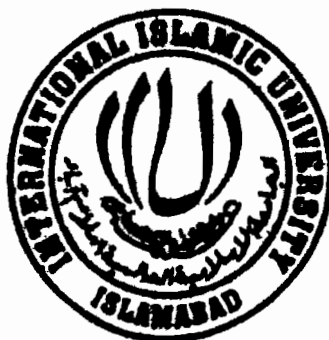


# **STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES**

**PHD Dissertation**



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## **FINAL APPROVAL**

This is to certify that we gone through and evaluated the dissertation titled "Strategic Dimensions of Pak-Russia Relations: Prospects and Challenges", submitted by Mr. Aman Ullah, a student of Ph. D. International Relations under University Registration No. 15-FSS/PHDIR/S16, in partial fulfillment of the award of the degree of Ph. D. This thesis fulfills the requirements in its core and quality for the award of the degree.

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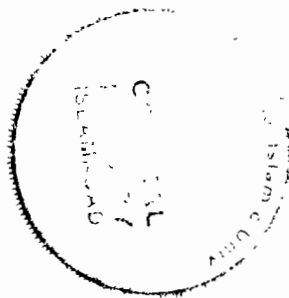
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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| USSR    | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics                 |
| CPEC    | China-Pakistan Economic Corridor                    |
| LNG     | Liquefied Natural Gas                               |
| SCO     | Shanghai Cooperation Organization                   |
| UAE     | United Arab Emirates                                |
| ISIS    | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria                     |
| SEATO   | Southeast Asia Treaty Organization                  |
| CENTO   | Central Treaty Organization                         |
| UNSC    | United Nations Security Council                     |
| NATO    | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                  |
| TAPI    | Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India             |
| CASA    | Central Asia-South Asia                             |
| IDEAS   | International Defence Exhibition and Seminar        |
| MoFA    | Ministry of Foreign Affairs                         |
| NSG     | Nuclear Suppliers Group                             |
| GDP     | Gross Domestic Product                              |
| GSOMIA  | General Security of Military Information Agreement  |
| LEMOA   | Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement          |
| COMCASA | Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement |
| BECA    | Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement            |
| QUAD    | Quadrilateral Security Dialogue                     |
| AUKUS   | Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States |
| SAARC   | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation    |
| ASEAN   | Association of Southeast Asian Nations              |

|       |  |
|-------|--|
| GWoT  | Global War on Terror                                 |
| CAREC | Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation Programme |
| ECO   | Economic Cooperation Organization                    |
| CASS  | Center for Aerospace and Security Studies            |
| GEP   | Greater Eurasian Partnership                         |
| CEC   | Central Eurasian Corridor                            |
| BRI   | Belt & Road Initiative                               |

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this PhD thesis to my parents, my wife and the family members, who always supported and encouraged me to get higher education and grow in professional life.



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## **ABSTRACT**

Pakistan and Russia have a bitter past. The Cold War hostility, the Soviet-Afghan war, the USSR disintegration and the post-Soviet dissolution decade of strained ties form a long history of unfriendly relationship between Islamabad and Moscow. Pakistan's decision to join the US-led global war on terror was well-received everywhere in the world, including Russia. Former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf's visit to Moscow in 2003 was an important development in respect of normalization of ties between the two countries. The subsequent exchange of visits by the civilian and military leadership contributed to reducing mutual distrust mounted over the past period of antagonism. It, however, does not mean, as voiced by the experts on international relations in this dissertation, that the distrust has completely ended. While there seems incremental shift in the foreign policies of the two countries toward each other, the pace of improvement is extremely slow with only a few steps taken to enhance bilateral defence cooperation over the past one decade. Nonetheless, the two countries have actively been engaged on the Afghanistan issue to attain the common objective of peace and stability in the war-torn country as well as the region at large.

This study explains the complex phenomenon of strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations since 2003 in the context of historical facts and current geo-political dynamics. At present, the converging interests of the two countries and the challenges in the way on the path of positive trajectory provide a base to explain the phenomenon. Interviews of a select group of experts on these aspects shedding light on prospects and challenges help the reader understand the questions raised in the study. It transpires from the views of the experts that the possibilities are stronger than the obstacles, and the process of gradual improvement may continue amidst the challenges. The expert opinion suggests that Pakistan and Russia are interested to move forward taking along their respective traditional allies; the United States and India respectively; as this is not "either or" relationship.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union in 1991 was a defining occurrence that transformed the world order from bipolar to unipolar. Today – three decades down the lane – the world order again seems to be in a process of transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. With its robust economy, China is posing a challenge to the US economic dominance; and Russia, which has re-emerged as a great power, has also been endeavoring to establish its strategic influence in its neighborhood and beyond. While the world powers have unveiled their “Pivot to Asia” and “Turn to the East” approaches for the 21<sup>st</sup> century, geopolitical changes are being witnessed in the Asian region.

A lot is being produced in the scholarly domain on the prevailing geo-political situation in Asia; however, questions have also been surfacing about the nature of ties between the two great powers of Asia – China and Russia – and also their relations with other states in the region. Pakistan, being part of the Soviet-Afghan war that led to the Soviet collapse and subsequently emergence of unipolarity, has been an important player of this political imbroglio. This study aims to describe and analyze historical evolution as well as the current position of the strategic dimensions of Pak-Russia relations particularly since 2003. The term “strategic” gives multiple connotations in international politics; however, in this dissertation, it is being used in its general sense; meaning thereby that the study focuses on the issues pertaining to security of the two countries. The convergence and divergence of interests of the two countries on issues of mutual interest have also been explained thus underlining the possibilities and challenges in the growth of the bilateral relationship. This first chapter of “Introduction” gives background on the topic and describes research problem, aims and objectives, justification, limitations and the overall structure of the thesis. Literature Review will also be part of this chapter.

Russia has reestablished itself as a great power, and the country is expanding its influence in its neighborhood and the far-off. Under the Putin regime, Russia has improved its trade and defiance relations with other countries, including North Korea, Venezuela, Greece, Hungary, France and some far-right wing parties across Europe (Ijaz, 2016). Russia intervened in Ukraine, reacquired Crimea and has been interfering in the Middle Eastern affairs, particularly in Syria and

Iran. There are also realignments in the Asia Pacific region with China and Russia bolstering their mutual ties. India, a traditional ally of Russia, has been expanding and deepening ties with the United States. India believes to have a special role in the region – containment of China.

The US special focus on India to support it militarily and economically has created a complex situation in the South Asian region. Pakistan, which has been alleged by the United States of sheltering Afghan Taliban leadership for a long period, remains concerned about India's involvement in Afghanistan and the US support to it. However, since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021, India's role seems to have been marginalized. India's growing importance in the region at the behest of the United States and the instability in Afghanistan are worth concerning for China that too has been establishing its sphere of influence in different parts of the world. China's Belt and Road Initiative and the launch of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in Pakistan make Beijing an important stakeholder in South Asia. The problems created by the United States and India in South China Sea necessitated China to have another option of trade route through CPEC. While Pakistan has been facilitating peace and stability in Afghanistan, both Russia and China have also been taking keen interest in establishing peace and stability in the war-ravaged country in order to lessen the US influence in the region and prevent any spillover effect of terrorism from Afghanistan.

India's strategic partnership with the United States for securing its interests in the region and beyond has made an impact on New Delhi's traditional ties with Moscow. The Islamabad-Moscow relationship has also witnessed an improvement, though not significant enough. Former President General (retd) Pervez Musharraf's visit to Moscow in 2003 was no less than an ice breaker in the tense bilateral relationship. This set the tone for exchange of visits by the two sides. In 2007, the then Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov paid a three-day visit to Pakistan, which was the first visit of any Russian prime minister in post-Soviet era. This trip gave a push of reactivation to the bilateral relationship. The year 2014 is another very important year in the history of Pakistan-Russia ties when Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu paid a visit to Pakistan, which resulted in signing of a landmark agreement of defence cooperation between the two countries. The visit and the agreement led to lifting of Russia's self-imposed embargoes on Pakistan for sale of weapons and start of joint military drills. Russia also agreed to sell Mi-35 helicopters to Pakistan besides pledging \$1.7 billion for construction of LNG pipeline from Karachi to Lahore (Dawn, 2015). In September 2016, the two countries staged military exercises

in Pakistan despite India's displeasure over it. They again conducted military drills in Russia in September 2017. The joint military drills continue to take place with intervals.

There are many opportunities for Pakistan and Russia to move forward and cooperate in multiple fields for mutual benefits; however, the trajectory of the bilateral relationship does not seem to be a smooth sailing process. As for bilateral cooperation, the two countries have great potential in the fields of defense, energy and trade. On May 29, 2021, Islamabad and Moscow signed amended intergovernmental agreement on North South Gas pipeline project. Later in November 2021, the two sides agreed to sign the Shareholders and Facilitation Agreement for the \$3 billion project by February 15, 2022 (The News, 2021). In addition to the bilateral cooperation, the two countries have several regional issues to get closer and cooperate with each other for mutual benefit. These include the Afghan issue, fear of spill-over effect of terrorism from Afghanistan and narcotics smuggling. It is in the interest of both the countries that the US-led forces do not stay in Afghanistan and the US influence in the region recedes. A regional approach in addressing the regional issues is in the interest of both the countries. The platforms of SCO and CPEC provide them ample opportunities to expand cooperation in the fields of energy, trade and defense. Russia has also expressed desire to join CPEC, which has been welcomed by both Pakistan and China (Xing, 2017). China, an all-weather friend of Pakistan, is a very important factor in the phenomenon of geopolitical developments. China, Russia and Pakistan have been actively involved in the process of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan.

The long history of Pakistan and Russia being opponent forces and their alliances with the enemies of each other – India and the United States – cannot be set aside. However, this does not mean that it is a zero-sum game and the two countries cannot move forward until they abandon their past allies. The historical baggage and a couple of other factors, nonetheless, bring forth various challenges. India's big market advantage is an attraction for Russia; and this makes the former the largest arms buyer of the latter. According to a report released by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute in March 2021, Russia exported 20 percent of the total global arms exports in 2016-2020, and India was the lead importer with 23 percent of the total followed by China with 18 percent. However, India is also keen to deepen and expand its defence relations with the United States, particularly in technology transfer and joint production. The bilateral defence trade increased from less than \$1 billion in 2008 to \$18 billion in 2018. An increase of 550 percent was recorded in export of US arms to India in 2013-17 (Parpiani, 2020).

Although Pakistan and Russia have taken various steps to improve bilateral relations since 2003, the pace of progress seems slow with only a few substantial steps. On the other hand, Pakistan's ties with its traditional ally, the United States, have been tense; and this decline in the level of bilateral relationship continues for several years. Former US President Donald Trump gave clear threats to Pakistan accusing it of harboring the terrorists whom the United States had been fighting (Yousafzai, 2017). After assuming the office of the US President, Joe Biden did not make any contact with former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Washington has always demanded of Pakistan to do more in the fight against terror and it doubted Pakistan's role vis a vis the Afghan issue. Now as the United States has left Afghanistan and it also suspects Pakistan's role in the Afghan issue, there seem little chances of improvement in Islamabad-Washington ties in near future.

An important challenge for Pakistan's foreign policy makers is to manage the country's ties with both the United States and Russia. Russia is not an alternative to the United States; nor is Russia going to abandon India for Pakistan. A cautious approach is being applied by both Russia and Pakistan to move on. After restoration of their political contact in 2003 since the fall of the Soviet Union, some steps have been taken; however, it cannot be stated that the two countries have established their relationship on sound footings.

Pakistan is weighing options on the questions how much Russia can and will support it, and how Islamabad can manage its relationship with Washington. Similarly, Russia, which has re-emerged as a great power, seems to be following a policy of diversification in South Asia.

### **1.1. Rationale of the study:**

Russia and China – two major world powers have been in a good state of affairs mutually and are also trying to establish their influence in different countries, including Pakistan, in a bid to contain the US influence in the region. India – fully backed by the United States – has also been striving to emerge as a key player in the region. The Indo-US closeness has left an impact on the historical strong relationship between India and Russia. Similarly, Pakistan – a frontline ally of the United States in the war on terror – could not get the due importance from Washington in the context of its policy towards Afghanistan (Hanif, 2013). In 2017, President Donald Trump's allegations against Pakistan in the US strategy on Afghanistan and South Asia, and the subsequent cancelation of the then Pakistani Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif's scheduled visit to the United States reflected tension in the bilateral relationship. Several Pakistani officials, including Khawaja

Asif hinted at shifting Pakistan's US-centric foreign policy toward China and Russia (Siddiqui, 2017). Later, two visits of the then US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and US Secretary of Defence James Mattis also indicated a change in Pakistan's behavior toward the United States. Similarly, Pakistan has been trying to convey its message that it has done and sacrificed more than any other country of the world in the fight against terrorism. The tension of Trump era in the bilateral relations still persists; rather it has increased since Joe Biden's arrival in the White House.

The launch of CPEC and Pakistan's full membership of SCO give signals not compatible to Pakistan's traditional US-centric foreign policy. In this emerging scenario of realignments in the region, the relationship between Pakistan and Russia needs to be scientifically studied and analyzed. This study will focus on Islamabad-Moscow relationship in the realm of security since 2003 in comparison with the historical relationship. The year 2003 carries special importance in the bilateral ties because of former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf's icebreaking visit to Moscow, which paved the way for interactions and exchange of visits by the either side. The study is expected to be a useful addition to the existing knowledge of geo-political environment particularly in South Asia. While the developments continue taking place in the Pak-Russia relationship, a study based on history and contexts of regional realignments will contribute to fill gap in this area.

### **1.2. Statement of the problem:**

Pakistan and Russia have been taking steps over the past two decades to improve the bilateral relationship. In the backdrop of the Cold War enmity and strained ties of 1990s, these developments appear to be very important. Obviously, mutual interests and commonality of views on a host of issues are bringing the two countries closer. Nonetheless, there are also challenges that restrain the two countries to progress fast on the path of bilateral cooperation. The progress made in the bilateral relationship over the past two decades does not reflect a very positive picture. Thus, the study is an attempt to explain the predicament as to why the two countries have not made substantial progress over the past two decades despite the fact that they have no hostility or enmity. This study will provide the reader an insight into the trajectory of Islamabad-Moscow ties and also the changing geopolitical environment in South Asia. The study based on secondary source of data and primary source of interviews of the relevant persons may help the reader have a relatively clear understanding about the existing geopolitical and geostrategic milieu.

### **1.3. Objectives of the study:**



The study is expected to achieve the following objectives:

- To describe the strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations in the context of historical facts and areas of common interest at bilateral and multilateral levels
- To identify the major areas of mutual interest and the obstacles that have capacity to impede the progress in bilateral relations
- To explain the existing geopolitical environment in South Asia in which Pakistan and India are readjusting their positions and opening up their foreign policies
- To provide an understanding into Pakistan's relations with the great powers in a world witnessing transition from unipolarity to multipolarity

#### **1.4. Research questions:**

The primary question of this study is: -

- What are the converging interests of Pakistan and Russia and what factors are impeding progress in the bilateral relationship?

Under the banner of the above-mentioned primary research question, the study would also elaborate the following secondary questions as well.

- How much important the India-US strategic partnership is a factor for improvement in Islamabad-Moscow ties?
- Why could Pakistan and Russia not achieve something very significant in respect of the bilateral cooperation over the past two decades?
- What are the main challenges for Pakistan and Russia to build better ties?
- What changes are taking place in Pakistan's foreign policy vis a vis its relations with world great powers in the emerging multipolar world order?

#### **1.5. Significance of the study:**

South Asia has a history of Indo-Soviet and Pakistan-US alliances. The end of the Cold War with the Soviet collapse in 1991 transformed the bipolar world order into unipolarity. However, after three decades of the Soviet dissolution, another phase of transition has been underway. While the United States still enjoys the only super power status, China's strong economy and Russia's re-emergence as a great power are posing a threat to the US dominance and hegemony in different parts of the world. The US support to India in order to counterbalance China, Beijing's deepening strategic partnership with Islamabad particularly after the launch of the CPEC and Russia's gradually improving ties with Pakistan have formed an interesting geopolitical

environment. A scientific study into the Pakistan-Russia relations in the backdrop of other regional developments would give the reader an understanding of the prevailing geopolitical milieu.

Pakistan and Russia have been enjoying normal relations for over two decades; and also taking initiatives particularly for over a decade to strengthen bilateral ties. It needs to be studied as to how the two countries are improving bilateral ties specifically in the security domain since 2003 and why they have are moving ahead on the path of cooperation for mutual benefits at a slow pace. In the emerging situation in which realignments are taking place in South Asia particularly in the wake of the new dimension of Indo-US strategic partnership, this study will give answer to various relevant questions on the strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations. The data gathered from secondary sources views of the experts on the subject would make this dissertation a valuable addition to the existing knowledge on the subject. It would also contribute to filling the gap in the existing literature on the subject.

#### **1.6. Delimitations of the study:**

The study focuses on the security related matters of Pakistan-Russia relations, which forms a major component of the bilateral relationship. Although the two countries have cooperated or discussed ways to cooperate in economy, trade and energy; the major portion of their engagements or disengagements consists of security-related matters. Pakistan's joining of the Western bloc during the Cold War that laid foundation of distrust between Islamabad and Moscow, Russia's support to India in 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan, Pakistan's participation in the Soviet-Afghan war that led to dissolution of the USSR; and then Pakistan's joining of the US-led war on terror; all were the major historical facts that left deep imprints on Pakistan-Russia relations. And since the revival of the bilateral relations in 2003, whatever progress has so far been made is mainly in the defence sector. It is either Russia's lifting of embargos on sale of arms to Pakistan in 2014, provision of four attack helicopters to Pakistan, joint military drills or joint efforts on the Afghan issue; this all is related to security.

The Pakistan-Russia relationship is an emerging phenomenon and developments continue taking place in the days the dissertation is being written, particularly on the Afghan issue in which the two countries have been deeply involved. Therefore, the latest official statements and other developments will have to be cited from newspapers' online editions and official websites. However, scholarly work published in journals will also be used for reference. Authentic official sources will be used for data pertaining to bilateral consultations, agreements and level of

cooperation. In this study, different countries become relevant to provide context to explaining the phenomenon under question. However, it does not mean that the mutual relationship of these countries would be studied or explained in detail in the thesis; rather, the study will only focus on the strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations. The data or information about other countries that make relevance here will only be cited to elaborate the main question. The contextual information, nonetheless, will make the debate logical. The objectives of the study might seem to be vast because of expected discussion on relations among various countries, but they will be specific in the light of the topic. The study would be an addition to the existing knowledge, which would obviously open more avenues for research.

## **2. Methodology:**

Denzin and Lincoln have defined methodology as “how the researcher gains knowledge about the social world” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In quantitative research, numerical data is analyzed statistically whereas qualitative research is based on non-numerical data. Qualitative research includes a wide range of methods including interviews, case studies, ethnographic research and discourse analysis, to name just a few (Sukamaolson, 2007).

This study attempts to explain the strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations and the future prospects vis a vis the deepening India-US ties. The subject under study warrants that soft data should be used instead of hard data – a feature of quantitative research. The qualitative research approach has been followed to explain the event, circumstance or phenomenon under study. Interviews of a select panel of experts on the subject have been conducted that may help explain the phenomenon. The objective is to analyze the interaction of people with problems or issues (McNabb, 2015). These interactions have been studied in their context and then subjectively explained by the researcher. Under the framework of qualitative research, which is a research of “cases and contexts,” the case of Pakistan-Russia relationship has been studied in the context of India-US ties.

### **2.1. Research Design:**

In the prevailing anarchic world, Pakistan and Russia have been pursuing their respective national interests and acquiring more and more power to ensure their security. While international politics revolves around maximization of power because of no-existence of an overarching authority to ensure order in the world, the inter-state relations of the countries concerned have been studied under the theoretical framework of Structural Realism.

The topic pertains to relationship between Pakistan and Russia since 2003 with a focus on matters of strategic nature. Data about major developments occurred in the bilateral relationship during this period has been collected from secondary sources including books, newspapers, journals and official statements. Views of analysts and officials on the subject have been gathered through these secondary sources. Primary source has also been utilized and interviews conducted to collect data, which provided ground for drawing comparisons and making analysis.

In qualitative research, case study method is used to explore a real-time phenomenon in its naturally occurring context (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999). It is a “strategy for doing research which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context using multiple sources of evidence (Robson, 1993).” The Case Study Model has been applied to conduct this research that encompasses explaining important events and developments related to Islamabad-Moscow defence ties since 2003 in the backdrop of their relationship during the Cold War period and the growing India-US strategic partnership. Under this case study of Pakistan-Russia relations, it is explained “how” and “why” the two countries are improving their mutual relations. The questions have been appropriately dealt under the explanatory form of Case Study research design. The causal links in the events related to Pakistan-Russia and India-US relations since 2003 were studied and analyzed. The Case Study design also became suitable because a current phenomenon was being studied. The researcher had no control over the events, which is another feature of Case Study design.

The Pakistan-Russia relationship is a complex contemporary phenomenon that needs to be studied and explained in the context of the India-US ties and other important geopolitical milieu. The causal links of India-US ties and other events taking place in the region do have impact on the Islamabad-Moscow ties and also lead to making inferences about the main question.

## **2.2. Population:**

In this study, population consists of diplomats, politicians, foreign policy experts and journalists, who have grip over the subject being studied. The diplomats include former ambassadors, researchers at think-tanks, Russia’s diplomats or scholars and officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Analysts and experts on international relations, who had deep understanding of the developments taking place in the world in general and South Asia in particular as well as involvement of Russia and the United States in them, were approached to know their viewpoints on the topic.

### **2.3. Sampling:**

While applying non-random convenience sampling, a suitable sample size was selected to gather primary source data. The sample of experts and analysts was chosen keeping in view their relevant knowledge, experience, research work and impartiality.

### **2.4. Data Collection:**

Both primary and secondary source data was gathered for this qualitative input. The primary data was obtained through recorded interviews or written responses of unstructured questions. The questions were designed and put before a select sample to record their views. Official statements have also been used. For the secondary data, newspapers, journals, books, media reports and other published material were consulted.

Collection of primary source data is always not an easy task. The most relevant people on the subject were contacted to record their views on some unstructured questions. However, it was found difficult to reach people and record their interviews because the world had been gripped by Corona virus in those days. Nonetheless, as per requirements, the sample consisted of panelists having relevant knowledge as well as experience. They belonged to the community of former diplomats, former defence officials, analysts at think-tanks and researchers. Two of the six respondents shared their responses in written through e-mail while others gave interviews. A total of 12 open-ended questions were developed to seek opinion of the experts. Six of them were based on possibilities while six others reflected challenges in growth of Islamabad-Moscow ties.

Validity of the qualitative data was ensured by strictly following the set procedures and methods of collecting data so that the study becomes trustworthy. Multiple methods or data sources, including interviews, published material and official documents were used to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The recorded interviews were transcribed faithfully to ensure fairness and impartiality. Quotes of the respondents in interviews and also from official statements were used to the maximum level to illustrate conclusions. The transcribed material was shared with the analysts interviewed to ensure accuracy of the data. All the steps taken in the process of data collection were also documented.

### **2.5. Discourse Analysis:**

The data collected through both primary and secondary sources contained views and opinions about the phenomenon, which indicated trends or inclinations of the respondents. The researcher built a narrative on the basis of these trends. It was in descriptive form. Even if

numerical data is used at few places, such as for referring the volume of economic and defence cooperation among the countries concerned in the study, it was interpreted by the researcher in a narrative form as per the Case Study approach. The data actually reflected tendencies of growth and impediments in the course of Pakistan-Russia relationship, which helped the researcher reach findings.

### **3. Organization of study:**

The dissertation consists of seven chapters.

The first chapter – Introduction – provides an overview of the topic with a brief background. It unveils Problem Statement, Research Questions, Significance of the Study, Research Methodology and Organization of the Study. Literature Review is also a part of this chapter.

The second chapter – Theoretical Framework – briefly explains the relevant theory and its application in the study. Attempt has been made to introduce key concepts of the topic and develop the relevant theoretical framework. It has also been explained how the study fits in the theory being applied for the purpose.

The third chapter – Historical Perspective of Pakistan-Russia Relations – provides a background on the topic beginning from the Cold War era. The main events that impacted the overall bilateral relationship have been cited to set the tone of the debate. It covers the era from the beginning of Cold War or the inception of Pakistan to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The hostility between Pakistan and Russia during the Cold War era, the Soviet-Afghan war, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the tense 1990s ties have been briefly narrated in this part of the study.

