosperity.

Conclusion:

the historical trajectory of Pakistan and Russia's relationship reveals a complex interplay of geopolitical dynamics, influenced by shifts in global power structures, regional security concerns, and evolving strategic interests. From the onset of the Cold War era, where both nations found themselves aligned with opposing blocs, to the post-Cold War period characterized by attempts at recalibrating their ties, the journey has been marked by both cooperation and contention. Pakistan and Russia have navigated a complex historical relationship marked by geopolitical shifts and strategic rivalries. From the Cold War era to the present day, both countries have sought to balance their interests while engaging in dialogue and cooperation. Recent efforts have seen a convergence of interests across multiple domains, including defense collaboration, counterterrorism efforts, food and energy security, and economic cooperation. Joint military exercises, technology transfers, and energy projects like the 'Pakistan Stream' pipeline underscore the potential for deeper engagement. While challenges remain, such as trade barriers and historical tensions, the present moment offers an opportunity for Pakistan and Russia to strengthen their partnership. By leveraging their complementary strengths and mutual interests, both countries can contribute to regional stability, economic growth, and shared security objectives.

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