The fourth chapter elaborates strategic dimensions of Pak-Russia relations. It gives a brief overview of the historical events that had strategic implications for the two countries and also mentions important developments in the area of defence cooperation since the revival of the bilateral relationship. The bilateral cooperation in defence sector as well as their interaction and collaboration on international issues of mutual interest have also been explained.

The fifth chapter titled “Russia’s resurgence as a great power and realignments in region” dilates upon Russia’s journey of again becoming a great power of the world. The phenomenon of Russia’s growing importance in the world politics and its efforts to establish its influence in different parts of the world has been explained. Russia’s current status vis a vis other great powers

like the United States and China has also been presented. With the emergence of China as a threat to the US dominance in economy in the world and Russia's use of hard power to establish its influence in different countries, realignments are taking place in South Asia. India's close strategic partnership with the United States and its effects on other countries of the region has also been studied.

The sixth chapter, "Pakistan-Russia: Convergence of Interests," identifies the areas in which the two countries have common interests. This commonality of views and convergence of interests on bilateral as well as international issues is actually leading to improvement in bilateral ties. This chapter mainly consists of views or opinions of experts, who are interviewed, about the matters on which the two countries have prospects of bilateral cooperation. A similarity of interest of the two countries is likely to determine the future course of bilateral ties. The secondary source data and the content of the primary source interviews have been attempted to be incorporated to present a holistic picture of the study.

The seventh chapter – "Challenges in Pakistan-Russia Growing Ties" – unveils the hurdles or impediments in the progress of the bilateral cooperation. The panelists interviewed have been asked whether these challenges do have any impeding effect on the cooperation and are making the progress slow. In order to develop a complete understanding of the topic, the important points in the data, both secondary and primary, have been gathered in this chapter.

In "Conclusion," the last part of the study, the researcher analyzed the experts' views and the data to reach findings of the study. These findings may bring forth a clear understanding about the phenomenon under study as well as the research questions. The evidence gathered from the secondary source data and the tendency shown in the views may help develop an understanding about Pakistan-Russia ties that seem to be on the positive trajectory though at a slow pace. In the light of the findings, recommendations have also been made in a bid to enlighten readers and provide food for thought for scholars.

#### **4. Literature Review:**

A study about Russia is very important as well as interesting these days when the world has been in the process of transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. Russia that has re-emerged as a great power and has been trying to establish its influence in different parts of the world is an important player of this game. The US failure in Afghanistan and the active role being played by

China and Russia for peace and stability in Afghanistan has made the topic further interesting and worth studying.

The topic, “Strategic Dimensions of Pak-Russia Relations: Prospects and Challenges,” looks very relevant today when realignments are taking place in South Asia. The strategic dimension of the relationship encompassing interactions and engagements between the two countries in security-related matters at bilateral and regional level has been focused in this study. The bilateral cooperation in defence sector does not contain any substantial deals; however, if compared with their bitter past, it means a lot. One of the most important aspects of the bilateral ties is that each of the two sides has been endeavoring to diversify its foreign policy approaches. In the past, Pakistan had been aligned with the United States at the cost of cold and tense ties with the Soviet Union while the Soviet Union supported India against Pakistan. Since there is no friend or foe in international politics, the two countries have been on the path of improvement of their mutual relations.

Over the past two decades, a lot of developments having strategic implications for Pakistan and Russia have taken place and scholars have also written about them. They have been studying the change in the approaches of the two countries toward each other and trying to understand the emerging dynamics in the region. While the topic is related to the latest developments taking place in the bilateral relationship, pieces of writing continue pouring in especially in the form of research articles and newspaper/magazine opinions. There are numerous scholarly products published in journals and in the form of books on the subject; however, this study is expected to prove to be a useful addition to the existing knowledge with a difference. This dissertation not only informs the reader about the level of cooperation between the two countries in defence sector but also provides an insight into the main areas of common interest for them to enhance mutual cooperation and also the impediments in the way. The study of factors involved in improvement of bilateral ties and the causes of slow progress based on data and views of the relevant experts enlightens the reader on the direction of the bilateral relations in an environment of new alignments in the region.

Russia’s resurgence as a great power has been a hot topic for scholars of international politics for a couple of years. Writers have described the phenomenon in different ways. While referring to the changes taking place in the world, Jonathan Adelman has termed it “one of the greatest surprises of all.” He said Russia’s reacquiring Crimea, Southern Ossetia, Abkhazia and part of Left Bank Ukraine has been welcomed by conservative nationalist leaders (Adelman,



2015). With its strong military capabilities, Eurasian geographic location, capable leadership, conservative nationalism and resuscitation of old Cold War relationships, Russia has become a major player in the world. In his article, Jonathan Adelman gave a brief overview of Russia's growing ties with countries across the world. He said Moscow enjoys good ties with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, Morocco and the UAE. Israel and Russia have \$2 billion deal and Israel sells drones to Russia. Syrian President Bashar al Assad depends greatly on Moscow's \$4-5 billion military aid for his survival. Russia played an important role in Iranian nuclear deal. In Latin America, Russia enjoys good relations with Argentina and Brazil; while in Asia, Russia has friendly relations with China, India and Japan. Russia is the biggest arms exporter to China. Chinese President Xi Jinping had predicted that the Sino-Russian relationship could become the number one relationship of the world. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has tilt toward the United States, continues to have strong strategic, military and political ties with Russia (Adelman, 2015). Adelman mainly focuses on Russia's expansionist policy with little attention to the country's economic condition, which is a key element of resurgence as a great power.

There is a viewpoint that Russia's current foreign policy mainly focuses on three priorities noticed in its centuries-long approach toward the world. In their working paper titled "Russia's Global Ambitions in Perspective," Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer wrote that the Russian foreign policy reflects three main drivers, which were present in Moscow's three centuries old posture on the world stage. They include quest for strategic depth, recognition as a great power in the world and Russia's complicated relations with the West (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). The factors pointed out by Julia Gurganus and Eugene Rumer involved in Russia's current foreign policy approach seem to be quite important and relevant.

In his book "Russian Foreign Policy, Change and Continuity in National Identity," Andrei Stankov has explained the evolution of the Russian foreign policy behavior. The book mainly highlights Russia's own struggle for global share in politics for securing its strategic and economic interests (Tsygankov, 2019).

Alexander Lukin has produced a very enlightening article on Russia in a post-bipolar world. He has stated that 2014 is a pivotal year in Russia's foreign policy. The Ukrainian crisis "solidified Moscow's refusal to follow the West, leading to open confrontation." He has described it as a "marked turn" in the policies being followed by Moscow since 1991. Russia had been giving

strategic concessions to the West, but Moscow realized that it could not have friendly ties with the West and the United States without tendering complete political submission to them (Lukin, 2016).

President Putin has an impact of his personality on the Russian foreign policy behavior. Fiona Hill and Clifford G. Gaddy have produced a biography of President Putin. The book helps the reader understand the growth and political life of the Russian leadership that influenced the Russian politics. The Russian leadership always focused on improvement in relations with the West and other parts of the world (Hill & Gaddy, 2015). This viewpoint, however, can be debated.

Putin's goal has been to regain respect and influence of Russia in the world. He believes that the world should take Russia seriously. He wants the world to accept Russia as a great power (Herspring, 2009).

Political observers have noticed a change in Russia's foreign policy toward South Asia under the Putin leadership particularly after annexation of Crimea in 2014. They are of the view that India's closeness with the United States left an impact on the long India-Russia partnership. In this regard, Professor B.M. Jain has referred to the burgeoning defence trade, maritime and homeland security cooperation between India and the United States and cited US-India nuclear deal and the 2016 Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement in this regard. Prof. Jain is of the view that China and India tried to provoke the apparent ripples in Delhi-Moscow relationship in order to isolate Russia from India. He said that they also succeed in sowing the seeds of suspicion between the two countries. Prof Jain said the frequent visits of Pakistan senior military officials to Russia were aimed at diluting India-Russia "all-weather friendship" and procure weapons from Russia. He was of the opinion that Pakistan could exploit its military ties with Russia by convincing it not to support India on Kashmir issue and India's membership for Nuclear Suppliers Group (Jain, 2016).

Alluding to Russia's resurgence as a great power, Harsh V. Pant has termed Afghanistan as Russia's another front to undermine the West and particularly the US geopolitical interests. Russia now believes itself as a vanguard of the global challenge to the West. Russia's view that Taliban was the necessary bulwark to defeat the global fight against ISIS was taken by the West as an attempt to undermine the West (Pant).

In a very informative article "Russia in South Asia: Balancing the United States and China," Raza Fatima explains how the closeness between India and the United States has impacted the India-Russia relations. She is of the view that Russia's outlook toward South Asia has also

changed because of India's inclination toward the United States. She says Russia's interest in South Asia mainly revolved around through objectives – energy route, apprehension of terrorism through spillover effect from Afghanistan, and access to the Arabian Sea. After USSR's failure in its invasion of Afghanistan (1979-89), its involvement in the region reduced. The US prominent role in the region and Russia's weak economic condition led to Russia's pulling back from the region. However, since the Indo-US civil nuclear deal and their growing bilateral relations left an impact on Russia's policy toward South Asia and its relations with India (Fatima, 2017). The article underlining the India-US partnership as an important factor in the changing regional environment makes a relevance to the topic being studied.

As for Pakistan-Russia relations, Saddam Hussain has briefly narrated the history of the relationship in his article "Russia and Pakistan's Reluctant Romance." He has touched upon the Cold War era and also described the nature of the relationship after the Soviet collapse. He stated that many people in Pakistan are of the view that the 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Peace and Cooperation encouraged India to attack the East Pakistan. The Islamabad-Moscow relations touched the lowest ebb during the 1980s Soviet invasion of Afghanistan when Pakistan joined the United States to stop the Soviet Union from entering Pakistan. The strained relations continued after the 1991 Soviet disintegration till 2003 when President Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow and the two countries established political contact. Though relations between Russia and Pakistan remained turbulent over the years, they have been warming up over the last decade (Hussain, 2017). The article provides a brief portion of the history of bilateral relations, which is very short. A detailed look into the historical facts, being presented in this dissertation, gives the reader a better understanding of the subject.

Sergey N. Kamenov, in his article "Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: Influence on Security in South Asia," has drawn attention to the history of the Pakistan-Russia relationship. In the backdrop of the history, he gives an optimistic view about growth in the bilateral relations in days to come (Kamenov, 2010). Analysis of the growth in the bilateral relationship can only be correctly assessed through comparison with the past.

Although the bilateral relationship was reactivated with President Musharraf's visit to Moscow, there is a viewpoint that Pakistan's decision to join the US-led war on terror was a key development in addressing the Russian mistrust. Tahir Amin has described in detail the evolution of the bilateral relationship. He opines that Pakistan's participation in the war on terror was a

turning point that removed irritant between the two countries as Moscow had a concern over Pakistan's support to the Taliban regime. Pointing out other factors of an improvement in Islamabad-Moscow ties, Tahir Amin said India's growing collaboration with the Western countries, including its multi-billion dollar arms deal with various Western countries, agreements of civil nuclear cooperation and its strategic partnership with the United States pushed Russia to get closer to Pakistan, which is the key player in the Afghan issue (Amin 2016). This article is a very interesting and useful document for the students of international politics.

Since President Musharraf's 2003 visit to Moscow, different initiatives have been taken by the two sides to improve their relationship. In 2007, the then Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Frandkov paid a three-day visit to Pakistan and discussed prospects of economic cooperation. In 2011, the then Russian President Vladimir Putin publicly endorsed Pakistan's bid to join SCO. The Salala attack in 2011 by the United States was also condemned by Russia (Hussain, 2012). In 2013, former Army Chief General (retired) Ashfaq Parvez Kayanai and former Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces Colonel General Vladmir Chikin, at a meeting in Pakistan, discussed defence cooperation. A major development took place in 2014 when Russia lifted sanctions on arms sale to Pakistan. The same year, the two countries also signed an agreement to expand defence cooperation. On December 23, 2014, Pakistan and Russia inked an energy deal worth \$1.7 billion to lay a pipeline for liquefied natural gas from Karachi to Lahore (Bhutta, 2014). The project was, however, delayed and later revived through a fresh agreement in 2021. Russia and Pakistan held their first ever tactical exercises titled Friendship-2016 in Cherat area of Pakistan from September 26 to October 10 in 2016. During the visit of Russia's Federal Security Services Director Alexander Bortnikov to Pakistan in 2016, Moscow showed its interest to have access to Gwadar Port and join China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Russia also agreed to deliver Pakistan four Mi-35 helicopters in 2017.

Feroz Hassan Khan has produced an informative and useful piece of writing on the strategic relations between Pakistan and Russia. In his article, "Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations – An Emerging Entente Cordiale," he gave an overview of the history of bilateral relations. He also explained the current state of affairs in every area of mutual interest. Mr. Khan has clearly indicated a shift in Pakistan's foreign policy toward the United States and Russia, and he believes this occurred after the United States carried out strike in Abbottabad to kill Osama bin Laden in 2011 and gave special favors to India in its nuclear program. He is of the view that Islamabad slowly

moved away from the United States, further strengthened relations with China and sought rapprochement with Russia (Khan, 2021).

Sarah Akram, in her article “Pakistan Russia Relations: Future Trends,” has pointed out the common interests of Pakistan and Russia to move forward in bilateral cooperation in diverse sectors. Describing it as beneficial for both the countries, Akram has urged Pakistan to pursue its relationship with Russia. She says it is mutually beneficial for both Pakistan and Russia to develop greater economic and military ties; and there is great potential in the fields of trade, energy and infrastructure development. Pakistan has the potential to provide market to Russia for its defence supplies and investment in the energy and infrastructure sectors. It is greatly beneficial for Pakistan to have good relations with all major powers in the region including Russia, a permanent UNSC member (Akram, 2016). Ms. Akram has pinpointed the preferred areas of mutual cooperation for mutual benefits; however, the aspect of getting closer to each other needs to have been explained further.

Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan is of the view that historically, Pakistan’s choice of aligning with the United States harmed its potential of developing ties with Russia. He has described Russia’s Indo-centric South Asia policy as another cause of limiting Islamabad-Moscow ties. However, he is of the view that Russia has now changed its foreign policy by forging ties with other countries in the region as well like Pakistan, China, Iran and Afghanistan besides keeping its relations with India intact (Khan, 2018).

In their article, Misbah Arif and Raja Qaiser Ahmed have described in detail the trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations. While referring to the difficult times of the relations, they put misinterpretation as the main reason for it. They also dubbed policy differences as a major hurdle in the relationship since Islamabad joined the Western bloc during the Cold War. Russia and India developed close ties and Russia became India’s largest arms exporter. This led to mistrust between Islamabad and Moscow. Referring to the improvement in the bilateral ties, Misbah Arif and Raja Qaiser Ahmed termed the 2014 Defence Cooperation Agreement as a “milestone” in the bilateral relationship. They are of the opinion that Russia’s provision of around \$1 billion to Pakistan for energy projects, lifting of arms embargo on Pakistan and supply of four Mi35 attack helicopters to Pakistan suggest that the two states are willing to come closer to each other in view of the changing geopolitical and geostrategic situations (Arif & Ahmed, 2018).

At a panel discussion on “Russia’s Revival: Opportunities and Limitations for Pakistan” at IPRI on December 11, 2015, the panelists discussed in detail Russia’s economic, military and other strengths such as energy exports. They also had a look at the recent history of Pakistan-Russia relations. The areas of common interest as well as limitations in advancement of ties were also pointed out in the discussion. According to a report of the discussion, the panelists concluded that the two countries have a favorable environment to advance their relations. They have great potential to cooperate in various sectors. Pakistan needs to focus on enhancing its cooperation with Russia in energy, infrastructure and the areas of communication (Abbas, 2016).

Ahmed Rashid too highlighted the same point in his article “Russia and Pakistan slowly move towards an embrace.” He is of the view that the two countries are trying to come close but they are also facing various challenges. He does not see any substantial development in respect of bilateral cooperation. Rashid believes that Russia cannot annoy India, which is Moscow’s largest market of arms exports (Rashid, 2016). The article explains that Russia cannot annoy India; however, it ignored the little change in Russian foreign policy toward India, seen in various gestures toward Pakistan such as launch of joint military exercises.

Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan has expressed similar apprehensions in a piece of writing. He sees optimism vis a vis improvement in Islamabad-Moscow relations. However, he says, Russia, which does not want to provoke India, is heading very cautiously. He has also indicated India’s tilt toward the United States (Khan, 2016).

Vladimir Moskalkenko and Peter Topychkanov, in their research report “Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities,” have stated that the security interests of Pakistan and Russia are increasingly intertwined. They are of the view that improvement in their relations will benefit both the countries; however, there are obstacles in the way. They believe that Moscow does not provoke India (Moskalkenko & Topychkanov, 2014).

Joint military exercises between Pakistan and Russia in 2016 was a major development in respect of bilateral cooperation in defence sector. India strongly reacted to it. Petr Topychkanov stated that “deep military cooperation between Russia and Pakistan threatens Delhi (Topychkanov 2016).” He quotes India’s then Ambassador to Russia Pankaj Saran as saying: “We have conveyed our views to the Russian side that military cooperation with Pakistan, which is a state that sponsors and practices terrorism as a matter of state policy, is a wrong approach. It will only create further problems (Topychkanov, 2016).”

Nabarun Roy has hinted at change in India-Russia “time-tested” relations amidst political changes among nations. He opines that India-Russia relations have been affected by the trend that Russia is trying to establish its influence in different parts of the world. In this regard, he has also referred to improving security cooperation between Russia and Pakistan. In the context of these developments, he has carried a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2015. According to the survey, 70 percent of Indians who were polled viewed the United States favorably. Russia trailed the United States with 43 percent of Indians seeing it in a positive light. While eight percent of Indians viewed the United States in a negative light, 16 percent viewed Russia in a negative light (Roy, 2016).

Ashok Sajjanhar says India has been heavily dependent on the Russian armaments. He says although Russia still remains the largest arms supplier to India, its share in overall imports has considerably decreased. (Sajjanhar, 2016)

In the context of geopolitical changes, Poline Tikhonova has stated that if Russia, China and Pakistan join forces to eliminate terrorism in Afghanistan, they may also help peel off the US superpower status. He has opined that giving up Afghanistan so easily will reduce the US influence in the region and it might also lead to end the US sole global power status. He has pointed out that China views the U.S. as its rival, and Pakistan also has many grievances against the United States. China has dismissed reports that its military is operating in Eastern Afghanistan, Russia is getting closer to both China and Pakistan despite its decades-long friendship with India, a major rival of both of them (Tikhonova, 2017).

Tim Craig, in his article “As the US moves closer to India, Pakistan looks to Russia,” quotes Russian foreign policy expert Yury Barmin as saying that he doubts Russia would risk its relationship with India by also selling arms to Pakistan. He said he suspects Putin is using Pakistan as leverage over the Indian government so it doesn’t get too close to the US (Craig, 2015).

The articles and pieces of writing cited above have highlighted different aspects of the subject, including emergence of Russia as a great power and its growing influence, historical perspective of Pakistan-Russia relations and the changes taking place in the bilateral relationship. As for the bilateral relationship, some writers have discussed economy, diplomacy, politics and strategic affairs. Starting from the historical perspective, the writers have narrated how the relationship between Pakistan and Russia has been growing. The challenges or obstacles in the way of growing bilateral ties have also been pinpointed in some of the pieces of writing. Historical

baggage and mutual distrust are another point underlined in the articles mentioned above. All these aspects are quite important vis a vis Pakistan-Russia relation. However, there is an aspect that actually has been most important as far as the bilateral relationship is concerned; and this relates to security.

Pakistan-Russia ties have so far been fortunately or unfortunately based on defence related matters. Pakistan's decision to ally with the United States at the cost of strained ties with the Soviet Union during the Cold War period was mainly because of security vis a vis India. The Cold War era, the post-Cold War decade and the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – matters pertaining to defence emerge as the prominent developments of the bilateral ties. This study is a different one from the existing literature on the subject in many ways.

It is a fact that the subject under study is a real phenomenon that is getting unfolded with every passing day with events taking place from time to time. In the prevailing geopolitical milieu, any developments related to Pakistan-Russia growing ties or the ever deepening strategic New Delhi-Washington partnership are quite interesting. The subject needs to be studied widely and deeply as knowledge about it is quite pertinent.

This study is an attempt to give a different perspective on the subject. The current state of affairs between Islamabad and Moscow has been studied in the context of multiple factors including, history of bilateral relations, India's traditional ties with Russia and its new partnership with the United States, current geopolitical environment, commonalities of interests for Islamabad and Moscow and challenges for the two. The secondary source data and the views of the experts given in interviews make a useful combination to produce a focused empirical study. This dissertation is going to prove a useful addition in the existing literature as well as an invitation to the scholars of international politics to make efforts and bring forth new aspects of the phenomenon.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1. What is a Theory?**

In International Relations, a theory is not simply some grand formal model with hypotheses and assumptions; rather, “a theory is a kind of simplifying device that allows you to decide which facts matter and which do not” (John, Steve & Patricia, 2011). The theories of International Relations “allow us to understand and try to make sense of the world around us through various lenses, each of which represents a different theoretical perspective (Gold & McGlinchey, 2017).” A theory can also be described as a picture, mentally formed, of a bounded realm or domain or activity. It is a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connections among its parts (Waltz, 1997). A theory is born in conjuncture and is viable if the conjuncture is confirmed. It provides the researcher a complete framework to explain his observations based on facts and assumptions. Theoretical framework provides safe foundation for a study.

#### **2.2. Realism:**

The Realists believe that relations among states take place in the absence of a world government, making the international system anarchic. The uneven distribution of power among states gives formation to power politics. Along with E.H. Carr (1892-1982) and George Kennan (1904-2005), Hans Morgenthau (1904-1980) tried to develop a comprehensive theory of ‘power politics on the philosophical basis of Realist principles of human nature, the essence of politics, the balance of power and the role of ethics in foreign policy.

In his book *Scientific Man Versus Power Politics*, Morgenthau says; “politics is a struggle for power because a political man is an innately selfish creature with an insatiable urge to dominate others. Human nature has three dimensions, biological, rational and spiritual (Morgenthau, 1945).” Although Morgenthau acknowledges that all three combine to determine human behavior in different contexts, he focuses on the ‘will to power’ as the defining characteristic of politics, distinguishing it from economics (the rational pursuit of wealth) and religion (the spiritual realm of morality (Morgenthau, 1945).

In the absence of a system to regulate behavior of states, particularly aggressor ones, every state is supposed to have an effective self-defence system. For attaining security, a state continues

to enhance its power. States usually try to protect themselves through military force and aggressive strategies. While Realist theorists' arguments mainly revolve around international anarchy and power, they say that international anarchy forces states to strive for power and form alliances on the basis of converging interests as seen in the case of Pakistan and Russia (Mearsheimer, 2007).

Realists view that primary actor in international relations is state, and the primary goal of every state is to protect national interests. In absence of a reliable reconciliation process among states, force is considered as the means to secure objectives at external level, which increases anarchy (Keohane, 1986). In the debate of anarchy and protection of national interests, realists are divided. In his book, Hans Morgenthau argues that "it is the nature of every human to exercise some amount of power and since great powers (states) are also governed by the humans, hence, they want their state to have dominating position in their interaction with other states (Morgenthau, Thompson & Clinton, 1985)." Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan have explained Realist theory in the following lines.

"Since states are primary actors, they are sovereign and there is anarchy at world stage in the sense that due to absence of a central controlling authority to regulate state behaviour, states try to defend their interests (the state survival being the prime interest) through coercion and use of force. Hence to defend themselves against aggression the states either try to maximize their power or seek alliances to create and maintain state of balance of power. In this context the ethics are inconsequential (Shimko, 2012)."

### **2.3. Structural Realism:**

According to Structural Realists, international politics is essentially a struggle for power but they do not endorse the classical realist assumption that this is a result of human nature. Instead, Structural Realists attribute security competition and inter-state conflict to the lack of an overarching authority above states and the relative distribution of power in the international system. Relative distribution of power in the international system is the key independent variable in understanding important international outcomes such as war and peace, alliance politics, and the balance of power (John, Steve & Patricia, 2011).

In the prevailing anarchic system, Structural Realists believe that it is essential for a state to acquire power for survival and protection of its interests. They argue that the driving force behind acquiring power for a state is anarchic structure of international system, not human nature (Mearsheimer, 2007). Structural theorist John Herz, who coined the concept of 'security dilemma,'

explains, “it is the international anarchy that assures the centrality of the struggle for power even in the absence of aggressiveness or similar factors (Hariman, 1996).” Many argue that the pursuit of power by states is proportional to security problems. There are several states that have unchecked powers like the United States and Russia thus creating an uncertain environment of insecurity for many states like Pakistan. Therefore, states are justified to acquire power to defend themselves against the powerful states’ aggression (Mearsheimer, 2007).

There are two groups in structural realism; defensive and offensive. The defensive realists see anarchy as the main reason behind states’ behavior of engaging in self-help mechanisms of defenses like Pakistan. States maximize power fearing absence of security in international system, and they mitigate the policies of other states’ security apparatus (Taliaferro, 2000). According to Kenneth Waltz, many states in international system struggle for maximization of power; hence, maximization of power is related to states’ survival in an international order, which does not provide any protection (Pashakhanlou, 2009). He also argues that since every state is autonomous, sovereign and political unity, it must rely on its own resources to ensure its security interests in an anarchic environment (Donnelly, 2000). Many states have to compete with each other in the international system or at regional level. As these states define power with security, they avoid achieving relative advantage over others apprehending that it would escalate competition for power among states or make them join alliances against each other. Thus, balance of power system is an inevitable consequence of the anarchical structure of international politics. Some states make alliances with weaker states to neutralize dominant and to balance power in international system. In such instances, the primary concern of states is to maintain balancing position instead of maximization of power (Sutch & Elias, 2007). Alliances are used both to enhance security and to maintain balance of power. We can see that the United States is deepening its ties with India to balance its power in South Asia and Russia is trying to enhance its security by improving relations with Pakistan.

While sharing many of the basic assumptions of Waltz’s structural realist theory, which is frequently termed as Defensive Realism, John Mearsheimer differs with Waltz when it comes to describing the behavior of states. Mearsheimer says that there are no satisfied or status quo states, rather, all states are continuously searching for opportunities to gain power at the expense of other states (John, Steve & Patricia, 2011). He believes that states need to maximize their power to attain hegemony as the best way for survival in an anarchic world. He is of the view that power is not

end, but it is means to the objective of state survival or security. The sources of power include military strength, socioeconomic development, scientific and technological advancement, political clout and demographic strengths (Arif & Raja, 2018). Offensive Realists are of the view that there is no restraining power over states. Thus, “many states try to ensure their security by maximizing their relative advantage within given framework of the power relationship (Bashir & Naseer, 2018). Offensive Realists view that war is inevitable; therefore, it is essential for states to maximize their power and also pay attention on shifting powers and interests and must be ready to gain advantage. In such an anarchic environment, a hegemonic status can guarantee survival (Paul, Wirtz & Fortmann, 2004).

#### **2.4. Application of Theory on Pak-Russia relations:**

In the post-disintegration period after Mikhail Gorbachev, the Russian leadership focused on eliminating domestic vulnerabilities. However, Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin gave a new direction to the country’s foreign policy with the objective to gain economic boom through state centric policy (Hussain and Sangay 2012). Russian policy toward South Asia was dominated by strategic interests. Later, a pluralistic approach was visible on part of Russia. The domestic and structural approaches during the last few years led to a new strategic understanding of Russian foreign policy. In the decreasing credibility of the United States, Russia is willing to fill the gap (Khan, 2015). Russia’s foreign policy mainly has four objectives – to rebuild identity, strengthen economy, comprehend security and regain lost global stature. States’ security and stability may be threatened by any change at structural level. Sometimes, instability and disintegration of active systemic states can harm international system.

Since its creation, Pakistan has been facing threat from its arch rival India. Because of this insecurity, Pakistan has been striving to strengthen its defense. Security became the foremost priority for the policy makers. As regards perpetual sense of insecurity due to hostile neighborhood Kenneth Waltz says, “The web of social and political life is spun out of inclinations and incentives, deterrent threats and punishments. Eliminate the latter two and the ordering of the society depends entirely on the former - a utopian thought impractical this side of Eden (Waltz, 2010).”

During the Cold War period, Pakistan had to align itself with the United States through SEATO and CENTO because of security concerns vis a vis India; hence the state’s foreign affairs were guided by Realist Theory. While the erstwhile Soviet Union had supported India against Pakistan during this period, Moscow had sour and hostile relations with Islamabad. On the other,

Pakistan backed the United States in the “guerilla war” against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. In the post-Cold War period, Russia has been striving to establish its influence in different parts of the world. Pakistan’s joining of the US-led war on terror against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan changed the Russian perception about Pakistan. And today, Russia sees Pakistan as a key player in bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan. The improving relationship between Pakistan and Russia has been reinforced by evolving China-Russia strategic partnership. These two major powers are moving close to each other because they have similarity of views on multiple international issues such as the world order and use of force to be decided only by the United Nations. The US strategic partnership with India is an important development to bring Pakistan and Russia closer to each other. Despite its friendship with New Delhi, Russia is skeptic about India’s future role in Afghanistan and Central Asia, which might serve the US strategic interests in the region. Russia considers Pakistan as an important country for peace and stability in Afghanistan and it will not support India in its anti-Pakistan Afghan politics. The pursuit of Realist Theory is evident from this two-way track of friendship (Hanif, 2013).

The focus of this study is Pakistan-Russia relations in the realm of security. The two countries do not have direct geographical linkage; however, they have historical and political connections. In its early years, Pakistan’s decision of joining the Western Camp due to its security concerns was a rationally opted decision as the domestic societal environment supported alignment with the Western countries. Moreover, the societal, economic and structural compulsions led to losing the Russian friendship. The domestic and political environment formed Pakistan’s weak diplomatic approach towards Russia. In the first half century, Pakistan’s alignment and desire for credible support from the Muslim states was aimed at addressing its primary issues such as economic vulnerabilities, security concerns, territorial dispute, water dispute and the Kashmir issue. Pakistan-Russia relations can better be understood in the backdrop of regional and global developments, and the two countries’ convergence of interest in various areas. Russia’s post 9/11 security concerns vis a vis Chechen and other military groups and the US-led Global War on Terror softened it toward the United States. Moscow was being seen by Washington as a potential ally in the war on terror (Rose, 1998). The bilateral ties deteriorated in 2003 as Washington held the stance of political solution of Chechnya (Tsygankov, 2011).

The United States wants to contain China, and therefore, has been trying to build India as a force in the region. Although Russia and India have historical and longstanding relationship,

India's interests at domestic as well as at regional level are being better served by deepening partnership with the United States. Convergence of interests in the region is bringing India and the United States closer to each other. An important regional development is that the United States has left Afghanistan after 20 years war.

At present, Pakistan does not seem to have any special role for the United States in the region particularly in Afghanistan, hence not being given the importance which the former enjoyed in the past. India-US closeness and distance between Pakistan and the United States seem to be important factors in betterment of Moscow-Islamabad ties. All these states are striving to secure their respective interests in the chaotic international system, which has no central government. To achieve the objective of security, the states are making new alignments in South Asia. In view of the regional strategic and security compulsions, Pakistan has been improving its ties with China and Russia. Neo-classical realism focuses on state behavior that requires some parameters of collaboration. Pakistan and Russia have made some improvements in political and military interactions. This improvement leads the two countries to make enhancement in the relative gains. The neo-Realists also opine that increase in relative power gives rise to states' intentions to have more influence abroad.

The main argument is that the deepening strategic partnership between India and the United States is posing serious security threat to Pakistan and also strengthening the US hegemonic position in the region, which cannot go unnoticed for Russia that has been striving to regain its lost stature in world politics. The Indo-US mutual behavior appears to have an impact on Pakistan and Russia. Besides, there are several other developments like Afghanistan that serve as driving force for the two countries to engage with each other for mutual benefits. Thus, the international political structure makes them come close to each other. The Structural Realism theory gives a logical flow in this case.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS: A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

The relationship between Pakistan and the erstwhile Soviet Union had been uneasy and troubled. Although a few positive developments took place occasionally during the Cold War period, the bilateral ties had largely been marred by distrust caused by various decisions and incidents. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent Afghan war in which Pakistan supported the US-sponsored Mujahideen against the Soviet attack could be described as the worst era of the Pakistan-Russia relationship.

#### **3.1. Cold War period:**

Pakistan and India emerged as separate states on the map of the world as a result of the partition of the British India in 1947. As these were the early days of the Cold War, the newly established nation-states that emerged out of colonialism were faced with a dilemma to choose one of the two super powers – the United States or the Soviet Union – in the emerging bipolar international system. India preferred to be strategically independent and did not join any military alliance. However, it had a close intentional collaboration with the Soviet Union while officially pursuing a non-aligned policy. On the other hand, Pakistan, which was more vulnerable and economically weaker than India, joined the US-led military alliances that continued till the end of the Cold War. Although Pakistan benefited economically and militarily from these alliances, it had to pay the price for it.

The USSR had accepted partition of the Indian subcontinent without any reservation and it unconditionally accepted Pakistan as an independent state. It voted in favor of Pakistan as an independent state in the United Nations in September 1947 (Kamenev, 2010). The USSR, however, had been following the agenda of expansionist philosophy. Pakistan, having religious ideologies, had Islamic philosophic roots. Although the two countries had different destinations, they were not hostile against each other.

Pakistan and the USSR established diplomatic relations on May 1, 1948 (Owais, 2007). Soon after its independence, Pakistan faced an existential threat from its neighboring country India. Pakistan's decision to choose the United States as its partner gave a cool start to the Pakistan-Russia relations (Burke and Ziring, 1990).

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The people at the helm of affairs in Pakistan were of the view that they could not receive the required economic support from Moscow during the Cold War period and there was also a concern of getting military equipment in view of the volatile eastern border (Hanif, 2013). However, despite joining the Western Camp, Pakistan had been making efforts to create a balance of power to counter India, it established diplomatic relations with USSR in 1948 (Cawasjee, 2011).

“In the years that immediately followed the independence, Pakistan under the rule of Liaquat Ali Khan, a strong supporter of the Non-Aligned Movement, practiced a fairly neutral foreign policy towards both the super-powers. However, as the USSR’s inclination became clear with the vetoing of Kashmir issue resolutions in the UN in India’s favour, Pakistan was now convinced as to which side to pick for the years to come (Khan, 2018, pp 87-103).”

In 1949, the United States invited Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru for a visit. Later, the Soviet Union extended the same invitation to Pakistani Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. However, Liaquat Ali Khan opted to go to Washington instead of Moscow, “possibly using the Soviet invitation as a bargaining chip to extract an invitation from the U.S. (Amin, 2012).

After the war with India in 1948, Pakistan realized the necessity for enhancing its defence capability on urgent basis. The country had also been facing economic issues. The top priorities, thus, were strengthening of economy and building security arsenal. There is a general perception that Liaquat Ali Khan preferred the United States to the Soviet Union to procure defence equipment and get economic assistance that the Soviet Union had not provided Pakistan despite the latter’s repeated requests for it (Shah, 2012). It was also believed that after suffering losses in the World War II, the Soviet Union would not be able to provide Pakistan the required economic assistance.

### **3.1.1. Pakistan’s joining of US military alliances:**

In order to check advance of Communism in Asia, the United States realized the necessity for an organization in the region. As a result, eight Western and Asian countries held a conference in Manila and signed a treaty of collective defence on September 9, 1954. These countries included the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines and Thailand; and the treaty was named as SEATO.

In 1955, Turkey, Iraq, the United Kingdom, Pakistan and Iran formed the Baghdad Pact Organization or the Middle East Treaty Organization with the main objective of mutual security



and prevention of spread of the Communism. Although an unofficial observer, the United States inked agreements with the member states of the pact. After Iran's pull out from the pact in 1959, the treaty was named CENTO.

The United States formed SEATO and CENTO in 1950s to protect the Asian region from the threat of Communism. Islamabad had aligned itself with Washington and it supported the American policies aimed at frustrating the Soviet objectives. At that time, the foremost priority of Pakistan was security against the aggression of its neighbor India and resolution of the Kashmir dispute. While India was in a better position as compared to Pakistan in respect of economic and military capabilities, Pakistan joined these military alliances for receiving economic and military assistance from the United States (Jabeen & Mazhar, 2011). There was an apprehension in the Soviet Union that Pakistan might become part of the anti-Communist Western alliance, and the same proved true. Pakistan joined SEATO in 1954 and CENTO in 1955 (Jalalzai, 2003).

This development took the USSR close to India for defence cooperation, and Moscow also started supplying military hardware to New Delhi. There was a perception during the Cold War period that the Soviet efforts to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea were aimed at separating Balochistan from Pakistan (Ashier, 2012). In February 1957, "Russia used its veto power in the UN Security Council in favor of India to bar a resolution on Kashmir, putting a permanent blockade on any progress on the Kashmir dispute in the UNSC." (Siddiqi, 2017, pp 58-73)

### **3.1.2. Tashkent Agreement:**

The Indo-USSR relationship got strengthened during the 1960s when the latter became a leading country in the Non-Aligned Movement. The Soviet Union had also supported India on Kashmir issue by vetoing twice in favor of India at the UN Security Council in 1957 and 1962. The resolutions had demanded UN intervention in Kashmir. The Soviet Union also started building its ties with Afghanistan and backed it on the issue of Pakhtunistan, a border issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan (Amin, 2012). The incident of shooting down an espionage US plane, which had flown from Peshawar, by the Soviet Union in 1960, further worsened the Pakistan-USSR ties. The then Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev had threatened to annihilate Peshawar with rockets (Chaudhri, 1966).

The US-India relations improved in the wake of the Sino-Indian war in 1962. Disenchanted by this development, Pakistan took steps to normalize its ties with the Soviet Union and to strengthen relations with China (Khan, 1964). President Ayub Khan visited Moscow in April,

1965. While Pakistan and India fought a war in 1965, the Soviet Union successfully mediated between the two countries at Tashkent a year later (Amin, 1980).

Pakistan and India had a dispute over Kashmir since their independence from the British rule and the partition. The two countries fought the first war on Kashmir in 1947-48 and the second in 1965. The war started on September 6, 1965; and within 17 days, there were heavy casualties on both sides. The United States and the Soviet Union urged the United Nations to play a role in the situation that could endanger world peace. As a result of the UN efforts, the two countries agreed on ceasefire. Meanwhile, Soviet Prime Minister Aleksey Kosygin brought the two countries to the negotiating table and invited them to Tashkent (Behera, 2007). Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani President Ayub Khan held a meeting in Tashkent on January 4, 1966 (Sujitha, 2022). On the occasion, the two leaders signed a pact called the Tashkent Declaration of 1966 that brought the war to end.

### **3.1.3. Dismemberment of Pakistan:**

The Soviet Union turned closer to India during the political crisis in the then East Pakistan. Pakistan's efforts for rapprochement between the United States and China through a secret trip by Henry Kissinger, the National Security Advisor of the then President Richard Nixon, to China widened the gulf between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. In 1971, the Soviet Union and India signed Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, under which Moscow fully supported India in the war with Pakistan, resulting in disintegration of Pakistan and emergence of an independent state Bangladesh (Choudhury 1975). The USSR had vetoed a resolution, preventing the United Nations from playing any role in the East Pakistan crisis (Srivastva, 1971).

Later, Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto paid two visits to the Soviet Union in 1972 and again in 1974 to normalize relations with the Soviet Union. The bilateral relationship improved those days and the Soviet Union established a steel mill in Karachi. Pakistan left the US-sponsored military alliances and adopted a non-aligned foreign policy (Amin, 2012). Pakistan took steps to distance itself from the West and to move closer to both China and Russia.

### **3.1.4. Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and dissolution of USSR:**

Successive Soviet regimes have always taken keen interest in Afghan affairs. While the Afghan governments became progressive through the years, the financial assistance of Afghanistan increased to \$150 million in a year during the second regime of President Mohammed Daoud (1973-78), (Collins, 1980). Apprehending crackdowns from autocratic Daoud, two pro-

Russia parties toppled Daoud regime in 1978 with the help of some segments from the armed forces and the KGB, and killed President Daoud Khan (Collins, 1980). While the new regime plunged into power struggle, Nur Muhammad Taraki became head of state soon after the coup (Ellison, 2017). In 1979, the situation turned worse for Taraki as domestic repression rose. In September, Soviets asked Taraki to remove ambitious Hafizullah Amin. When Amin came to know about it, a gun battle started in which Taraki was killed (Collins, 1980). The Soviets attacked Afghanistan on December 24, 1979, and the Soviet troops killed Hafizullah Amin, installing their loyalist Babrak Kamal (Galster, 2001). However, Babrak Karmal failed to gain popular support. The Mujahideen's rebellion spread across the country. Pakistan was the base for the Muhaideen, who were backed by the United States and Saudi Arabia (Riedel, 2010).

The relationship between Pakistan and the Soviet Union had been highly antagonistic throughout the period of Soviet troops' presence in Afghanistan. The Soviet Union started to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan in 1988. In December 1991, the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Russian Federation was established. The decade from 1979 to 1989 could be dubbed the worst period of the Pakistan-Russia relationship as Pakistan had backed the US-sponsored war of the Mujahideen against the Soviet attack on Afghanistan.

“The Soviet-Afghan war had a direct impact on the final period of the Soviet Union and the formation of a new government. Western Intelligence believed that the purpose of the Soviet invasion was either to obtain entrance to the warm waters of the Persian Gulf or start WWII in order to justify their own militarization and the staying by military personnel of the USSR. (Nomazoza, 2015)”

### **3.1.5. Kashmir issue:**

Historically, the Soviet Union backed India on Kashmir issue. Soviet leaders Khrushchev and Bulganin visited Srinagar in 1955 and they openly declared Soviet support to India on Kashmir issue. In 1950s, the Soviet Union exercised its veto in the UN Security Council to block Anglo-American moves on Kashmir (Simha, 2016). The USSR used its veto in the UN Security Council for several times to foil the attempts on behalf of Pakistan to get passed Security Council resolutions against India on Kashmir issue (Bhaumik, 2017).

India and Russia have been on the same page on the Kashmir issue. Both the states allegedly believe that Pakistan has been backing militancy in Indian illegally occupied Jammu and

Kashmir. In 2002, the Russian Foreign Minister, during his visit to India, stated that Pakistan must dismantle the terrorist infrastructure in Kashmir under its control (Khattak 2018).

On August 5, 2019, India revoked the special status provided to Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution. Pakistan strongly reacted to the move by raising voice against the Indian act at the international forums. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qursehi engaged with the world leaders to draw their attention to the Indian act, which Pakistan described it as "unilateral" and "illegal" because Kashmir, a disputed territory, has been lying pending on the agenda of the UN Security Council resolutions. Foreign Minister Qureshi also telephonically discussed the matter with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. Russia again supported the Indian act of annexing Kashmir. Talking to Foreign Minister Qureshi, the Russian Foreign Minister urged Pakistan to bilaterally resolve its dispute with India over Kashmir (Syed, 2019).

As a result of Pakistan's efforts and China's support, the UN Security Council held informal consultations on Kashmir on August 17, 2019. It was for the first time after 1971 that the UN Security Council discussed "India-Pakistan question." The meeting took place behind closed doors. A public statement was not issued at the end of the meeting because all the members did not agree to it. However, China conveyed that all the members had a general will against "unilateral actions." On the occasion, Moscow backed India on the Kashmir issue but with a twist of referring to UN charter and the Security Council resolutions for the first time. Russia's Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy stated in his tweets, "Russia continues to consistently promote normalization of India-Pakistan ties. We hope that existing divergences around Kashmir will be settled bilaterally by political and diplomatic means only on the basis of Simla Agreement of 1972 and Lahore Declaration of 1999, in accordance with the UN Charter, relevant UN resolutions and bilateral agreements between India and Pakistan."

#### **3.1.6. Main causes of mutual distrust:**

There were three major developments of the Cold War period that served as basis for distrust between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. First, Pakistan provided air bases to the United States for carrying out reconnaissance of the Soviet Union. In May 1960, a US spy plane U-2 had flown from Pakistan Air Force Camp Badaber near Peshawar for taking aerial photographs and reconnaissance in the Soviet territory. The plane was shot down by the Soviet Air Defence forces. Pilot Gary Powers, who had ejected through parachute, was captured by the Soviet Forces. He was later released in 1962 in exchange for Soviet spy Rudolf Abel, who had been captured by the

United States. During the Cold War era, the Soviet Union, as a super power, mostly voted against Pakistan at international forums, particularly on Kashmir issue in the United Nations. Secondly, in 1971, Pakistan facilitated rapprochement between the United States and China. In retaliation, the Soviet Union signed India-Soviet Mutual Friendship treaty with India in August 1971. Under the treaty, the Soviet Union supported India in Pakistan-India war in 1971 that resulted in disintegration of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh. Some scholars believe that Pakistan paid this heaviest price for playing a facilitating role in US-China rapprochement. Finally, in 1980s, Pakistan and the United States had made an alliance to fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan after its invasion that led to Soviets' defeat and then eventually dissolution of the Soviet Union. It could be stated that both Pakistan and the Soviet Union contributed indirectly for each other's disintegration during the Cold War.

### **3.1.7. Positive developments of Cold War era:**

Pakistan and the Soviet Union have a history of tense relations. However, a few positive developments also took place from time to time as parts of efforts to mend the bilateral ties. In 1958, the Soviet Union showed its willingness to help Pakistan in economic and technical aspects to develop its agriculture sector and control floods (Hanif, 2013). Pakistan's former President Ayub Khan paid a visit to the Soviet Union in 1965, the first ever visit of a Pakistani head of state to the Soviet Union. "The visit helped in removing misunderstandings and agreements on trade, economic cooperation; and cultural exchanges were signed" (Owais, 2007, pp 125-139). In 1966, the USSR mediated between Pakistan and India that led to end of the 1965 war as a result of the Tashkent Declaration. In April 1968, the then Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin visited Pakistan and "announced a limited supply of arms to Pakistan" (Owais, 2007, pp 125-139).

In 1969, the then President Yahya Khan visited Moscow and the two countries signed a deal for provision of some helicopters to Pakistan (Hussain, 2012). After the disintegration of Pakistan in 1971, the then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto changed Pakistan's foreign policy and withdrew from SEATO in 1973 and CENTO in 1979. He also visited Moscow twice in March 1972 and then in October 1974 that led to considerable improvement in bilateral relations resulting in establishing a steel mill in Karachi (Hussain, 2012).

In 1969, the then Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin presented a plan, known as Kosygin Plan, for friendship and constructive cooperation among the regional countries, including

the Soviet Union, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and Iran. The plan envisaged construction of road for a trade route from the Soviet Union to India via Afghanistan and Pakistan (Noorani, 2018).

Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev had tried to convince Pakistan about his Asian Collective Security Treaty plan; however, it could not be materialized because China and India had also not supported it (Hanif, 2013). Besides, Pakistan believed that Russia wanted to contain Chinese influence in the region and to damage its friendship with China (Shah and Parveen, 2016).

The afore-cited positive developments between Pakistan and the Soviet Union could not build a sustainable relationship between the two countries during the Cold War period.

### **3.2. The Post-Cold War decade:**

While the USSR was disintegrated and the United States left Afghanistan in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the new Russia and Pakistan cautiously moved forward to build a bilateral relationship. Russia had a grievance about Pakistan's alliance with the United States in the Cold War whereas Pakistan had reservations about Russia's support to India on Kashmir issue.

Both Pakistan and Russia had also been in a period of transition. Pakistan had to face US sanctions under Pressler Amendment under which the military and economic assistance to Pakistan was suspended. Pakistan needed to modernize its military; however, the country felt that it was abandoned by the United States after having been used by it in the Cold War and that Islamabad had to face the fallout of the Afghan war. After dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia had been undergoing a financial crisis and it wanted to sell its military hardware to earn money. There was also a potential threat from Afghanistan in the form of rising Taliban. In addition, Chechen rebels also took refuge in the area from Central Asia to Pakistan's tribal areas alongside its western border (Torbakov, I. 2010).

In the first decade of new Russia, the relationship between Pakistan and Russia mainly focused on terrorism, Afghanistan and drug trafficking. Pakistan also tried to address Russian concerns about any support to the Chechens. Even during the second Chechen war in 2000, the then ISI Chief Lt. General (retired) Mahmud Ahmed visited Russia and told Moscow that Pakistan Government was not involved in any of these activities (Hussain, 2012).

#### **3.2.1. Exchange of visits:**

In the post-Cold War era, Pakistan and Russia have been found on the path of building their relationship. The Soviet forces left Afghanistan in 1989. In March 1992, President Najibullah announced on radio and television to step aside. About a month later of his announcement, he went

into hiding under the “unacknowledged protection” of the UN office in Kabul (Rubin, 1993). The United States abandoned Afghanistan and Pakistan had been facing sanctions under the Pressler and Glenn amendments, which made it have a fresh view about Moscow. The leadership of Pakistan and Russia, both from the civilian and military sides, started visiting each other.

In December 1992, Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoy paid a goodwill visit to Islamabad. During the visit, Rutskoy not only endorsed Pakistan’s proposal of declaring South Asia a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone but also indicated an adjustment in Russia’s Kashmir policy when he stated that both Pakistan and India should show respect for human rights, which displeased India (Siddiqui, 2017). Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev and First Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Adamishin visited Pakistan in April 1993 and in May 1994 respectively. From Pakistan side, Foreign Secretary Akram Zaki visited Russia in 1992 and Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ahmed Ali paid a visit to Moscow in July 1994. During the visit of Assef Ahmed Ali, the two countries signed a protocol, agreeing for regular consultations between foreign ministers of the two countries. In September 1995, a delegation of Russian parliamentarians visited Pakistan. Alexander Vengerovsky, the head of the delegation, in a statement, expressed Russia’s willingness to provide military hardware to Pakistan (Owais, 2007). On the other side, however, in 1993, Russia and India signed a new 20-year Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation during President Boris Yeltsin’s visit to New Delhi; a similar to their 1971 treaty. Russia again supported India’s stance on Kashmir, and during his visit President Yeltsin stated that “the truth is on the side of India.” (Siddiqui, 2017)

### **3.2.2. Taliban regime:**

The Taliban emerged as a force in Afghanistan in 1994 as a result of the civil war after the Soviet pullout. They established their control in the southern parts of the country. By late 1996, their support from Pashtun ethnic groups in southern areas and conservative Muslims enabled them to capture the capital Kabul and have effective control over the country. The non-Pashtun groups, however, continued resisting the Taliban. The Taliban continued controlling Afghanistan, except a small part in the northern area, by 2001.

The world disapproved the Taliban’s social policies and their severe punishments to criminals. Only Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognized the Taliban regime. Extremist elements from various Muslim countries, including the then Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden, had been staying in Afghanistan. The Taliban refused the United States to expel

Osama bin Laden after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. The United States and the allied forces launched attack on Afghanistan and removed the Taliban from power.

Pakistan supported the Taliban, who had been fighting the pro-Russian Northern Alliance, which marred the Islamabad-Moscow ties. There was a fear in Moscow that the Taliban regime in Afghanistan might cause separatism in some of the Central Asian States and even in Russia itself. However, the two countries continued efforts to improve their relations.

In 1999, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif paid an important visit to Moscow and signed a few agreements to promote bilateral cooperation in trade and industrial sector. The then Russian President Boris Yeltsin described Nawaz Sharif's visit as "a new chapter in relations between the two countries oriented into the 21<sup>st</sup> century" (Owais, 2007, pp 125-139). In September 1999, the special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pakistan, and stated that Pakistan can play a stabilizing role in the region by contributing to the efforts against international terrorism and narcotics trafficking (Jalalzai, 2003). On the other hand, Moscow openly supported India during the Kargil crisis in 1999 and showed concerns on Pakistan's moves in the area (Azizian & Vasilieff, 2003).

### **3.2.3. US sanctions against Pakistan:**

For the United States, Pakistan's geostrategic importance decreased after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Following the withdrawal of the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, the United States abandoned Afghanistan, leaving Pakistan alone to face the brunt of the Afghan conflict. A great many Afghans had developed sentiments against the Mujahideen. Meanwhile, the United States did not want Pakistan to have nuclear capability. Under the Pressler Amendment in 1990, which envisaged sanctions in terms of military and economic assistance, the United States did not provide Pakistan F-16 fight jets for which Pakistan had already paid.

After the nuclear tests by Pakistan in 1998, US President Bill Clinton imposed additional sanctions on Pakistan under the Glenn Amendment of 1994 that allowed sanctions against the non-nuclear weapon states which do not detonate nuclear explosions. In 1999, General Pervez Musharraf took over the power through a military coup in Pakistan, and the United States suspended the entire military and economic assistance to Pakistan under its Foreign Assistance Act. In the post-Cold War decade, Pakistan had bitter relations with the United States and soured ties with Russia. A positive development for Pakistan during this period was the 1998 nuclear explosions that greatly helped create a strategic balance against India through deterrence.



### **3.3. Trust building in bilateral relationship:**

Since its creation, Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union and then the Russian Federation remained cold till the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The basic reason seems to be lack of mutual trust. Soon after the independence, Pakistan's decision of approaching the United States for economic and military assistance sowed the seeds of distrust between Pakistan and the USSR that grew with the passage of time. The mutual mistrust was caused by several developments and decisions by the either side in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These include signing of SEATO and CENTO by Pakistan, the Friendship and Security Agreement between India and the Soviet Union in 1971 and the Soviet support to India during the Pakistan-India war in 1971, the USSR support to India on Kashmir issue at the UN Security Council, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's backing to the US-sponsored Afghan Mujahideen, dismemberment of the Soviet Union, and Pakistan's backing to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan.

#### **3.3.1. Pakistan's detachment from Taliban:**

The United States invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 after the Taliban refused to hand over Al-Qaeda chief Osama bin Laden and other Al-Qaeda leaders, who had alleged involvement in the 9/11 attacks in the United States and had been living in Afghanistan. Pakistan that had recognized the Taliban regime in Afghanistan took a major policy shift to abandon support to the Taliban and join the US-led coalition in the global war on terror.

Russia had not been comfortable with Pakistan's support to the Taliban government. Islamabad's decision to become part of the US-led coalition in the war on terror was well-received in Moscow (Siddiqui, 2017). Besides terrorism in Afghanistan, Russia was also concerned about drug trafficking. Pakistan's detachment from the Taliban government in Afghanistan allayed Russian concerns about terrorism vis a vis Islamabad. With this decision, a major friction in the Pakistan-Russia relationship after the Cold War and a cause of distrust was removed. It contributed to building the bilateral relationship.

### **3.4. Beginning of new era in bilateral relationship:**

Russia appears to have intention to improve relations with Pakistan to have leverage at two levels. First, a better relationship with Pakistan will enable Moscow to have advantage on the issues of terrorism and Afghanistan. It also desired to benefit from differences between Pakistan and the United States and create a role for itself in the region. Second, there is a perception in

Moscow that Pakistan will partially counter any alignment between India and the United States and might impede India to get too close to the United States (Craig, 2015).

While state visits started taking place from both Pakistan and Russia in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, an improvement in the bilateral relationship was witnessed.

In January 2002, Aziz Ahmed Khan, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, paid a visit to Moscow and held consultations with the Russian officials on ways to enhance trade and economy and improve political relations. A Russian business delegation visited Pakistan in early 2002 that resulted in formation of Pakistan-Russia Business Forum and Pakistan-Russia Business Council with the agenda to raise the bilateral trade and investment to one billion dollars in the coming years (Hanif, 2013). A major development in bilateral relations is the visit of the then ISI chief Lt. General (retired) Mahmud Ahmed to Moscow as a special envoy of the then President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf. During the visit, the two countries reached an agreement under which Russia would sell sixteen MI-17 military cargo helicopters to Pakistan (Owais, 2007).

President Musharraf and Russian President Vladimir Putin had a meeting on the sidelines of Multinational Security Summit in Almaty on June 4, 2002. This meeting, which proved to be a major breakthrough in the bilateral relationship, led to formation of the Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism and the Joint Working Group on Strategic Stability the same year to address the challenges to regional stability such as extremism, terrorism, human trafficking, narcotics smuggling and arms control (Amin, 2012).

Former Russian Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Alexander Losyukov paid a state visit to Pakistan in 2001. In reciprocation, former Pakistani President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow in 2003, which was the first visit by any Pakistani head of state or government after 30 years. This visit was the beginning of a new era of relationship between Pakistan and Russia.

President Musharraf's this land landmark visit and his earlier meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Almaty [2002] and Kuala Lumpur [2003] proved quite effective to build mutual confidence and trust. During Musharraf's visit to Moscow, the two countries signed

three agreements to improve diplomatic and cultural ties and address the issues in visa and immigration (Owais, 2007). In July 2004, the then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov visited Pakistan. A delegation of Russian Duma also paid a visit to Pakistan the same year. The improvement in relations with Russia helped Pakistan enter Shanghai Cooperation Organization as an observer in 2005. In 2005, President Musharraf and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin held a meeting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session and the heads of governments of the two also met during the SCO heads of government meeting in Moscow. The high level contacts and meetings continued during 2006. Musharraf and Putin also met on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in June 2006 and the heads of government held a meeting on the occasion of the next SCO summit in September 2006 (Hanif, 2013).

In November 2006, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Pakistan and discussed with his Pakistani counterpart Khurshid Kasuri matters pertaining to bilateral relations and mutual cooperation besides global issues. The two sides exchanged views on enhancement of bilateral cooperation in various fields, including energy, communications, railways and information technology. During the visit, Moscow evinced interest to participate in construction of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. In 2007, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan, which was the first visit of a Russian premier in 38 years. He held talks with President Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. The two sides discussed ways and means to enhance economic cooperation (Hussain, 2012). The same year, the two countries also signed an MoU for joint exploration of oil. Pakistan's former Army Chief General (retired) Ashfaq Parvez Kayani visited Moscow in 2009; and in 2010. Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani held meetings with the Russian leadership on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Dushanbe (Hanif, 2013). In the backdrop of the frequent visits and contacts during this period and Pakistan's participation as well as sacrifices in the war on terror, it appeared that Russian's strategic perception about Pakistan was changing positively in view of its future role in Afghanistan in the region.

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov was the first Russian prime minister who visited Pakistan in post-Soviet era in 2007, and this visit proved to be a turning point in the positive trajectory of the bilateral relations. Since then, the relationship witnessed a sustainable improvement with positive developments taking place with intervals. For instance, the two countries mutually engaged in a structured dialogue in 2009 in the form of annual quadrilateral summits among Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia and Tajikistan. The forum also offered

opportunities of bilateral meetings, and first of its kind was held in Tajikistan in 2009. A similar summit in Sochi in August 2010 expanded the ties. The two countries decided to establish Russia-Pakistan Inter-Governmental Commission for cooperation in trade, economy and science and technology; and the commission held its first meeting in September 2010 (Siddiqui, 2017).

### **3.5. Third country factor in Pakistan-Russia Relations:**

Pakistan-Russia relationship has never been independent, and it has always been affected by a third country. Since the Cold War period, the third country factor continues to persist in the Moscow-Islamabad ties. Pakistan's relations with the United States, India, Afghanistan and China had an impact on Islamabad's ties with Moscow. Besides, the mutual relationship of these states also had an effect on Moscow-Islamabad relationship.

#### **3.5.1. The US factor:**

Throughout the Cold War period, Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union remained strained and the major reason was Pakistan's alliance with the United States. With every decision and development taking Pakistan closer to the United States, the distrust between Moscow and Islamabad continued to deepen (Arif & Raja, 2018). Pakistan's alliance with the United States during the Soviet-Afghan war and the later US-led war on terror as well as other developments that made Pakistan a US ally created an impression that even if stepped back from Washington for a certain period and tilted toward the USSR or Russia, it was aimed at securing a better bargaining position.

Pakistan's decision to go to the United States to seek military and economic assistance created a gulf between Islamabad and Moscow (Amin, 2016). Islamabad's joining of the US military alliances in 1950s further took Pakistan away from the Soviet Union. Pakistan's role in the US-China rapprochement in 1971 also contributed to mar the Moscow-Islamabad relationship. The major decision of becoming part of the US proxy war against the Soviet Union by supporting the Mujahideen in Afghanistan took Pakistan-Russia relations to the lowest ebb. After the Soviet disintegration, the United States quit Afghanistan leaving Pakistan alone to face the brunt of the Afghan unrest. During 1990s, while Pakistan needed military equipment to upgrade its arsenals, it faced the US sanctions because of its nuclear program. Pakistan thus realized that it should engage with Russia. Another major decision on part of Islamabad that left an impact on Pakistan-Russia relations; this time positively, was abandoning support to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and joining the US-led global war on terror after the 9/11. Since Russia had concerns about terrorism

in the context of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, Pakistan's decision to become part of the alliance against the Taliban was received well in Moscow (Smith, 2004).

While Pakistan-Russia relations have been on the path of positive trajectory particularly for a decade, the United States again emerges as a major factor in this development. Washington's ever growing ties with India particularly since the Obama regime have caused a shift in Russia's policy toward South Asia. Russia seems to be pursuing an approach to diversify its relations in South Asia and build ties with Pakistan as well.

During the Cold War period, Pakistan's alliance with the United States and the USSR's improving ties with India shaped a cold relationship between Pakistan and Russia. In the unipolar world as well, Pakistan had been an ally of the United States. While Islamabad and Moscow have been progressing in strengthening their bilateral relationship, one cannot state that Washington is least concerned about it.

### **3.5.2. The India factor:**

The Indo-Russia relationship has been growing since India's first Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru paid his first official visit to the USSR in 1955. The bilateral trade agreements between the two countries in 1953 and then in 1958 laid the foundation of bilateral military cooperation (McGarr, 2013). The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation signed in 1971 had serious implications for Pakistan. Under the agreement, the USSR supported India in its war against Pakistan in 1971 that led to disintegration of Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh. The Soviets not only supported India in the war but also prevented Chinese interference in the war (Mehrotra 1990). The Indo-Russia strategic partnership is based on solid foundations such as respect of each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, Russia's supply of weapons to India to fulfill the requirements of India's armed forces, support to each other at global forums, common stance on the Kashmir issue and trusted alliance.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union's relations with Pakistan and India had been a zero sum game. In the post-Cold war period, the United States de-hyphenated its relations with Pakistan and India to a certain level and engaged with both the countries. On the other hand, Russia's relations with Pakistan remained hostage to India. However, there has been an understanding in Russia that Pakistan is an important country of the region and ties with it should be open up (Siddiqui, 2017). Russia was the only international ally of India during the Cold War; however, New Delhi has built better ties with the United States, the European Union, and Japan. Russia had

been the largest arms supplier to India; however, since 2011, the United States has left Russia behind in it. From 2011 to 2014, India imported military hardware from the United States worth \$13.9 billion and only \$5.34 billion equipment from Russia (LaGrone, 2014).

Russia has major stakes in India. Since India and Pakistan have been arch rivals, New Delhi does not want Moscow to build ties with Islamabad. The Russian strategic and economic interests in India contributed to cold Pakistan-USSR ties and then slow progress in the improvement in the bilateral relationship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. India's impact on Russia's approach toward Pakistan cannot be denied; however, it could not be stated that India has veto power over Russia's policy toward Pakistan. For about two decades, developments have been occurring from time to time implying that Russia independently viewed its relations with Pakistan. For instance, India was opposed to the joint military exercises taking place between Pakistan and Russia since 2016; however, Moscow has been continuing with it.

### **3.5.3. The Afghanistan factor:**

The historical perspective of Pakistan-Russia relations cannot be fully understood without the context of Afghanistan. On December 25, 1979, the Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan to replace the radical Hafizullah Amin with the Soviet-backed Babrak Karmal as head of the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (Mehra 2014). The 1979-1989 period of Soviet-Afghan war had been the worst era of relationship between Islamabad and Moscow. Since Pakistan considered the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a threat to its security, the Mujahideen from Pakistan fought the US proxy war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan that led to dissolution of the USSR.

The post-US withdrawal violence in Afghanistan, the Taliban regime, extremism and narcotics were matters of serious concern for the new Russia. Pakistan was one of the three countries that had recognized the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 1990s. There was also bitterness of the USSR disintegration. The relationship remained cold until Pakistan abandoned the Taliban government and became part of the US-led alliance against terrorism.

While Moscow sees Afghanistan as a suitable place for military basis to have influence over the region, the US prolonged presence in Afghanistan had been a cause of disturbance for it (Siddiqui, 2017). The US forces' complete pullout from Afghanistan in 2021 and the possible rise in violence and the Taliban insurgency are matters of serious concern for Moscow as this could also lead to permanent establishment of the US military bases in Afghanistan. There is also a

Russian apprehension that the instability in Afghanistan could have spillover effect in the Central Asian states.

With resurgence of Russia under President Putin, Moscow has been pursuing a policy to expand its influence in the region, including Afghanistan. Russia has been in contact with the Taliban in an environment when the United States is preparing to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan after 20 years and a peace process is being negotiated. Pakistan has been playing a constructive role in the ongoing peace process in Afghanistan, and Moscow also considers Islamabad very important for stabilization in Afghanistan. It believes that after the US pull out, the Afghan issues could only be resolved through a constructive role of Pakistan and Iran. Russia and China are also engaged with Pakistan in the efforts to reaching a political settlement in Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and Russia believe that political settlement in Afghanistan is inevitable for peace and security in the region; hence, Afghanistan becomes a place of convergence of interests between Islamabad and Moscow.

#### **3.5.4. The China factor:**

While India had been improving its ties with Moscow during the Cold War, Pakistan gave importance to its relations with China. The Soviet proposal of “collective security” in Asia floated in 1969 unveiled the differences between Islamabad and Moscow over China as Beijing had opposed the plan. Pakistan did not accept the plan believing that the Soviet Union wanted to contain Chinese influence in the region and harm its friendship with China (Amin, 2012). Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had initiated the policy of establishing better relations with China.

In the post-Cold War years, the Sino-Russia relations normalized, and Beijing served as instrument to rapprochement between Islamabad and Moscow. A harmony has been witnessed between China and Russia vis a vis their approach toward South Asia. As a result of this harmony, Pakistan and India were inducted into SCO. Russia and China have also been coordinating on the Afghan issue as both the countries want peace and stability in the war-torn country. Pakistan, Russia and China have been continuing trilateral consultations to improve the security situation in Afghanistan. CPEC is also proving another important factor of better Pakistan-Russia ties. In the wake of the economic hardships, Russia has shown interest in CPEC and other related infrastructure development projects.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS OF PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS

A general overview of Pakistan-Russia relations gives an impression that the two countries' ties have a major part of engagements, disengagements or confrontations in security related matters. It is either the matter of Pakistan's joining of the Western Bloc at the cost of abandoning the Soviet Union during the Cold War period or the USSR's support to India in the 1965 and 1971 wars against Pakistan as well as Kashmir issue, Pakistan's backing to the United States in the Soviet-Afghan war that led to dissolution of the Soviet Union, Pakistan's recognition and support to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1990s and then Pakistan's joining of the US-led war on terror; all these developments were of strategic nature or pertaining to security; and all these events had an impact on Pakistan-Russia relations. They also form strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship. After the reactivation of the bilateral relationship in 2003, the two countries have been mainly focusing on the defence related cooperation. Rather, the revival of the relationship was done through the visit by General (retired) Pervez Musharraf.

As compared to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the second decade witnessed a relatively quick progress in improvement of Islamabad-Moscow relationship, particularly in the field of defense. In addition to an enhanced interaction at higher level, there had also been a better collaboration and similarity of views on the regional and international issues. During this period, Russia made a number of decisions and also took steps, indicating a change in its approach toward Pakistan. These include Russia's open support for permanent membership of the SCO for Pakistan, Moscow's condemnation of the US attack on Salala in Pakistan (Siddiqui, 2017), lifting of self-imposed embargoes on sale of military hardware to Pakistan, start of joint military exercises with Pakistan's armed forces despite India's opposition, and delivery of four Mi-35M attack helicopters to Pakistan.

Besides the bilateral security cooperation, there are also certain international issues in which the two countries have strategic interests. In this regard, Afghanistan is the most important issue for which the two countries have been making efforts for a peaceful and political settlement. Peace in Afghanistan is certainly important both for Pakistan and Russia. Being the closest neighbor in respect of geography, culture, religion and ethnicity and having a history of sharing



effects of the unrest in Afghanistan in the past, Pakistan is highly concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. Likewise, Russia is also always sensitive to the security situation in Afghanistan apprehending a spillover effect through the Central Asian states. Islamabad has been playing a reconciliatory role for peace and stability in Afghanistan. US President Joe Biden's announcement of complete withdrawal of the US and NATO troops from Afghanistan by August 2021 and the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021 two weeks before the pullout have changed the entire situation, posing a serious challenge to the world about the future of Afghanistan. Terrorism is another matter of mutual concern for Islamabad and Moscow. Pakistan has effectively dealt with militancy in its tribal areas by carrying out successful military operations. Russia has lauded Pakistan's efforts and the sacrifices in the fight against terrorism (Radio Pakistan, 2018). The armed forces of the two countries have been holding annual joint anti-terror drills since 2016 to learn from each other's experience. Russia's support to Pakistan on strategic issues at international forums such as Pakistan's pursuit for membership of Nuclear Supplier Group is quite important (Radio Pakistan, 2018).

#### **4.1. What is strategic partnership?**

While the world has been in a transition from unipolar to multipolar order, international relations have also been going through a change. States now emphasize on peace, cooperation and development. The phenomena of globalization, multilateralism, diversification of international relations and international integration have become popular. There is a tendency among states to promote relations with one another to enhance cooperation in the areas of mutual interest. Generally, a strategic partnership implies an interaction between two countries about security-related matters. However, it has been observed that countries having strategic partnerships cooperate with one another in diverse fields, including defence. No strategic partnership sans defence cooperation has been witnessed.

The word "strategic" gives different connotations such as a plan to achieve an objective or the matters relating to defence sector. Cambridge dictionary has defined the term "strategic" as "relating to the way in which an organization, country, etc. decides what it wants to achieve and plans actions and use of resources over time to do this." According to Oxford Dictionary of Politics and International Relations, "strategic" is an adjective "relating to gaining of overall or long-term military advantage."

Cambridge dictionary defines strategic partnership as “an arrangement between two companies or organizations to help each other to work together to make it easier for each of them to achieve the things they want to achieve.”

Experts on international relations have explained the term “strategic relationship or partnership” in different ways. According to Anna Michalski, Senior Associate Research Fellow at the Swedish Institute of International Relations, strategic partnership is a “specific form of bilateral relations between states and between states’ non-state actors which through their presence shapes the social structures of the international system and provides venues for bilateral interaction and the realization of international roles.” (Michalski 2019)

Strategic partnerships have been termed as “a specific form of bilateral engagement between two actors in the international system with the purpose of creating privileged bilateral relationships.” (Michalski & Pan, 2017)

Ukrainian scholar Zhovkva (2005) is of the view that “strategic partnerships are a special instrument of the state’s foreign policy toolkit, which the state uses to coordinate its actions on the international arena with other states. Strategic partnerships represent a type of special relationship and thus are not unique or new at all (Tyushka and Czechowska, 2019).

Strategic partnerships could hardly be traced before 1990s. Majority of the authors, who have tried to find out roots of the phenomenon, are of the view that the agreement between US President Bill Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin in 1994 is the first strategic partnership (Tyushka and Czechowska, 2019). Thomas Renard says it “is hardly imaginable that a strategic partnership worth the name could afford not to put security issues at the centre of its agenda.” (Renard 2016)”

Andriy Tyushka and Lucyna Czechowska opine that security component is essential in a strategic partnership; however, all security partnerships are not security driven. “SPs cover a broad range and may be issue-specific or all-encompassing” (Tyushka and Czechowska, 2019). The real strategic partnership is between the US and the UK or between the US and Israel. However, the concept of strategic partnership is usually used in the context of enhancement of cooperation between two states.

The general overview of Pakistan-Russia relationship suggests that since the beginning, security has been the core feature. It is either the strained relationship of the Cold War period or an improvement in the bilateral ties in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the main area is security. The Soviet Union

distanced from Pakistan when Islamabad joined the Western security blocs in 1950s (Khan, 2021). Tashkent Agreement was an issue of security in which Moscow played a role between Pakistan and India. There is a perception that India could not have won war against Pakistan in 1971 without the political and military support of the Soviet Union. The war led to dismemberment of Pakistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan's joining of the Afghan war was again a major issue of the USSR's security that led to disintegration of the USSR. Pakistan's recognition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1990s was a matter of concern for Russia because of the possible spillover effect of terrorism in Afghanistan into the Central Asian states. Russia welcomed Pakistan's major decision of abandoning the Taliban and joining the US war on terror in 2001. Pakistan's military operations against the Taliban and its efforts as well as sacrifices in the war on terror were well received in Moscow. During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the two countries have been taking steps to build mutual trust and enhance cooperation in different fields, mainly security, energy and trade. Given Russia's arms exports potential, Moscow would obviously desire to sell its military hardware to Pakistan, which also requires the same in view of its deteriorating relations with the United States. The Afghan security issue is an important matter for both Moscow and Islamabad to engage with each other. Peace and stability in Afghanistan is the core interest of both the countries.

Pakistan and Russia had been enemies during the Cold War; however, the convergence of strategic interests on various issues is bringing the two countries closer to each other. The political and military leaderships of the two countries have paid several visits to each other since President Musharraf's ice-breaking visit to Moscow. In view of the growing ties, Pakistan showed interest to forge a strategic partnership with Russia in May 2018 (Butt, 2019). Stephen Blank of US Strategic Studies Institute claims that Pakistan and Russia have "covertly developed geopolitical and strategic relations behind the scenes of the world politics" since Russia has concluded that Pakistan is the crucial player in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal from the country (Blank 2012).

#### **4.2. High level interactions:**

The civil and military leaderships of Pakistan and Russia had had interactions with each other particularly after President Musharraf's visit to Moscow in 2003. Later in 2007, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov's visit to Islamabad proved quite significant in paving the way for bilateral meetings. Former President Asif Zardari paid a historic visit to Moscow in 2011 – the first of any Pakistani head of state in 37 years – with an aim to open a new era of bilateral

cooperation forgetting the past. During the visit, MoUs were signed in the field of energy, investment, air services and agriculture. From 2008 to 2012, President Zardari met the then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for six times (Hanif 2013). In 2012, the then Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar visited Moscow and met her counterpart Sergey Lavrov to discuss ways to improve the bilateral relationship (Hanif 2013). After a gap of six years, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Islamabad, which was followed by an important visit by Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu in 2014.

The year 2017 was an important year in respect of interactions between the two countries. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin met on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in Astana on June 9. Later, the then prime ministers of the two countries met in Sochi on November 30, 2017. There were also eight visits of Pakistani ministers to Moscow during this year (MoFA). On November 5, 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan held a meeting with Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev on the sidelines of the China International Import Expo. The same year, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi held talks with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov twice; first on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York in September and the second in Moscow on December 26, 2018 (MoFA). Sergey Lavrov also paid a two-day official visit to Islamabad on April 6-7, 2021 to discuss bilateral relations and the regional situation, particularly the Afghan issue.

Like the political leadership, the military chiefs and senior military officials of the two countries also had exchange of visits particularly following the important visit by Pakistan's former Army Chief General (retired) Ashfaq Pervaiz Kayani to Moscow in 2009. Later, in 2012, the visit of General Kayani to Moscow was an important milestone in the bilateral defence relations (Siddiqi, 2017). The Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces of the Russian Federation Col. Gen. Vladimir V. Chirkin paid reciprocal visit to Pakistan in August 2013. The Russian Air Force Chief also visited Pakistan in April 2013. All the three Commanders-in-Chief of Russia's armed forces visited Pakistan in 2014. And in July 2015, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif paid a visit to Russia (Siddiqi, 2017). General Qamar Javed Bajwa was the third consecutive army chief, who visited Moscow in April 2018. During the visit, the two countries formed Joint Military Commission (Khan, 2021). The National Security Advisors of the two countries also held talks in Moscow during the same month. A delegation of Pakistan Navy led by Vice Admiral

Kaleem Shaukat visited Russia and signed MoU on cooperation in navies of the two countries (Khan, 2021).

The parliamentary level exchanges between the two countries also increased during the recent times. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, former National Assembly Speaker Ayaz Sadiq visited Russia to attend a conference titled “Parliamentarians Against Drugs” in December 2017. Former Senate Chairman Raza Rabbani led a delegation to represent Pakistan at the 137<sup>th</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union Assembly in Saint Petersburg in October 2017. Saleem Mandviwalla, the then Acting Chairman Senate, attended a parliamentary conference in Moscow on December 10, 2018. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed also participated in a conference in Russia in October 2018. In December 2017, Russia’s Chairman State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin participated in Regional Conference on Challenge of Terrorism and Inter-Regional Connectivity in Pakistan. Leonid Slutsky, the Chairman of Russia’s State Duma Committee on International Affairs, visited Pakistan in November 2017 and held meetings with the Speaker National Assembly and the Foreign Minister (MoFA).

Russian President Vladimir Putin had planned a visit to Pakistan in October 2012. The Russian authorities explained that the visit was postponed because of “technical hitches related to holding quadrilateral summit in Pakistan” (Hanif, 2013). There were different speculations about the postponement of the visit in the media. However, the Pakistani and Russian officials paid three visits after the cancellation of Putin’s visit that removed the misperceptions. A Russian delegation visited Pakistan and signed three MoUs on expansion of Pakistan Steel Mills, development of Railways and the energy sector. In the first week of October 2012, Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani paid his scheduled visit to Pakistan. And in October 2012, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov visited Islamabad and held meetings with his Pakistani counterpart and the Prime Minister (Hanif, 2013). Following the cancellation of Putin’s visit, Sergey Lavrov visited Pakistan in two days notice after rescheduling his visit to India on October 4, 2012. Similarly, Russian Defence Minister Anatoliy Serdyukov did not go to India on his scheduled visit for having a meeting with the visiting General Kayani. This suggests that Putin’s visit was not canceled to undermine the growing relations between Islamabad and Moscow (Nation, 2012).

On February 23, 2022, Prime Minister Imran Khan paid a two-day visit to Russia at the invitation of Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to a press release issued by the Prime Minister Office and posted on the official twitter account of the Prime Minister Office, “the two

leaders held wide-ranging consultations on bilateral relations as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest.” It adds,

“The Prime Minister expressed confidence that the positive trajectory of bilateral relations will continue to move forward in the future. He added that the trust and cordiality marking the relationship would translate into further deepening and broadening of mutual cooperation in diverse fields. The Prime Minister reaffirmed the importance of Pakistan-Stream Gas Pipeline as a flagship economic project between Pakistan and Russia and also discussed cooperation on prospective energy-related projects. The Prime Minister underscored Pakistan’s commitment to forge a long-term, multidimensional relationship with Russia.” (Prime Minister Office twitter account)

Addressing a news conference on conclusion of the visit, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi told media persons that Russia is keen to establish LNG terminal at Gwadar. It was a coincidence that Russia launched a military attack on Ukraine on the day Prime Minister Imran Khan arrived in Moscow for his two-day visit.

#### **4.3. Permanent membership of SCO for Pakistan:**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization was originally formed by Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in June 2001 with the objective of common development. Pakistan had been an observer of the SCO since 2005. It was the first country having observer status to apply for permanent membership in 2010. The heads of state, at their meeting in June 2015, agreed in principle to grant permanent membership to Pakistan. On June 9, 2017, Pakistan was given the status of a permanent member of the SCO (MoFA, 2017).

In 2011, the then Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin openly supported Pakistan for permanent membership of the SCO. He made this announcement while responding to Pakistan’s former Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani’s address at the 10<sup>th</sup> Heads of Government meeting of SCO in St. Petersburg (Dawn, 2011). On the occasion, Putin also supported implementation of trade and energy projects between the two countries besides materialization of TAPI and CASA-1000 projects. During his meeting with Gilani, Putin said, “Pakistan is important for us in trade and economy and it is an important partner in South Asia and in Islamic world.” (Dawn, 2011) Putin also offered to expand Pakistan Steel Mills and technical support for Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants.

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Pakistan’s accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, as a full member, has infused a new energy to our ties with the Russian Federation. Pakistan highly values the support extended by the Russian Federation during its membership process (MoFA).”

Pakistan became a full member of the SCO with the support of China; however, it would not have been possible without Russia’s consent. Institutions and regional organizations offer a platform for the member states to exchange views on the international issues of mutual concern as well as bilateral cooperation. The SCO is an effective platform for Russia, China and Pakistan to sit together and discuss the security concerns in the region. Their mutual understanding on issues such as Afghanistan, terrorism and drugs as well as joint efforts for the common objectives could lead to establishing an environment of peace, stability and development in the world.

The SCO membership carries special significance for Pakistan in all respects, including regional connectivity and cooperation with the member states in energy, trade, security and eradication of terrorism and extremism. The enhanced interaction with Russia and the Central Asian states may help ensure early materialization of TAPI and CASA-1000 projects besides initiating new projects with energy-rich Russia. The platform would also help Pakistan present its soft image before the world. Pakistan’s sacrifices and success against terrorism could be highlighted at this important international platform in a better way. Pakistan could also offer its cooperation to eliminate the menace of terrorism. The forum provides Pakistan an opportunity to foil India’s designs to isolate Pakistan at international level as well as to counter the Indian propaganda against Pakistan vis a vis terrorism. In February 2019, a terrorist attack was carried out on the Indian troops in Pulwama area of Kashmir. Following the incident, Indian Air Force carried out an air strike inside Pakistan territory. Pakistan Air Force effectively responded to the attack by shooting down an Indian aircraft and arrested an Indian pilot, who was later handed over to India. New Delhi wanted to take up the matter at the SCO meeting; however, China and Russia rejected the Indian proposal and asked for bilaterally addressing the issue. Pakistan took this development as a sign of its improved relations with Russia (Khan, 2021).

The forum has the potential to provide the leaderships of Pakistan and India an opportunity to sit on the table and discuss their outstanding issues. Leaders always find opportunity to hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines of a regional organization’s meetings, and these bilateral interactions pave the way for formal discussions on matters of mutual interest between countries.

Given its important geostrategic location and strong ties with China, Pakistan has immense opportunities to gain economically from the SCO platform by interacting with the member states.

#### **4.4. Killing of Osama bin Laden and Salala attack:**

On May 2, 2011, US President Barack Obama, in a late-night White House speech, announced that the United States conducted an operation inside Pakistan and killed Osama bin Laden, the chief of Al-Qaeda and the mastermind of the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. Later the same day, a press release issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad, confirmed the death of Osama bin Laden in an intelligence-driven operation by the US forces near Abbottabad. It said “President Obama telephoned President Zardari on the successful US operation which resulted in killing of Osama bin Laden (MoFA, 2011).”

President Obama wrote in his book “A Promised Land” that he knew that a military strike inside an allied state would be violation of its sovereignty, but he did not want to lose a chance to target Osama bin Laden (Iqbal, 2020). The Pakistani civil and military leadership were not aware of the Abbottabad operation in advance. President Asif Zardari and Army Chief General Ashfaq Parvaiz Kayani received phone calls from their US counterparts about the Abbottabad operation (Hussain, 2021). Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Salman Bashir described the US raid in Abbottabad as violation of Pakistan’s sovereignty. Referring to the UN charter in his news conference, he raised legal questions over the action and emphasized that everyone should be mindful of its international obligations (Bowcot, 2011). Salman Bashir also warned of “disastrous consequences” for any military action inside Pakistani territory by any country. Pakistan’s military, in a statement, also warned that Pakistan would review its military and intelligence cooperation with the United States in the war on terror in case of any future US raid (VOA, 2011).

On November 26, 2011, the NATO helicopters attacked a Pakistan Army check post, killing 24 soldiers and injuring 12 others at Salala in Mohmand Agency (Firdous, 2011). Pakistan believed that it was a deliberate and pre-planned attack carried out by US Special Force on which NATO had no control (Malik, 2012). Pakistan strongly reacted to the act. Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani termed it “unprovoked act of aggression” and a “blatant and unacceptable act” (Malik, 2012). Pakistan took a number of steps in protest against the aggression, including closure of the NATO supplies to Afghanistan and boycotting of the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan on December 5, 2011. Pakistan also demanded of the United States to tender official apology, vacate Shamsi Airbase and end the drone attacks.



Russia condemned the NATO attack on the Pakistan military check post across the border in Salala. The Russian Prime Minister termed the attack as “infringement of a state’s independence” (Khan, 2019). The Russian Foreign Minister underlined unacceptability of violating sovereignty of the states, including during counter terrorism operations (Reuters, 2011).

The US intrusion into Pakistan to kill Osama bin Laden without taking Pakistani leadership into confidence and the Salala attack took the Islamabad-Washington ties to the lowest ebb. These incidents made Pakistan’s policy makers think about diversifying the country’s foreign policy options by reducing dependence on the United States (Bashir & Naseer, 2018). They planned to reach out to Moscow (Yousaf, 2016).

In the wake of these developments, Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani visited Moscow in 2011 and informed the Russian leadership of Pakistan’s new approach and defence needs. He called for reviewing Russia’s policy of ban on arms sale to Pakistan (Khan, 2021). Later in August 2012, Pakistan’s Air Chief, Air Marshal (retired) Tariq Rafiq Butt visited Moscow, and this visit was reciprocated by Russian Air Chief Viktor Bondarev’s visit to Islamabad in April 2013.

#### **4.5. Bilateral Strategic Dialogue:**

Pakistan and Russia celebrated 65 years of their diplomatic relations with the beginning of bilateral strategic dialogue for all-inclusive collaboration (Azad, 2016). The strategic dialogue initiated at the foreign secretary level was aimed at improving multidimensional relationship, including defence, commerce and energy (Siddiqi, 2017). The first meeting of the dialogue held in 2013 developed an institutional framework for closer ties in almost all sectors, including politics, economy and trade. The second round of dialogue was held on October 21, 2014 in which the two sides discussed ways to enhance bilateral collaboration in different fields. On November 20, 2014, the defence ministers of the two countries signed an agreement to strengthen strategic relations (Arif & Ahmed, 2018).

Earlier in 2003, Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability was established for structured dialogue between the two countries. The group deals with the issues of arms control, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and building up global and regional security. In 2019, the group met for 13th time and discussed regional and global security situation, arms control and disarmament of non-proliferation agenda. The two sides reached an understanding for protecting multilateralism for international security and disarmament. They also expressed

satisfaction over cooperation and coordination between the two countries at various international forums. They also agreed on the need for capitalizing on the positive trajectory of bilateral relations (MoFA, 2019).

The strategic dialogue, which was initiated between Pakistan and Russia in 2013, proved a major breakthrough for improvement in bilateral ties (Bashir & Naseer, 2018). In 2014, Russia lifted self-imposed embargo on the sale of military hardware to Pakistan and the two countries also reached an agreement on defence in 2014.

#### **4.6. Defence Cooperation:**

The increasing interaction between the political and military leaderships of the two countries particularly in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century started producing results after a couple of years. Former Army Chief General (retired) Ashfaq Pervez Kayani's visit to Moscow in 2009 and the following exchange of visits by the senior military officials largely contributed to building trust and making concrete decisions.

In a surprise move on June 2, 2014, Russia announced to lift its self-imposed embargo to sell arms to Pakistan. Sergei Chemezov, the head of state-owned technology corporation Rostec, said "such a decision has been taken. We are holding talks on supplying the helicopters" (Dawn, 2014). It was an important decision and a major development that showed a paradigm shift in Russia's policy toward Pakistan. The move helped build mutual trust and it paved the way for opening new avenues of military cooperation.

In another major development, the two countries signed defence cooperation agreement on November 21, 2014. Pakistan's then Defence Minister Khawaja Asif and his Russian counterpart Sergey Shoigu in Islamabad signed the document. Shoigu was the first defence minister of Russia who visited Pakistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Pakistan's Defence Ministry termed the agreement as "milestone" in defence relations between the two countries. The agreement envisaged "exchange of information on politico-military issues; cooperation for promoting international security; intensification of counter-terrorism and arms control activities; strengthening collaboration in various military fields, including education, medicine, history, topography, hydrography and culture; and sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations (Syed, 2014)." In a statement, Shoigu said the two sides agreed that "bilateral military cooperation should have a great practical focus and contribute to increasing combat efficiency of our armed forces (Syed, 2014)." Khawaja Asif also expressed confidence that the two countries will "translate their

relationship in tangible terms and further strengthen military to military relations” (Syed, 2014). During Pakistan’s Defence Expo IDEAS 2014, the Russian Defence Minister appreciated Pakistan’s armed forces for effectively fighting terrorism (Arif and Ahmed 2018). In June 2014, Pakistan’s former Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani visited an arms expo in Moscow and spent 15 hours there. This shows Pakistan’s seriousness to improve defence ties with Russia (Akram, 2016).

Following Russia’s lifting of arms embargo on Pakistan, the two countries held negotiations about sale of four Mi-35M attack helicopters to Pakistan; and in 2015, Russia agreed to sell these helicopters. The two sides also signed an agreement in Rawalpindi on August 19, 2015 (Yousaf, 2015). The same year the two countries also struck a deal for import of Klimov RD-93 engines. The engines were used for JF-17 Thunder aircraft, which were jointly manufactured by Pakistan and China (Rafiq, 2015). In November 2016, Pakistan gave Russia access to warm waters through Gwadar Port; and in reciprocation, Russia allowed for Pakistan’s full membership of the SCO in 2017. The two countries also signed an MoU under which Russia would support for laying 1100-km long gas pipeline for connecting LNG terminals in Sindh and Punjab (Farwa, 2019). In 2017, Pakistan Army’s Aviation Corps received four Mi-35M attack helicopters from Russia (Gady, 2017). Pakistan also looks forward to purchase Sukhoi Su35 jet from Russia to enhance its ability of maritime guards and penetrate into the enemy’s area. Pakistan is also interested to buy Yak-130 combat trainer aircraft (Arif and Ahmed, 2018). Pakistan was also interested to buy Russia’s air defence systems, Su-35 jets and T-90 tanks; and the two countries also held talks about it. Russia, however, adopted a cautious approach apprehending that Pakistan could use the weapons for any other purpose, except counter-terrorism operations. The question is whether Russia would make a defence partnership with Pakistan that could worry India (Khan, 2019).

The enhanced interaction between the civil and military leaderships of the two countries resulted in improvement of bilateral relations, particularly in defence sector. There was a clear manifestation of improved level of mutual trust. The geo-political changes largely contributed to making the two countries realize to foster bilateral relationship. The year 2014 witnessed several positive developments showing growing Islamabad-Moscow strategic ties. The 2014 defence agreement between the two countries is considered as a “//milestone//” in the bilateral relationship (Ramachandran, 2014). Russia’s decision of selling weapons to Pakistan sent across a signal of change in the policy of the two countries. The move was not welcomed in India that has been

importing Russian arms for decades. The Defence Agreement, however, opened new avenues of defence cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad.

#### **4.6.1. Joint Military Exercises:**

In pursuant to the historic bilateral defence agreement, Pakistan and Russia started a series of joint military exercises. The two states conducted Arabian Monsoon naval drills in 2014 and 2015. In 2016, joint military exercises titled Druzhba [friendship] were held. About two hundred military personnel participated in this military drill held at Rattu, Gilgit-Baltistan and Cherat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In those days, Pakistan and India had tensions following an attack on a camp of Indian troops in Uri area of the Indian-administered Kashmir. India did not want Russia to hold this exercise. However, Russia ignored India's opposition and moved ahead. Expressing India's displeasure over the development, the Indian High Commission in Pakistan stated that Pakistan is "a wrong approach and it would only create problems" (Siddiqi, 2017). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also cited a Russian proverb "an old friend is better than two new friends," in his joint news conference with Russian President Vladimir Putin after the BRICS Summit in India in 2016 (Siddiqi, 2017). Pakistan and Russia have been holding "Friendship" military exercises every year, and in this regard, Druzhba V was held in Pakistan in November 2020. In a tweet on November 8, 2020, the Director General Inter Services Public Relations announced that the opening ceremony of two-week counter-terrorism exercise between the special forces of the two countries was held at Tarbela.

Pakistan Navy has been holding Aman multinational maritime exercise biannually since 2007. Naval forces from a number of countries participate in this maritime exercise. In 2017, a total of 35 countries took part in Aman naval exercise. For the first time, Russia's largest antisubmarine warship Severomorsk participated in this exercise (Khan, 2019). In 2021, Pakistan Navy hosted the event from February 11 to 16 wherein 45 countries, including Russia, participated. At the culmination of this mega event, the naval forces of Pakistan, Russia and Sri Lanka conducted jointly maritime exercises in the North Arabian Sea (Tribune, 2021).

In August 2018, Pakistan participated in SCO member states Joint Military Anti-Terrorist Command Staff Exercise called Peace Mission-2018 in Chelyabinsk, Russia (MoFA). In 2019, Pakistan along with other SCO member states also participated in military exercise TSENTR (Center) in the Russian city of Orenburg (Tribune, 2019). There was also reciprocal participation

of the military delegations of Pakistan and India in defence exhibitions. Pakistan Army visited Army-2018 Exhibition in Moscow, and the Russian military attended IDEAS 2019 (MoFA).

In August 2018, Pakistan and Russia signed an agreement for military training of Pakistani army officers in Russia. The security training agreement was reached at the end of the two-day meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Military Consultative Committee. Commenting on the growing cooperation between the two countries, Russia's Ambassador to Pakistan said, "This cooperation is developing into many directions. So, there is quite a wide spectrum. And, of course, this is a reflection of our approach to the relations with Pakistan, which to our country has their own independent value for us (Gul, 2018)."

#### **4.7. Bilateral Cooperation in Trade and Energy:**

Bilateral trade has been increasing steadily. Pakistan mainly exports cotton, textiles, leather, synthetic fabrics, fruits, surgical and sports goods to Russia. The major import items from Russia include fertilizers, chemical elements and compounds, rubber, tyres and tubes, paper and paper board, iron and steel (raw and manufactured products) and machinery (MoFA). According to Observatory of Economic Complexity, Pakistan exported \$279 million to Russia in 2020 while Russia exported \$699 million to Pakistan the same year. During the last 24 years, Pakistan's exports to Russia increased by 13.6 percent annually while Russian exports to Pakistan increased at an annualized rate of 10.2 percent.

Pakistan-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation is an important mechanism to review the wide spectrum of bilateral cooperation and prepare roadmap for future cooperation. The inaugural session of IGC was held in Moscow on September 21, 2010 (MoFA). Within the IGC's framework, a number of Joint Working Groups discuss ways and means to enhance bilateral cooperation. The sixth session of the IGC was held in Islamabad from December 9-11, 2019 wherein the two sides reviewed the entire spectrum of bilateral cooperation and resolved to enhance the bilateral trade to its true potential. The seventh session was held in Yekaterinbug, Russia, in November 2021.

Energy cooperation has emerged as the most prominent area of cooperation. Russia is a leader in global production of oil and gas and Pakistan is a developing country with immense energy needs (MoFA). The two countries signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement on construction of North-South Gas Pipeline from Karachi to Lahore in 2015 (MoFA). The project, however, could not be implemented and the two countries signed an agreement again in 2021

renaming it as Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline. The two countries also signed an Inter-Governmental Agreement on Cooperation in the sphere of LNG on October 13, 2017 (MoFA).

#### **4.8. Russia's position on issues of mutual interest:**

Being a permanent member of the UN Security Council and having a golden history of the bipolar world, Russia's voice is considered important in the international system. Its support to any country from the third world carries a weight and sends a meaningful message across the world. Although Russia has been facing financial issues, it still holds the status of one of the leading world military powers. There are certain international issues of mutual interest on which Islamabad and Moscow have identical views.

##### **4.8.1. Terrorism:**

With emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1994 and other militant forces in various other countries, terrorism and extremism greatly worried the world. The recognition of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1996 by Islamabad had been a matter of concern for Moscow. Terrorism in Afghanistan had an impact on the neighboring countries, including the Central Asian States bordering Russia. The 9/11 attacks and the subsequent Pakistan's decision to abandon the Taliban support sent a positive message to Moscow. The war on terror launched by the United States was welcomed by the world, including Russia. Pakistan suffered a serious spillover effect of the war in Afghanistan. The local Taliban carried out terrorist attacks across Pakistan, killing innocent people as well as security personnel. Pakistan lost about 70,000 innocent lives in the suicide bombings and attacks by the terrorists and faced a loss of \$150 billion in economy (Gul, 2021).

Pakistan's security forces carried out several military operations in the tribal region and ultimately achieved success. As a result of the decisive operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan in 2014, the terrorists belonging to Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Al-Qaeda, Jundullah and Haqqani Network were eliminated. In February 2017, Pakistan armed forces cleared North Waziristan of militants. Soon after conclusion of Zarb-e-Azb, Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was launched to eliminate the remnants, abettors and financiers of terrorists from across the country; and this still continues.

While the United States has been skeptical about Pakistan's sacrifices in the war on terror, Russia has been appreciative of Pakistan armed forces for their actions against the militants. During his visit to Defence Expo IDEAS 2014, the Russian Defence Minister lauded Pakistan's

armed forces to combat terrorism (Arif & Ahmed, 2018). Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Alexey Dedov stated that Pakistan is an important party to peace and stability in the region and the world. He called Pakistan a valuable partner to address the challenges such as terrorism and drug trafficking (Gul, 2018). Russia that has always been praising Pakistan for successfully overcoming the challenge of militancy, is keen to hold counter-terrorism exercises with Pakistan's armed forces (Khan, 2019).

Moscow's interests with Pakistan mainly focused on Afghanistan, Taliban, counter-terrorism, drug trafficking and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Counter-terrorism had been one of the top priorities of the bilateral cooperation and efforts toward this direction began in the early years of restoration of ties following the fall of Soviet Union. As a result of the meeting between former President Pervez Musharraf and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Almaty in June 2002, the two countries formed a Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism (Hussain, 2012). The group has been holding its meetings to discuss bilateral cooperation on counter terrorism. In its eighth meeting held in Moscow on November 14, 2019, the two countries expressed satisfaction over the cooperation against terrorism. On the occasion, the Russian side also recognized Pakistan's sacrifices and appreciated Pakistan armed forces' success in the fight against terrorism (Radio Pakistan, 2019). The 2014 Defence Agreement also stressed on intensified activities against terrorism. The bilateral meeting held during those days emphasized on harmonized efforts to combat international terrorism and narcotics traffic (Bashir & Naseer, 2018).

Pakistan's effective actions against militants in the country established the professional competence of its armed forces against militant forces. The ISIS-Khorasan's presence in Afghanistan had been a matter of concern for both Pakistan and Russia. Moscow believed that the IS militants had been posing threat to regional stability. While the US policy makers contended that ISIS-Khorasan was a declining threat, Pakistan and Russia had a shared viewpoint that the terrorist network had been gaining strength in Afghanistan after displacement of the ISIS terrorists in Iraq and Syria (Belt and Road News, 2020).

India accuses Pakistan of allegedly supporting and sponsoring terrorism after every terrorist incident on its soil. India and Russia have had a close relationship for decades. However, Russia did not endorse India's allegations against Pakistan vis a vis terrorism. Russia tried to maintain a balanced relationship in South Asia, avoiding the blame game between the two. India

wanted to take the matter of Pulwama attack in 2019 to the SCO forum; however, Russia thwarted this attempt and asked India for resolving these issues bilaterally. Contrary to that, Moscow has been appreciative of Pakistan's fight against terrorism, and it entered into joint anti-terror military drills with Pakistan's armed forces in 2016.

#### **4.8.2. Afghanistan:**

Afghanistan or the Afghan issue has been an important strategic dimension of Pak-Russia relationship, and this began with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Mujahideen belonging to Pakistan waged war against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan as a proxy of the United States. The invasion of Afghanistan was an important factor to the breakdown of the Soviet Union. Having concern over the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1990s, which was supported by Pakistan, Islamabad-Moscow ties remained tense. In 2001, Afghanistan again became a factor of change in Islamabad-Moscow ties by allaying Russia's distrust toward Pakistan when Islamabad decided to join the US-led alliance of war on terror and gave up support to the Taliban. The US invasion of Afghanistan and the militancy in Afghanistan affected the neighboring countries, particularly Pakistan. Afghanistan-based terrorism and drug-trafficking had been an important issue for the regional countries, including Russia. Islamabad and Moscow had developed mechanisms through working groups to cooperate mutually to combat these two menaces.

While the US and NATO forces have been withdrawing from Afghanistan after US President Joe Biden's announcement to pull out all troops from Afghanistan by August 2021, Pakistan, the United States, China, Russia and other regional countries had been making efforts for a political settlement in Afghanistan so that the country does not plunge into a civil war after the withdrawal of the foreign forces. Pakistan has been playing a reconciliatory role for a political solution to the issue. It facilitated a dialogue between the Taliban and the United States in Doha, Qatar, and later also played a positive role for intra-Afghan negotiations. China and Russia have also been part of these reconciliatory efforts. In 2018, Russia hosted a conference of the warring parties in Afghanistan and the stakeholders under a process called Moscow Format. A total of 11 countries participated in the talks, and for the first time, the Taliban were invited to an international forum. Although the Kabul government did not attend the talks, the representatives of the High Peace Council, formed for peace efforts, and individual Afghan leaders participated in the conference. The initiative was aimed at finding a regional solution to the protracted Afghan war. With the launch of this process, Russia became a proactive player in Afghanistan (Hussain, 2018).



Later, on March 18, 2021, Russia organized a conference in Moscow to discuss Afghan political settlement, in which the Taliban and the Afghan leadership participated. The Afghan government and the Taliban agreed on accelerated peace talks (Dawn, 2021).

The geostrategic location of Afghanistan is highly important for the regional countries for having peace, stability and prosperity. Peace in Afghanistan is likely to bring stability and prosperity in the region through regional connectivity and trade. Pakistan is the most affected country of any development in Afghanistan. The security situation in Afghanistan has implications for all the regional countries, including Russia. Islamabad and Moscow thus become important stakeholders of the developments in Afghanistan, and they are supposed to watch their respective national interests as well as the common objectives of peace and prosperity.

#### **4.8.3. Kashmir:**

Kashmir has been a disputed territory between Pakistan and India since their independence from the British rule in 1947. The two countries have fought three wars on the issue. There are also UN Security Council resolutions that call for right to self-determination for the people of Kashmir. Kashmir remains cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy. Islamabad has been making diplomatic efforts to draw the world attention to the issue and build international pressure on India to give the right to self-determination to the people of Kashmir as per the UN Security Council resolutions. In this regard, any international voice raised in favor or against Pakistan's position on Kashmir is very important for it.

Russia, being a traditional ally and a strategic partner of India, has always been supportive of the Indian stance on Kashmir at international forums, including the UN Security Council. India rules out any multilateral role on the issue, and rather claims that Kashmir is an integral part of India. The erstwhile Soviet Union had vetoed a number of resolutions on Kashmir in favor of India during the Cold War period. Instead of realizing the need for any multilateral efforts to resolve the issue, Russia considers Kashmir as a bilateral issue between Pakistan and India, and needs to be addressed by these two countries.

India changed Kashmir's special status by revoking Article 370 in its constitution and dividing it into two union territories – Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh. Pakistan raised voice against this "unilateral" action by India at the international level. On China's request, the UN Security Council held a closed-door session on August 16, 2019 to discuss the situation in Kashmir and India's revocation of the special status of Kashmir. It was for the first time that Pakistan and

India question was debated at the UN Security Council after 1971. China had been insisting that the world body should make a joint statement; however, it was opposed by the United States, Russia and France. However, Russia's First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy, in his tweet on August 16, 2019, referred to the UNSC resolutions for resolution of Kashmir issue. He stated, "We hope that the existing divergences around Kashmir will be settled bilaterally by political and diplomatic means only on the basis of Simla Agreement of 1972 and Lahore Declaration of 1999, in accordance with UN Charter, relevant UN resolutions and bilateral agreements between India and Pakistan (Dmitry Polyanskiy's twitter account)." The tweet was also retweeted by Russian foreign ministry's official account. This was for the first time that Russia mentioned UN resolutions in the context of the resolution of Kashmir issue as Russia has always been stressing for resolution of the issue bilaterally.

#### **4.8.4. Nuclear Suppliers Group:**

After the US-India nuclear deal legislated under the Hyde Act of 2008, the Nuclear Supplier Group gave India exception to make civil nuclear trade. Russia that had a long history of defence cooperation with India got an opportunity to sell nuclear power plants to India. On the other hand, Pakistan faced a difficult situation at the international level after emergence of Dr. A. Q. Khan network of nuclear proliferation. Feeling betrayed by the US legislation and its results, Pakistan moved to Russia and China, who were eager to exploit Pakistan's estrangement with the United States (Khan, 2021)

Pakistan and India have applied for membership of the NSG; however, their applications have been lying pending since 2016. Pakistan has complaints that the NSG has been differently treating Pakistan and India and it has become politicized. Addressing a webinar on "The Politics of NSG: The Current Dimensions," organized by Strategic Vision Institute, Kamran Akhtar, the Director General of Arms Control and Disarmament Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated; "NSG very much epitomizes the politics of non-proliferation at the global level." He alleged the NSG of according "precedence to the interests of the nuclear supplier states" (Dawn, 2021). Pakistan has been emphasizing on equitable basis for according membership.

Russia has indicated that it has no objection if Pakistan becomes member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Addressing a seminar on Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and Strategic Stability in Islamabad on December 15, 2017, First Secretary at Russian Embassy Pavel Didkovsky stated, "Moscow neither opposed nor wished to block Pakistan's application to join the Nuclear Suppliers

Group” (Farwa, 2019). Later, on August 1, 2018, speaking at a roundtable discussion in Islamabad, Russian Ambassador Alexey Dedov explained his country’s policy on the matter by saying, “Russia has no objections to Pakistan’s membership of the NSG. We are ready to work towards consensus-based discussions on this issue” (IPRI, 2018). This also indicates an improvement in Pakistan-Russia relations on a matter of strategic importance.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RUSSIA'S RESURGENCE AS A GREAT POWER AND REGIONAL REALIGNMENTS**

Following the Soviet collapse, Boris Yeltsin became the first president of the Russian Federation. Although Yeltsin was a Communist Party member, he eventually believed in democratic and free market reforms. During his period as president from 1991 to 1999, Russia faced a lot of difficulties, including economic collapse, corruption, crime rise and inequality. Russian scholar Michael Mcfaul has described Yeltsin as a “failed president.” In an interview with America’s National Public Radio on April 23, 2007 when President Yeltsin died, Mcfaul said Yeltsin was the person who “destroyed communism. Destroyed the Soviet Union. Destroyed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.” Mcfaul further said Yeltsin “was not very good for construction – good at destruction, bad at the construction (Mcfaul, 2007).” In 1999, Yeltsin resigned and chose Vladimir Putin as his successor.

Russia, under the leadership of President Vladimir Putin, has been striving to regain its past glory in respect of its influence in the world politics. Owing to the economic and foreign policies being pursued by President Putin, Russia has reemerged as a great power with its improved economic condition and enhanced strategic influence in its neighborhood and beyond. Under the leadership of President Putin, Russia has again become a key global player. While pursuing a proactive foreign policy, Russia has not only been forcefully presenting its perspective on various international issues before the world but also getting itself involved in the international conflicts. In addition to annexing Crimea, Russia has actively been involved in the Syrian conflict by supporting President Bashar al-Assad. There has also been Russia’s diplomatic engagement with other stakeholders on Afghanistan issue. Russia strengthened its ties with China; and these two major global powers feel threatened by the US expansionist designs in the region (Kremlin, 2022). Moscow’s policy toward Pakistan has witnessed a change particularly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With the enhanced level of engagement over bilateral cooperation in energy and defence sectors as well as on international issues, the bilateral ties have been on the positive trajectory for over a decade. The US-India strategic partnership and their constantly growing relations have implications for other countries located in the region, especially Russia, China, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Though

Pakistan had been a key member of the US-led alliance of war on terror, its relations with the United States are currently at a low level.

The current position of Russia, China and the United States, particularly after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021 appears to be shaping a new multi-polar world order. In this phase of transition, the countries of the region have been readjusting their alignments keeping in view of their respective national interests. Pakistan too has been watching its own national interests in the backdrop of the closeness between the United States and India.

### **5.1. What is a great power?**

The dictionary meanings of the term "great power" denote a state that has strong military and economic position along with an ability to influence other actors in international politics. According to Oxford Reference, "a great power possesses economic, diplomatic, and military strength and influence; and its interests extend beyond its own borders (Oxford Reference)." Collins Dictionary defines great power as "a nation that has exceptional political influence, resources and military strength." According to Oxford Dictionary, a great power is "a nation or country that has considerable international influence and military strength." A superpower is different from a great power. According to Britannica, a superpower possesses economic and military might or both and has influence vastly superior to that of other states. A superpower is the state that cannot be ignored at the world stage and without its cooperation, no problem can be solved. For instance, during the Cold War, the United States and the USSR could not intervene in the world affairs without taking into account the position of each other.

In order to understand the term "great power" in the context of international relations, it is essential to have understanding of the word "power" in international politics. Power is central to international politics and scholars have explained it in different ways and presented its various forms. In social science, Max Weber has defined power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance (Warren 1992)." Weber takes power as a zero-sum game and an attribute that derives from the qualities, resources and capabilities of one subject. Generally, power has been explained as a production of effects through social relations that shape capacities of actors to determine their fate. Barnett and Duvall say power is an actor that controls another to do what that other would not do otherwise (Barnett & Duvall 2005).

In international politics, some scholars have defined power as a means to an end. There are others who use the term to denote a country's military forces. In this context, they *only* discuss a country's military capability, not the influence that it wields in the system (Holsti, 1964). Hans Morgenthau is the biggest proponent of the concept of power as the core of international politics. He believes that international politics is all struggle for power, and this struggle is driven by from the desire to dominate, which is "a constitutive element of all human associations" (Holsti 1964). Regardless of the ultimate objectives, the immediate aim of a state is to increase power, and every state is engaged to maximize its power. Hence, international politics can be perceived as a struggle to dominate other states. Morgenthau views that power is a goal of any policy or a motive of any action; however, it can also be a means to an end.

There are different definitions of the term "great power;" however, political scientists are of the view that a great power must have sufficient military and political, economic, ideological and cultural power that can influence countries across the world. Russia fulfills many points of the criteria, but not all of them fully. A strong economy and military are considered as the two key prerequisites to become a great power. The world has seen Russia's military might in the recent years; however, economy has been a weak of Russia. There is a need for diversification of the Russian economy taking it beyond oil and gas. Moscow would have to reform and modernize its economic political economic systems to have a sustained influence in the world. The United States, China, Russia and Europe are considered as great global powers.

There has been a debate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that the American power is on the decline while other great powers are rising. President Putin has many a time spoken how the US-led unipolar world is being replaced by multipolar world. Today, the United States is not as strong as it had been at the end of the Cold War. However, it does not mean that the other great powers have been on the rise and they have no weaknesses. The weaknesses of the other great powers will not disappear with the decline of the United States.

## **5.2. Russia's resurgence as a great power:**

Despite its disintegration after the end of the Cold War, Russia has always been taken as a major international player mainly because of its largest landmass in the world, natural resources and nuclear weapons position. After dissolution of the USSR, Russia came across new political, economic, societal and foreign policy challenges. In the wake of the new realities, Russia revisited its concept of national interests and readjusted its policies toward other states. The strategic

environment prevailing since the 1990s affected Russia in different ways. There have been avenues for accountability and criticism at domestic level (Lo, 2002); the policy formulation actors increased; there was pursuit of intransigent foreign policy; the Soviet totalitarianism ended and there was progress toward democratic government (Arif & Ahmed, 2018).

The current Russian President Vladimir Putin has been committed since day one to reassert the Russian status as a global great power, and he has greatly succeeded in it (Katz, 2018). Putin's predecessor Boris Yeltsin failed to suppress Chechen separatist movement in 1990s; however, Putin did it in the early 2000s (Myre, 2022). He also succeeded to take Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia in 2008 and Crimea from Ukraine in 2014; while in 2015, the Russian military intervened in the Syrian civil war and successfully supported Assad regime against its opponents. The Russian intervention not only ensured survival of Assad regime but also changed the course of the war (VOA, 2018). Russia's successes in the foreign policy domain since Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, including annexation of Crimea, war in the eastern Ukraine, involvement in the Syrian conflict and the interference in the US and European politics, helped Moscow build its image as a great power. It also indicated Russia's tendency to take risks and improve capabilities of warfare. Russia's mood since 2012 suggests that its economic constraints did not become a hurdle in the pursuit of its foreign policy objectives. The Kremlin's approach of continuing its activism on external front despite economic difficulties at domestic level and the Western sanctions manifests its commitment to an activist foreign policy.

The economic, political and security concerns of Russia had an impact on its changed foreign policy after the Cold War. The sale of arms and ammunition has been a major source of income for Russia. During the Cold War period, India, Vietnam, China, Syria, Algeria, Iran, Myanmar and Egypt were the main importers of the Russian arms and ammunition (Bashir & Naseer, 2018). However, after the end of the Cold War, market opened for these countries, which adversely affected Russia's arms sale. The withdrawal of US arm embargo on Vietnam prompted it to purchase arms from open market (Parameswaran, 2016). Myanmar also diversified its relations with the West after the US lifted sanctions against it (Bashir & Naseer, 2018). The economic crisis and low economic growth in Venezuela made it impossible for it to purchase arms from Russia. Moscow also intervened in the Syrian conflict and has been providing arms to the government forces. However, Syria is not in the position to purchase arms. Egypt's Arab Spring also had an impact on Russian economy as the latter had to contest with the United States as well

as the European countries. Iran has been moving toward China because of certain compulsions in the region.

In such a situation, Russia has been striving to find new markets for its arms and ammunition. Pakistan imports its defence equipment mainly from the United States and China. However, the shifts being witnessed in alliances in the region have prompted the two countries to cooperate mutually. Their convergence of interest on various political issues in the region has also encouraged them to enter into defence cooperation. Pakistan has found a new exporter of arms in the form of Russia while Russia has secured a new market in the form of Pakistan.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Russian leaders have been endeavoring to reintegrate the former republics with Russia (Trenin, 2017). In order to make it a reality, there must be stability in the East. Hence, Russia has been engaged with Pakistan, China and Iran for peace and stability in Afghanistan. Moscow realizes that it would require support of China and Pakistan for implementation of its any plan in South Asia. China has a strong economic and strategic position in Asia, and it also takes Russia as a partner against the US hegemony in the region.

Russia and China have gained prominent positions in the changing geopolitical environment though they face different security challenges. If Russia and China try to exploit these changes in the region for their interests, it would be challenged by the West. The Ukraine problem is a serious security threat for Russia. In view of these realities, Russia has been trying to adjust with new allies and maintain normal relations with the West for economic support, investment and modern technology.

The issues of Syria and Iraq; and their linkage with the militant groups in Central Asia pose a security threat to Russia. The past bleeding wounds of Afghanistan, the current instability in the war-torn country and the US forces' stay there are matters of security concern for Russia. Drug money is another challenge. Moscow's foreign policy is factored around all these realities.

#### **5.2.1. Moscow's foreign policy priorities:**

Foreign policy is formed in the light of domestic situation and prevailing external geopolitical and economic environment. Russia's current foreign policy reflects three main drivers that existed in the pre-Soviet era as well. The most important of them is the quest for strategic depth and securing buffers against foreign threats, leading to geographical expansion. Besides the sense of insecurity and pursuit of expansion, Moscow's foreign policy is also based on its ambition



to be recognized as a great power in the world. And the third driver is the complicated relationship with the West of rivalry and cooperation. However, Russia does not have a few key elements of the Soviet era such as rigid ideology and huge resources. At present, there is flexibility and adaptability with no ideological bindings. The modest resources are being carefully used for vested interests (Gurganus & Rumer 2019).

The current activist foreign policy of Russia in different remote parts of the world goes beyond its previously held two elements – claim to have privileged interests in its immediate neighborhood, which was seen in its war with Georgia in 2008; and its rejection of the post-Cold War security order in Europe, which was reflected in annexation of Crimea in 2014. Moscow has recently expanded its foreign policy outreach in parts of the world where it had not existed three decades ago.

The activist foreign policy, associated with Putin, was actually introduced by Yevgeny Primakov, who became foreign minister in 1996. The policy, known as Primakov Doctrine, declared that Russia would no longer follow the Western powers, particularly the United States, but would rather position itself as an independent center of power in the world, leading to creation of a multipolar world (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019). Later Sergey Lavrov, who followed Primakov as foreign minister, stated, “Russia left the path our Western partners had tried to make it follow after the breakup of the Soviet Union and embarked on a track of its own (TASS, 2014).”

In view of the weak economic position of Moscow, there was a thinking in the West that Russia would not be able to move alone in the light of Primakov Doctrine. However, with the improvement in its economic condition through utilization of massive resources at its disposal, Russia transformed from reluctant acceptance to the West’s decisions to resistance; and hence adopted an activist foreign policy with a geographic agenda. Putin’s policy, thus, is a continuation of the previous governments of decades or centuries old.

#### **5.2.1.1. Quest for strategic depth:**

Geography has been important element of the security of the Russian state since its existence. Securing the vast stretch of territory against the neighbors in the east, west and the south, who were believed to be hostile, has been a challenge for all the rulers. In order to secure the territory, more territory was acquired, which was to be secured from the external threats. In this regard, historian Stephen Kotkin says;

“Whatever the original causes behind early Russian expansionism – much of which was unplanned – many in the country’s political class came to believe over time that only further expansion could secure the earlier acquisitions. Russian security has thus traditionally been partly predicated on moving outward, in the name of preempting external attack (Kotkin, 2016).”

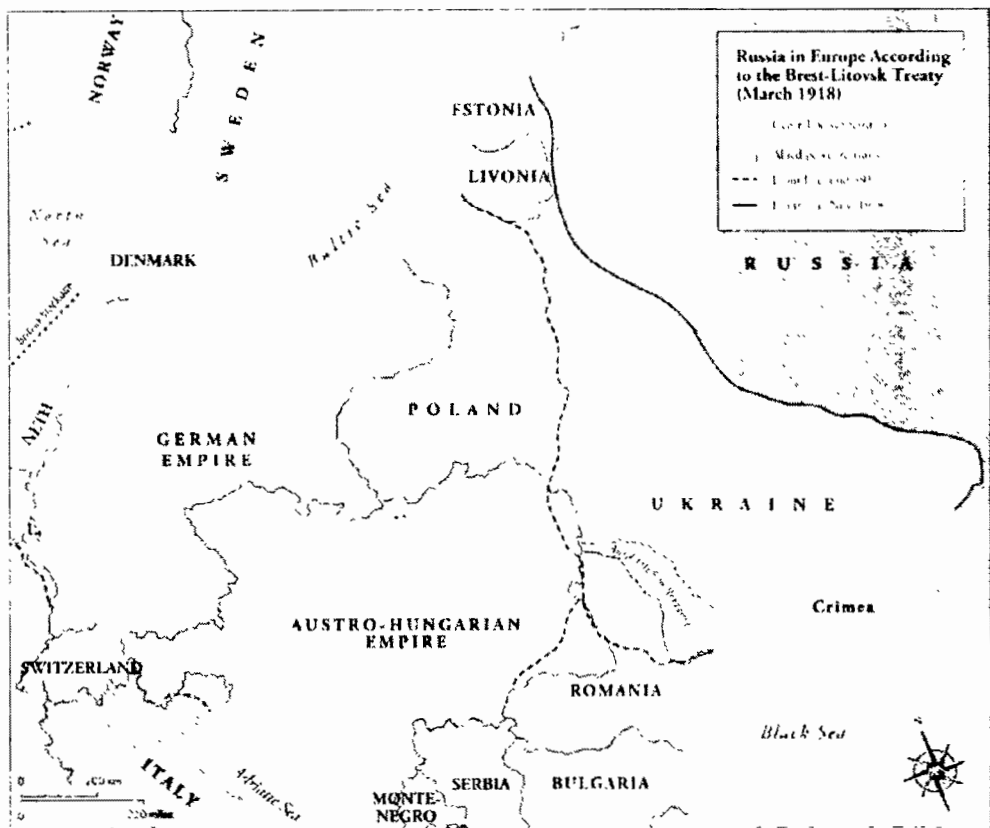
· The loss of territory in 1917 revolution and the 1918 Brest-Litovsk Treaty and later in dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 created a deep sense of insecurity among the Russian rulers, who made a quest to regain strategic depth; and this remained the key task after recovery from the revolution, civil war and after the 1990s collapse. President Putin, who has been proactively pursuing the policy of restoration of the past glory of Russia, has intervened in Syria and fought wars with Georgia and Ukraine. The country, already struggling to recover and rebuild the national economy, had to face Western sanctions in reaction to the war in Ukraine. The following maps show loss of Russian territories in different times.

Map 1: Russia in Europe in 1914



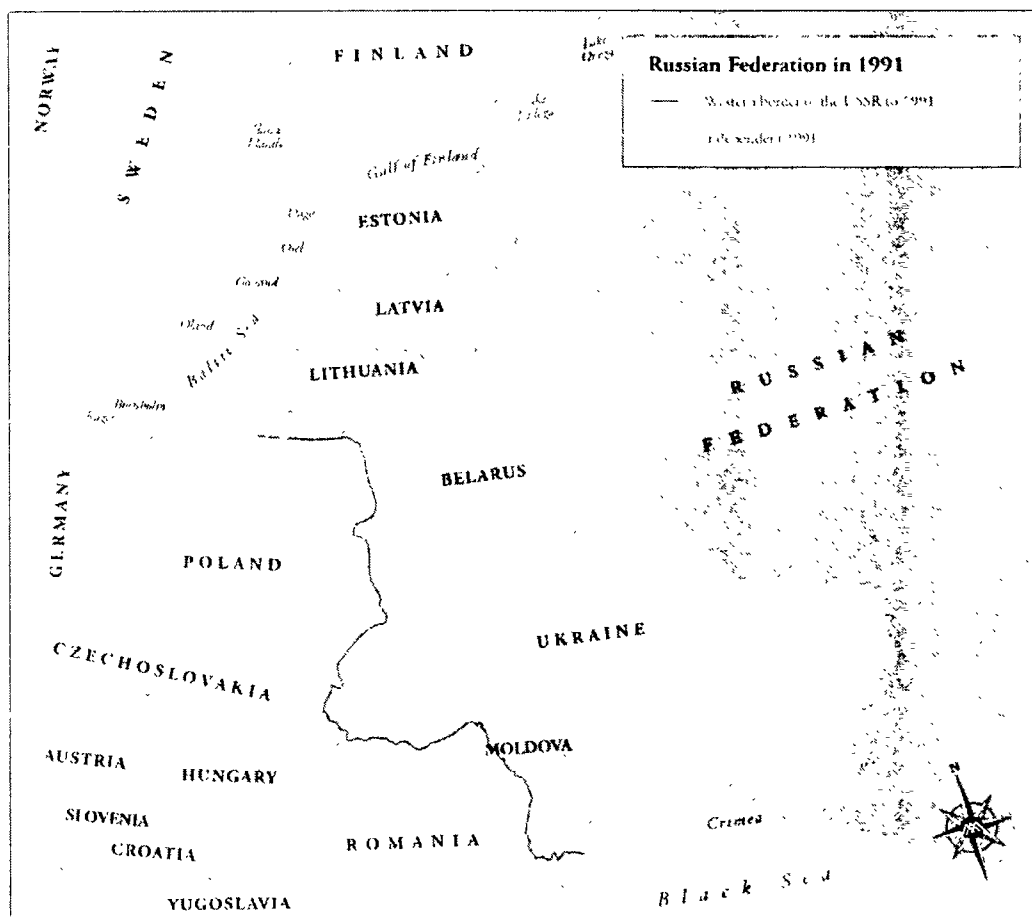
Source: The Map Archive, <https://www.themaparchive.com>

**Map 2: Russia in Europe According to the Brest-Litovsk Treaty (March 1918)**



Source: The Map Archive, <https://www.themaparchive.com>

### Map 3: Russian Federation in 1991



Source: The Map Archive, <https://www.themaparchive.com>

#### 5.2.1.2. Recognition as a great power:

Although Russia still keeps much of the Soviet military arsenal, it has lost a large part of the territory of the former Soviet Union. The country's economy is weak; however, its foreign policy successes and the achievements in establishing influence in different parts of the world are impressive.

Russia's geographic expansion is aimed at attaining recognition as a great global power. This recognition is also taken as legitimacy to the territorial conquests. The official Foreign Policy Concept of 1993 describes a foreign policy priority "furthering integration of the Commonwealth

of Independent States” and ensuring Russia’s role as a great global power (Gurganus & Rumer, 2019).

#### **5.2.1.3. Relationship with the West:**

During the Soviet era, there had been an ideological competition between Soviet Communism and democratic capitalism. However, capitalist ideas have replaced Communism. After the Soviet collapse of 1991, Russia struggled for a decade to redefine its relations with the West. Many among the people close to President Yeltsin hoped that Russia would reset relations with the West on the basis of equality and cooperation. They were of the view that Russia would have its own policies and a voice in the global policies (Berls, 2021). Unfortunately, none of the two sides was able to develop a new relationship. The developments such as NATO expansion, bombing of Serbia, support for independent Kosovo and change of regime in Iraq and Libya convinced Moscow that the West had been following the policies aimed at threatening Russian sovereignty. The decade of 1990s proved to be period of disillusionments. President Putin was also initially willing to develop a new relationship with the West, but this thinking was short-lived and he decided to adopt a new path.

In its latest National Security Strategy issued in December 2015, Russia has described the United States and its NATO allies as its main threat. It emphasizes on building Russia’s military might to prevent the West’s designs toward Russia. Moscow has also repeatedly accused that the West is trying to dominate the world order, depriving Moscow of its due place in the international arena (RNSS, 2015).

Russia’s relations with the West had been on the decline; however, a sharp deterioration occurred after Russia’s annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. In 2016, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov wrote that Russia and Europe could not have stable relationship mainly because Europe did not let Russia be Russia and its assertion that Russia must follow the European norms, which was not acceptable to Russian leaders (Lavrov, 2016). The cyber warfare increased the confrontation between the two sides. Russia’s attack on the US democratic system through its interference in the 2016 American elections and similar attacks in some other European countries are clear examples of the Russian offensive; however, it goes beyond interference in elections.

#### **5.2.1.4. Pursuit of multipolarity:**

At present, Russia has a clear vision about its foreign policy – to resist the US domination, cooperate with China to end the US hegemony, become a major power and have influence in its

backyard – Central Asia while doing energy and infrastructure projects in South and Central Asia (Farwa 2019). Regaining of the lost status and end to the unipolar world have been the key features of Russia's foreign policy. Thus, Moscow, along with Beijing, promotes multipolarity.

The key foreign policy objectives include ensuring its sovereignty and security; maintaining its influence in the neighborhood; localizing the conflicts that can hit it; undermining the US influence; working with regional countries for building a multipolar world and fostering economic growth. Under the broader objective of limiting the US influence in South Asia, Moscow aims to reduce America's leverage in the Afghan peace process. It also desires to find alternative markets for the Russian oil and gas (Kuchins & Bryndza, 2008).

Moscow's foreign policy is focused to create a multi-polar world against the US-led unipolar world. This has been manifested in President Putin's speech in Munich in 2007, war with Georgia in 2008, the Syrian crisis, the Crimean annexation and the deepening strategic ties with China (Korolev, 2015).

Russia directly intervened in Syria in 2015 on behalf of President Bashar al-Assad and became the main military actor in the Syrian war. On the other hand, the United States is involved through a coalition, not unilaterally. Hence, Russia got a free hand to act in Syria, sending across a message that it is a power to be recognized. President's Putin's policy toward Crimea is considered as a beginning of multi-polarity (Luhn, 2015).

Russia has been pursuing policies to challenge the US power and assert itself globally. Russia's policy toward China has gone through a change with a view to jointly compete with the United States. Moscow's growing ties with the West, China and Iran are aimed at countering the US influence in Russia's near abroad. In order to enhance economic ties and expand its sphere of influence, Russia got involved in the Middle East and Asia.

#### **5.2.1.5. Russia's tilt towards East:**

In 2010, Putin unveiled "Turn to the East" policy to expand ties with the Asian states in diverse fields, including economy, politics and military. This reorientation is not a result of any sudden change in the Russian policy, but it was initially proposed in 1995 by the then Defence Minister Pavel Grachev, who stated that NATO's eastward encroachment would result in Russia's expansion toward the East for having new allies (Arif & Ahmed, 2018). This policy shift is caused by Moscow's desire to regain its lost status; great powers' interest in this region; and Russia's

approach to project its influence beyond its borders. Russians believe that the policy would help them secure their national interests by exploring new markets in Asia.

Geographically, Russia is a Eurasian country. However, the active participation of Russia in the political affairs of the Pacific region makes it Euro-Pacific power. Russia, a resource-rich country, has the largest gas reserves. Oil and gas largely contribute to its exports. Several Asian countries, including India, Japan, China and South Korea import oil, gas and defence equipment from Russia; and Moscow intends to enhance its trade relations with the Asia-Pacific region. Russia is also a major arms exporter to China, and it is expanding arms sale to Indonesia, Vietnam and Malaysia (Arif & Ahmed, 2018).

After the Soviet disintegration, Russia and the West had an understanding that they would move closer to each other respecting each other's interests and making mutually acceptable compromises. However, only Russia had to make concessions in the end. When the West tried to expand the NATO toward the east and reached near the Russian border, Ukraine, Moscow decided to resist their expansionism (Lukin, 2016). The year 2014 carries special significance in the Russian foreign policy. The Ukrainian crisis made clear Russia's policy not to follow the West. This was a marked turn in the Russian foreign policy since 1991.

Addressing a news conference on December 18, 2014, President Putin attributed the change in the Russian foreign policy to the global trend of turning toward the east. He said:

"This stems from the global economic processes, because the East – that is, the Asia-Pacific Region – shows faster growth than the rest of the world. New opportunities open up. As for energy, the demand for resources is racing in leaps and bounds in China, India as well as in Japan and South Korea. Everything is developing faster there than in other places (Kremlin, 2014)."

Until 2014, Russia had mainly been engaged in trade ties in the West and the former Soviet states. However, afterwards, it started looking toward the East and found China as a major energy market as well as a power in Asia's politics. It was direly needed in the wake of the economic sanctions faced by Russia's main oil and gas companies Gazprom and Rosneft, which were looking for new markets. Since President Putin has been in office in 2012, his policies have largely been China center in Asia with a view to reduce Moscow's dependence on the West. However, Russia has been engaged with other Asian countries as well to avoid the perception of being a China-dependent state.



### **5.2.2. Russia under Putin:**

Vladimir Putin, who has been in power for two decades as president or prime minister, was legally bound to step down as president at the end of his second consecutive term in 2024. However, on April 5, 2021, Putin signed a law allowing him to stay in power till 2036. The amendments approved to the Russian constitution in July 2020 through a nationwide vote allowed him to rule the country for two more six-year terms. Putin has already served as president in two consecutive terms of 2000-2004 and 2004-2008. He served as prime minister from 1999 to 2000 and again from 2008 to 2012; and was then reelected as president in 2012 and 2018.

The current foreign policy of Russia has an impact of Putin's personality. Since President Putin has been in power, Russia has been reviving and making gains in the international political system. It is rising as a balancing force by influencing the immediate as well as distant regions of interest. Like any leader, Putin receives information and takes advice from different sources; and then decides on his own. He is the controller of the policy. Putin's words prevail over any decision by the government machinery. He keeps important strategic decisions close to his chest; however, like manager of senior position, he devolves powers to others. For several times, he has taken decisions going against the institutional advices (Lynch, 2011). For instance, Putin supported the US war on terror and allowed it to establish bases in post-Soviet Central Asia despite opposition by the national security institutions.

The policies being followed by Putin have greatly contributed to bringing Russia into the global power politics. Putin's actions in Georgia and Crimea, establishing influence in the neighborhood, revision of agreements of 1990s with the West, involvement in Syria and constant improvement in relations with China have brought Russia back into the great game (Lo, 2008). Russia has the central military role and complete freedom in Syria; while on the other hand, the United States operates through a coalition. With this full-fledged involvement in Syria, Russia has sent across a message that Moscow is a force that needs to be reckoned with.

### **5.2.3. Russia's Economy:**

Boris Yeltsin was elected as the first president of the Russian Federation in June 1991 – six months before official dissolution of the former Soviet Union. Soon after his election, he quit Communist Party and started a reform program, envisaging transformation of the Soviet model of a centrally planned economy to market economy. In 1994, the Russian economy was privatized by 70 percent (Berls, 2021), which was a major change because an important feature of the Soviet

system had been the state ownership of all sectors of economy. By the end of 1990s, the Yeltsin government failed to manage the economy. When the oil prices fell during the Asian economic crisis in 1997, the Russian government defaulted. One year later, Yeltsin resigned; and Putin, the then Prime Minister, became president of Russia in 1999.

Under President Putin, Russia's economy witnessed two different periods. The economy grew at a fast pace of seven percent a year till 2008 (Aslund, 2020). According to noted Russian economist Sergey Guriyev, "in the ten years from 1999 to 2008, Russian GDP grew by 94 percent and per capita GDP doubled. This is the most outstanding decade in modern Russian economic history (Berls, 2021)." Since 2009, Russia's economy has been stagnant with an average growth of one percent in a year (Aslund, 2020).

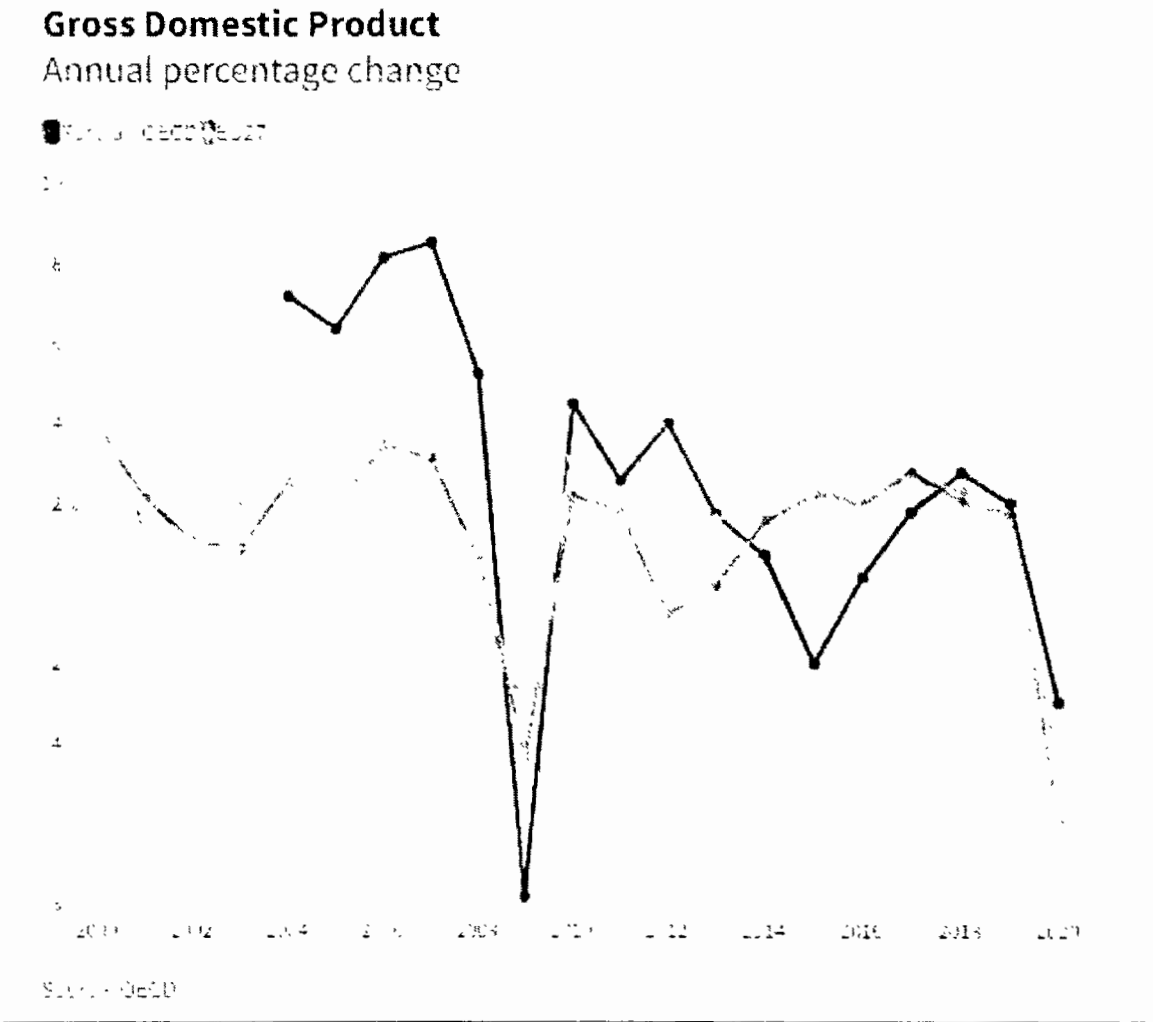
On completion of his two consecutive terms as president, Putin stepped down in May 2008 in accordance with the constitutional provision. Dmitry Medvedev became president; however, Putin, as prime minister, enjoyed the real power behind the scene. Medvedev, known as liberal reformer, tried to shift the country's reliance on oil and gas toward technology. However, the 2008 global economic crisis wiped out the reforms programs; and Russia went into the damage control mode. In 2012, Putin again became president of Russia; and Medvedev assumed the office of the prime minister. There had been talk of reforms, but nothing could be done practically and the economy was on the decline. According to Russian economist Sergey Guriyev, Russia's economy grew at the average rate of two percent from 2010 to 2019. This had been a period of stagnation and there was least recovery.

The year 2014 was another critical period for Russia when the country had to face sanctions because of annexing Crimea. The West's economic sanctions led Russia to another difficult situation. During the same year, oil prices also fell. Putin was not much interested in investment and economic growth, and he only focused on economic stability. In 2018, Putin started his fourth term in the office of president with less economic ambitions than in 2012 (Aslund, 2020). The decrease in oil prices during the Covid-19 aggravated the Russian economic situation. The World Bank country review of Russia shows the last 2020 GDP 1486.9 billion dollars.

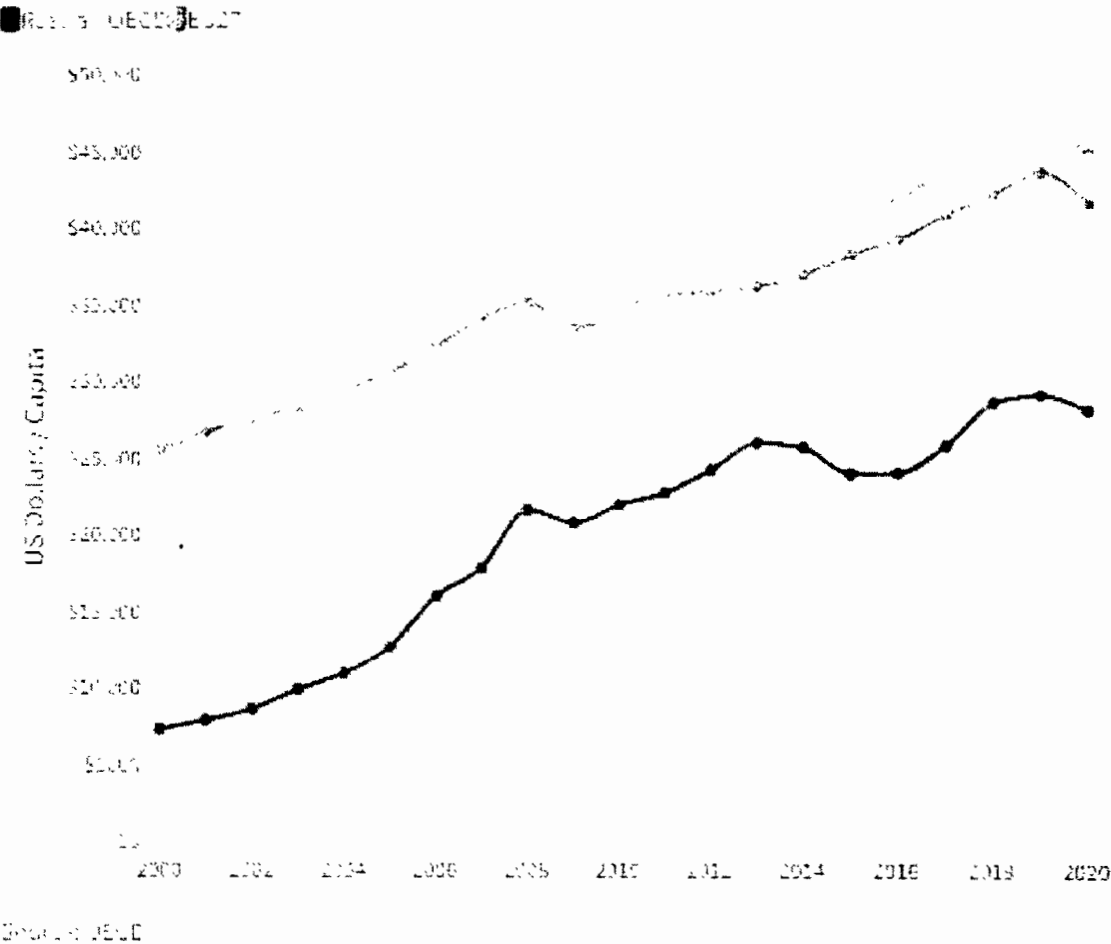
Despite all these facts, no one can deny that President Putin has been successful to bring Russia on the global geopolitical stage. He led the country to improve Russia's economy through foreign direct investment, promotion of industries and exploitation of the country's natural resources, particularly oil and gas. During the course, the country had to face a lot of difficulties,

such as sanctions by the West after the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and the country’s interference in the US election in 2016. The other unfortunate developments that hit the Russian economy and for which Russia was not responsible included the 2008 financial crisis, the oil price crash in 2014, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The economic data of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, spreading over two decades of Putin in power gives a picture of the country’s growth rate, GDP per capita, employment situation and the inflation rate.



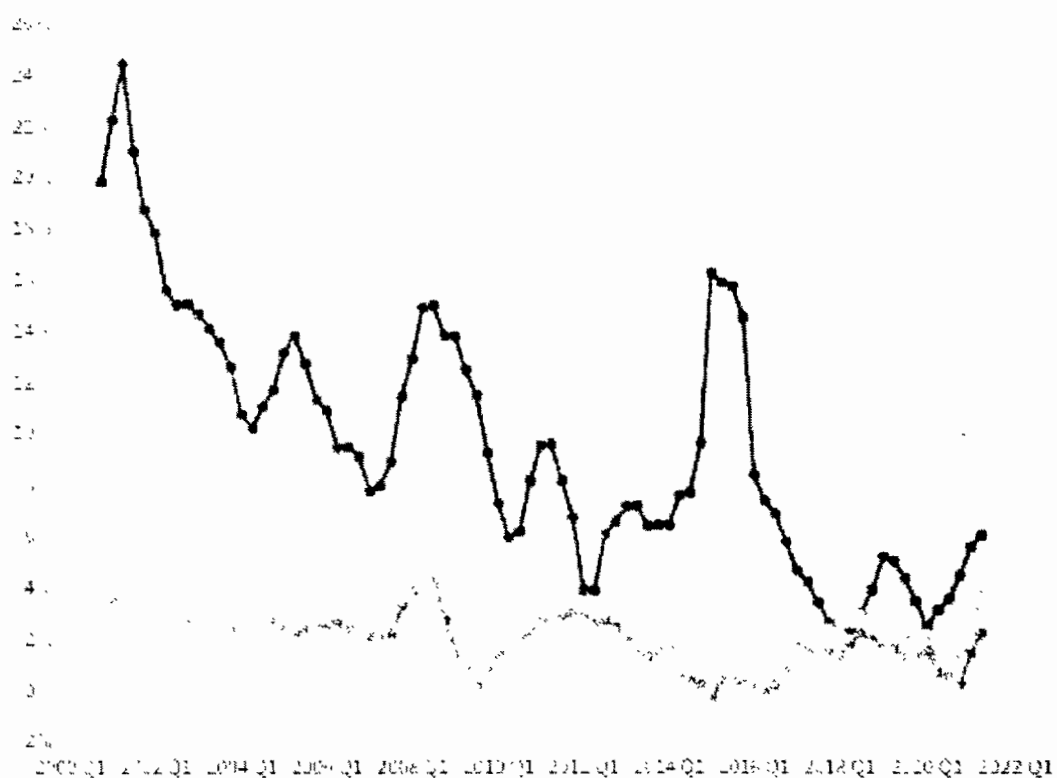
# GDP per capita 2000-2020 (US Dollars)



## Inflation (CPI)

Total, Annual growth rate (%)

■ Russia 1992-2022

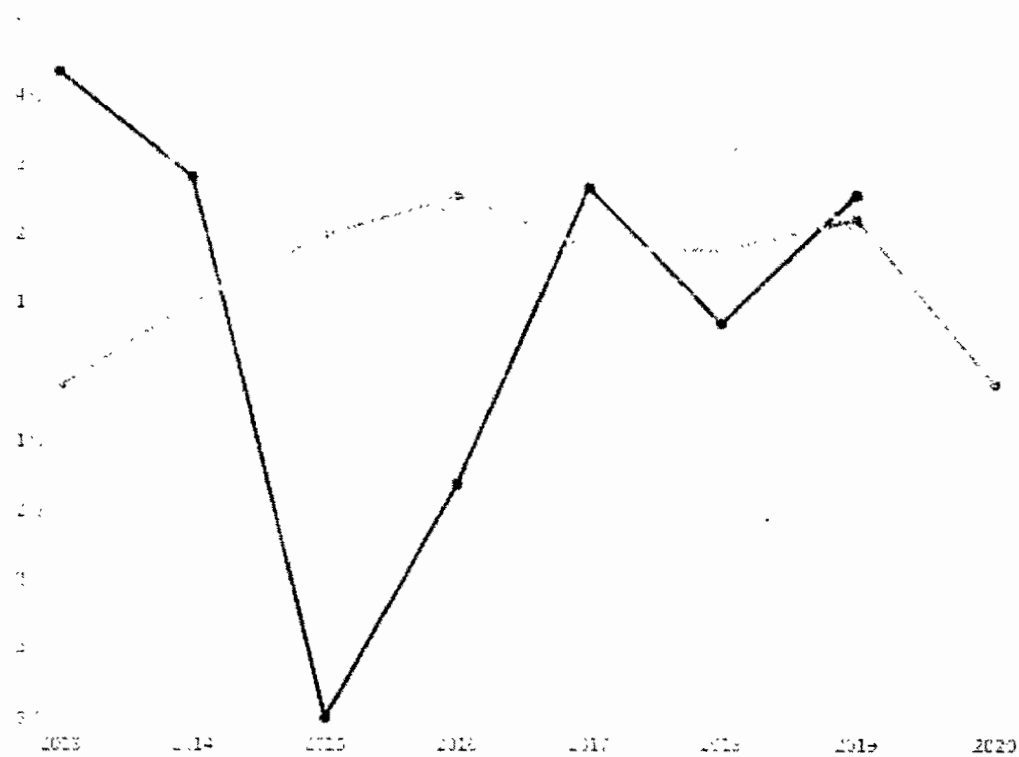


Source: Rosstat

## Household disposable income

Net, Annual growth rate (%)

● Russia ● EU27



SOURCE: OECD

Russia, being the 11<sup>th</sup> largest economy of the world by GDP, has no comparison with the United States that still enjoys the top most position with \$22.9 trillion economy. However, Russia has been endeavoring to establish economic influence in different countries through its natural resources and arms exports. These economic tools have helped Russia carry its diplomatic and military activities in those areas. Turkey mainly imports oil and gas from Russia and is also interested in the Russian weapons systems. The following chart, however, reflects a comparison of Russia's economy with other major world powers.

**Comparison of Russian economy with other major powers:**

| Rank | Country | GDP<br>(\$T) | % of Global GDP |
|------|---------|--------------|-----------------|
| 1    | U.S.    | \$22.9       | 24.4%           |
| 2    | China   | \$16.9       | 17.9%           |
| 3    | Japan   | \$5.1        | 5.4%            |
| 4    | Germany | \$4.2        | 4.5%            |
| 5    | UK      | \$3.1        | 3.3%            |
| 6    | India   | \$2.9        | 3.1%            |
| 7    | France  | \$2.9        | 3.1%            |
| 8    | Italy   | \$2.1        | 2.3%            |
| 9    | Canada  | \$2.0        | 2.1%            |
| 10   | Korea   | \$1.8        | 1.9%            |
| 11   | Russia  | \$1.6        | 1.7%            |

*2020 GDP (latest available) used where IMF estimates for 2021 were unavailable.<https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualizing-the-94-trillion-world-economy-in-one-chart/>*

**5.2.4. Russia’s military power:**

In the 1990s following the Soviet collapse, the Russian Armed Forces had faced an extreme decline in their budget, combat readiness and professional competence. While the country had been suffering from severe economic problems, it drastically reduced military expenditures. It was not clear what place the Russian Armed Forces are going to have in the world. The image of the

forces was also extremely poor (Kasapoglu & Ulgen, 2021). The first Chechen war in 1990s showed the difficulties being faced by the Russian armed forces. The forces, however, performed better in the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. Although Russia achieved its strategic goals in the conflict, shortfalls in the armed forces also surfaced. Resultantly, in October 2008, Russian Defence Minister Anatoly Serdyukov announced a programme to reform, upgrade and modernize the armed forces. The 2010-20 State Armament Programme and the New Look Reform programme envisaged various measures to enhance capability of the armed forces.

## **Main objectives of the 'New Look' reform programme**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- Reduce military personnel from 1.35 million to 1m
- Disband cadre units and transition to a combat-ready army
- Halve the number of officers and increase the number of soldiers and sergeants
- Extensive structural reform:
  - Reduce the six military districts to four
  - Military districts to transform into Joint Strategic Commands
  - Transform armies, divisions and regiments into a unified brigade structure
  - Reorganise the Air Force and Air Defence forces, moving to 'Air Bases' for the Air Force (and transitioning the fleet into this structure) and Aerospace Defence Brigades for the Air Defence forces.
- Merge 65 military higher-education institutions into ten combined universities
- Outsource rear support functions to civilian organisations, including equipment repair and catering
- Increase purchases of military equipment in order to replace obsolete hardware
- Increase the frequency and intensity of combat training
- Dispose of excess Ministry of Defence property and reduce the stockpile of surplus ammunition.

Source: IISS

Under the New Look reform programme, consistent investment and structural changes over a decade have contributed to achieving enhanced level of professional capabilities of the Russian armed forces. Today, the Russian armed forces are at the best of their level since the Soviet collapse with modern equipment and professional expertise. The capable conventional armed forces are ever ready to be fielded. The annexation of Crimea, involvement in eastern Ukraine and intervention in Syria demonstrate the enhanced level of confidence of the Russian Armed Forces. The reform program, launched after Russia's war with Georgia, has led to this improvement in the defence capability. The International Institute for Strategic Studies strategic dossier "Russia's Military Modernization: An Assessment" has given the following assessments of the reform programme (Barrie & Hackett, 2020).



- Russian leaders have well-equipped conventional armed forces
- Moscow has credible military tool to pursue foreign policy objectives
- Nuclear forces continue to be ultimate security guarantor of Russia
- The ground forces have higher readiness than before with better equipment
- Navy's firepower has been extended with widespread introduction of cruise missiles
- Aerospace Forces' capability enhanced with upgraded combat aircraft

Today, Russia is the second strongest military power in the world after the United States. There is a huge difference between the defence spending of the two countries; however, military equipment, nuclear warheads and other indicators take Russia close to the United States. While Russia has adopted aggressive posture in Ukraine and Syria, tension has spiked between the two powers during the past couple of years. Although Russia has gained the status of a world power owing to the size and power of its armed forces, the United States still maintains the top position with the additional strength of its military alliances. A brief comparison of the two military powers has been presented in the following tables, based on the "Military Balance 2021 report" of the International Institute for Strategic Studies.

**Comparison between US and Russia military strength:**

| <b>Indicator</b>                             | <b>Russia</b> | <b>US</b> |
|--|---------------|-----------|
| Defence Budget                               | \$60.6bn      | \$738bn   |
| Active Personnel                             | 900,000       | 1,388,100 |
| Reserve Personnel                            | 2,000,000     | 844,950   |
| Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Launchers | 336           | 400       |

**Air Power:**

| <b>Equipment</b>   | <b>Russia</b>   | <b>US</b> |
|--|-----------------|-----------|
| Bomber Aircraft  | 137             | 157       |
| Fighter And Ground Attack Aircraft                         | 1,021           | 3,318     |
| Attack Helicopters   | 402             | 867       |
| Heavy Unmanned Aerial Vehicles                             | Some (under 50) | 625       |
| Heavy/Medium Transport Helicopters and Tilt-Rotor Aircraft | 368             | 3,033     |
| Heavy/Medium Transport Aircraft                            | 190             | 686       |
| Tanker and Multi-Role Tanker/Transport Aircraft            | 15              | 567       |

|   |   |     |
|---|---|-----|
| Airborne Early-Warning And Control Aircraft | 9 | 125 |
|---|---|-----|

#### **Land Power:**

| Equipment                           | Russia | US    |
|-------------------------------------|--------|-------|
| Armoured Infantry Fighting Vehicles | 6,450  | 3,419 |
| Main Battle Tanks                   | 3,330  | 2,509 |
| Artillery                           | 5,689  | 6,941 |

#### **Sea Power:**

| Equipment                                    | Russia | US  |
|--|--------|-----|
| Ballistic-Missile Nuclear-Powered Submarines | 11     | 14  |
| Attack/Guided Missile Submarines             | 38     | 54  |
| Aircraft Carriers                            | 1      | 11  |
| Cruisers, Destroyers and Frigates            | 30     | 113 |
| Principal Amphibious Ships                   | 5      | 32  |

#### **Source: IISS**

While conventional weapons and well-trained professional armed forces contribute to making Russia the second biggest military power of the world, the strategic nuclear arsenal continues to be the guarantor of its security. In nuclear arsenal as well, Russia is the next to the United States. A table of the nuclear warheads being reproduced hereunder shows that Russia possesses more nuclear warheads than that of the United States; however, it has deployed less than the United States has done.

#### **World nuclear forces, January 2021**

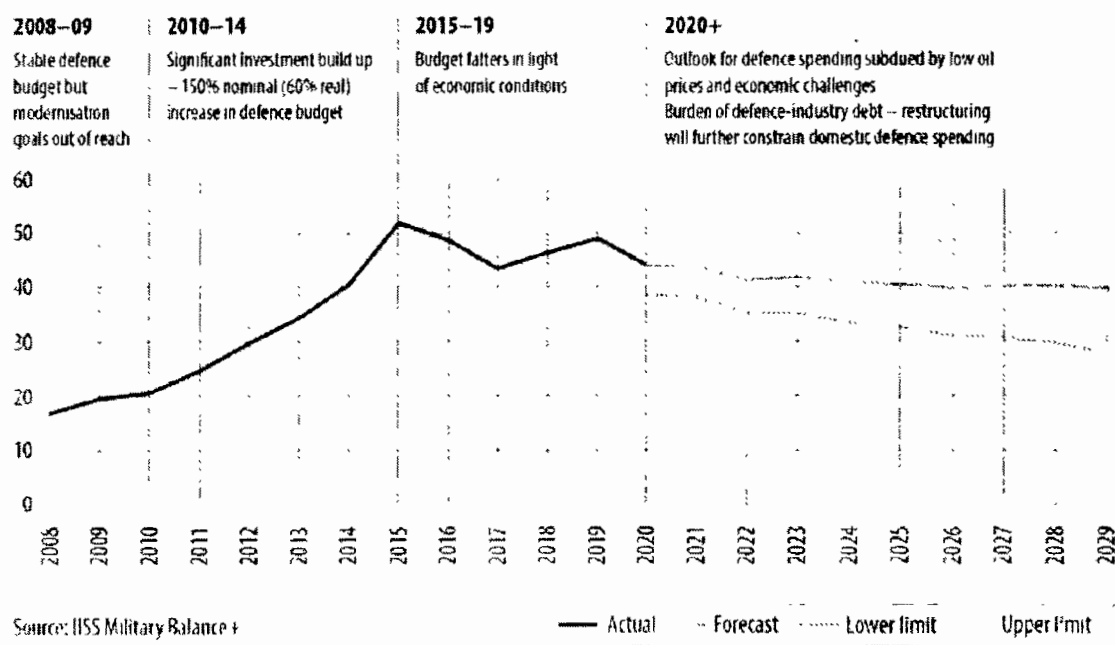
| Country  | Deployed warheads* | Other warheads** | Total 2021 | Total 2020 |
|----------|--------------------|------------------|------------|------------|
| USA      | 1 800              | 3 750            | 5 550      | 5 800      |
| Russia   | 1 625              | 4 630            | 6 255      | 6 375      |
| UK***    | 120                | 105              | 225        | 215        |
| France   | 280                | 10               | 290        | 290        |
| China    |                    | 350              | 350        | 320        |
| India    |                    | 156              | 156        | 150        |
| Pakistan |                    | 165              | 165        | 160        |

|                 |       |         |         |         |
|-----------------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| Israel          |       | 90      | 90      | 90      |
| North Korea**** | ...   | [40–50] | [40–50] | [30–40] |
| Total           | 3 825 | 9 255   | 13 080  | 13 400  |

Source: SIPRI Yearbook 2021.

The IISS dossier has noted success of the reform programme in respect of modernization of the Russian military hardware, it has underlined the need for its upgradation. Besides, Russia will have to introduce new types of the equipment. And for all this, economy will be the main determinant.

Russian defence budget, 2008–29 (current US\$ billions)



### 5.2.5. Russia’s influence in immediate and distant neighborhood:

Like the United States and China, Russia has been expanding its influence in different parts of the world by supporting regimes like that of President Assad in Syria, providing investment for infrastructure projects such as in Europe and offering military or economic support like Venezuela.

Russia's efforts for influence through investment, intervention or annexation pose a challenge to the United States. While economic dominance appears to be a priority area of competition between the United States and China, Russia has been endeavoring to set its role on the geopolitical stage of the world. To be present at the global world stage and defend its backyard seem to be important objectives of Russia to overcome the humiliation of Soviet collapse and the subsequent emergence of the United States as the sole super power.

In his annual news conference in December 2018, President Putin announced that the US global influence has come to an end. He said the US monopoly of a unipolar world has almost disappeared, providing Russia an opportunity to fill this gap (Kremlin, 2018). Since Russia has come out of the shock of the Soviet Union collapse, it has been pursuing a key foreign policy and national security objective to resist the United States and position itself as a great power in the world. Although Moscow faces economic challenges, it has grown and become a military power to have influence in different parts of the world. The annexation of Crimea, war with Ukraine and intervention in Syria have demonstrated Russia's aggressive foreign policy posture aimed at establishing its influence in the world. Moscow's attempts to build relations with other countries and have influence in Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and other parts of the world seem to be important elements of the Russian foreign policy.

Russia has expanded its presence in Africa under the Putin administration. While China has been investing in infrastructure projects in the continent, Russia has been trying to establish its influence by building ties with political and military elites through provision of arms and signing of agreements for military cooperation. In 2021, Russia increased its involvement in the civil war in Libya. Moscow is also keen to enhance trade with the African countries and have access to the mineral resources in the continent. In October 2019, Putin hosted a summit of over 40 African heads of state in Sochi. Ahead of the summit, Putin had told TASS news agency that Western countries resorted to blackmailing and intimidating African governments, but Russia would respect their sovereignty and also provide them help without any conditions. During the summit, Putin stated that Russia's trade with Africa amounted to \$20 billion in 2018, getting doubled in the past five years; however, it aimed to further increase it (Ellyatt, 2020).

In Latin America, Russia has longstanding relations with several countries that have socialist or communist regimes, including Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba. The relationship with these nations got developed through Moscow's diplomatic support, sale of arms and investment in

energy. Russia has also improved its ties with the regional powers, including Argentina, Mexico and Brazil. Russia has been backing Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro regime and it also helped to foil the US-backed coup led by opposition leader Juan Guaido in 2019. Russia is a geopolitical ally of Venezuela with strong bilateral relations in energy and defense.

Russia has established itself as an influential power in the Middle East. During the last decade, it has established strong relations with Syria as well as Saudi Arabia, which is the most powerful country of the region. It is a unique phenomenon in the international politics that Russia has good ties with Saudi Arabia as well as its arch rival Iran. The US reimposition of sanctions against Iran after its withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal has been repeatedly criticized by Moscow. Russia's military presence in Syria and support to President Assad against the rebel forces that want to remove the government is seen as a way to expand and maintain its influence. Russia seeks to fill the vacuum left by the United States and also capitalize on the anti-US sentiments for the policies such as relocation of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, presenting itself as an alternative power.

Russia's relations with the European countries are complicated. While it appears exploiting divisions within the EU by backing right-wing movements, it also carries out joint infrastructure projects like Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline with Germany. Russia's treatment with Ukraine – annexation of Crimea and support to the uprising in east Ukraine – is the most important issue for Europe. The Baltic states, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, have an apprehension that Russia could provoke military confrontation or attack them as a sizeable number of ethnic Russians have been living in those states since the Soviet collapse. The countries in the Caucasus – Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia – have a tense relationship with Russia. And following the Russia-Georgia war in 2008, the relationship between Russia and Georgia also remains strained.

Afghanistan, a country at the crossroads of Central and South Asia, is another state about which Russia has been actively engaged diplomatically particularly through the Troika Plus and Moscow Format forums. Moscow had participated in the negotiations for a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul on August 15, 2021, Russia was not alarmed as was seen on part of the United States and European countries. Russian diplomats described the Taliban as “normal guys” and stated that the Kabul was safer than before when the US forces had been present there. President Putin's special envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov had even stated that the Taliban were easier to talk with than the previous “puppet government” of former President

Ashraf Ghani. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov paid a two-day visit to Islamabad on April 6, 2021 and held talks with the Pakistan leadership on the Afghan situation. The two sides reaffirmed commitment to continue support for peace in Afghanistan. Russia has been intensifying efforts to expand diplomatic and political clout in Afghanistan.

### **5.3. Changing regional dynamics:**

In international politics, there is no permanent friend or foe, but interests drive states' policies. Policies do undergo change with the passage of time with the sole aim of protecting national interests. India, which had been a traditional ally of the former Soviet Union, is today a strategic partner of the United States. The US-India ties are getting stronger with every passing day. Pakistan has long been an ally of the United States for one reason or the other such as containment of the former Soviet Union, end to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 1990s and elimination of terrorism. For the historical role Pakistan had played during the Cold War and the first Afghan war, there had been an extreme level of distrust between Moscow and Islamabad. Except for the efforts for enhancement of cooperation in economy, trade and education from 1947 to 1950 and from 1965 to 1969, the two countries had unfriendly relations for having different viewpoints on the regional and international issues (Khan, 2019). However, two decades down the lane, particularly since 2010, improvement is being seen in the Pakistan-Russia relations.

In 1998, Russian Prime Minister Primakov proposed that Russia, China and India should form a strategic triangle in opposition to the United States, but it could not be materialized because of India. New Delhi had doubts about cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. The US-India nuclear pact and the growing strategic relations put at risk Russia's hold on India's weapon market. This made Russia bring a change in its foreign policy. Putin paid several visits to India, but he could not draft India away from strategic partnership with the United States. In this scenario, Russia started building relations with Pakistan (Khan, 2019).

Today, the foremost priority of Washington in this part of the world seems to be containment of China; and for this key foreign policy objective, India is being supported and strengthened. China, an important factor for geopolitical changes and a trusted friend of Pakistan, has been making major investments in Pakistan specifically under the CPEC project, a part of China's Belt and Road initiative. The Moscow-Beijing relationship is also strengthening day by day. The instability of Afghanistan is yet another factor for changing regional dynamics. With the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan after two decades of long war with the Taliban and

the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, Russia has been showing keen interest to remain engaged as well as involved in the efforts for peace in the war-torn country. All these phenomena are linked with each other. The improvement in the Moscow-Islamabad relationship can hardly be delinked with the growing US-India ties. Likewise, the policies of the end to the US role as the sole super power, multi-polarity, and lessening of the US influence in the region provide a context to the improving Moscow-Beijing relationship.

### **5.3.1. India-US Strategic Partnership:**

During the Cold War, Pakistan had been aligned to the United States whereas India had been on the side of the Soviet Union. Following the Soviet collapse, the United States started to change its policies toward the Asia-Pacific and South Asia. China's emergence as a great power in the world was considered as threat to the US hegemony and a threat to the status quo. In the wake of the India-China border disputes, India was taken as a natural partner with whom the United States could develop its relations. Thus, the United States has been strengthening its ties with India – a major regional power and an arch-rival of China. The US-India nexus is trying to pose a challenge to the growing Chinese influence.

The United States views India has a great democracy in South Asia, and it wants to use it to contain the expanding Chinese influence. Began in 1990s, the US-India relationship has been solidifying for two decades, and has now transformed into a strategic partnership. The two countries have signed four foundational agreements to enhance bilateral military cooperation. They are: General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in 2002, Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 and the latest one Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020 (Gillani, 2021). In 2016, the United States declared India as a major defence partner; and in 2018, India was elevated to Strategic Trade Authorization tier 1 status. The bilateral defense trade has been expanding, and it increased from near zero in 2008 to over \$20 in 2020 (Department of State, 2021).

The US Department of State has described the deepening strategic partnership between the two countries as:

“The United States and India have a strong strategic partnership founded on shared values and a commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region. The United States supports India's emergence as a leading global power and vital partner in efforts to ensure that the

Indo-Pacific is a region of peace, stability, and growing prosperity and economic inclusion. (Department of State, 2021)”

The two countries economic and trade ties are also ever strengthening; and in 2019, the bilateral trade in goods and services reached \$149 billion (Department of State, 2021). Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the United States on September 24, 2021. During the meeting, President Joe Biden and Modi affirmed “a clear vision that will guide the US-India relationship forward: building a strategic partnership and working together with regional groups, including ASEAN and Quad members, to promote shared interests in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond (The White House, 2021).”

There are certain factors that have contributed to this bilateral cooperation over the last two decades. They include the rise of China and the US efforts to counterbalance China; burgeoning middle class of India that has made it a lucrative market for US exports; India, having big infrastructure and cheap labor provides a lucrative alternative destination for US firms in the wake of US-China trade war and the US desire that China does not fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan after its withdrawal from the war-torn country.

#### **5.3.2. Changing India-Russia Ties:**

India and Russia enjoy long traditional bilateral partnership. Russia’s National Security Strategy, in its edition of July 2021, has described the bilateral relationship as “special privileged strategic partnership.” While Pakistan had joined the Western bloc during the Cold War, India went to the Soviet camp. Moscow fully supported India against Pakistan vis a vis the Kashmir issue, the wars and other important international issues. Even after the Soviet collapse, Russia had been India’s main international political partner. Former US Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama began to transform the US relationship with India (Mohan, 2021). Most of the Indians take Russia as their proven friend. However, the developments taking place in the region for a couple of years are making an attempt on India-Russia relations. India’s growing ties with the United States and the strengthening Russia-China partnership seem to have left an impact on New Delhi’s ties with Moscow. Russia that has been facing isolation by the West considers China as its strategic partner; whereas, for India, China is the biggest security threat as stated by late Indian Chief of Defence Staff General Bipin Rawat on November 13, 2021.

Russia is still one of India’s largest arms suppliers. However, the volume of the arms has decreased since 2016. According to SIPRI report titled Trends in International Arms Transfer, 2020,



Russia supplied 20 percent of the total global arms exports to 45 countries from 2016-20. India was the main recipient of the Russian weapons with 23 percent of the total. The report discloses that Russia's arms exports in 2016-20 were 22 percent lower than in 2011-15. The overall decrease in Russia's arms exports can be attributed to 53 percent decrease in its arms exports to India. As for economy, India trades to the tune of \$100 billion each with the United States and China whereas it still stands around \$10 billion (Trenin, 2021).

Moscow is certainly disappointed by India's growing role in QUAD. It also has a realization that a conflict between India and China will take the former to the United States. India strengthened its position in Afghanistan over the last two decades under the US patronage; however, after the US withdrawal, India too had to wind up. While Russia has been engaged with the Taliban in close coordination with Pakistan, it has sought to keep India out of Afghanistan because it does not have any influence over the Taliban. Following the increasing assertiveness by China, a major shift has been witnessed in the Indian foreign policy in the form of clearly turning to the United States and its pacific allies to balance China (Mohan, 2021).

On December 7, 2021, President Putin visited India to attend 21<sup>st</sup> India-Russia annual summit. It was disclosed during the visit that India has started receiving S-400 anti-missile defence system from Russia. Additionally, the two countries signed 28 agreements of bilateral cooperation in diverse fields and a 10-year defence cooperation pact from 2021-2030. Putin's visit is being seen as an attempt to repair the damage done to the bilateral relationship over the past couple of years as the two countries drifted apart. Observers also take it as a bid to bring a balance in the relationship.

### **5.3.3. Deepening China-Russia ties:**

The China-Russia relationship has historically been marked by distrust and mutual wariness. In 1969, the two countries had a border conflict that pushed them to the brink of a nuclear war. The two countries that share 4300-kilometers long border resolved their border disputes in early 2000s. For two decades, they have built up bilateral cooperation in multiple domains as well as at international forums to counterbalance the US influence. The Moscow-Beijing growing relationship need not to be considered temporary as marriage of convenience, but this longstanding strategic partnership is based on their agreements, including Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order in 1997 and Treaty of Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation in 2001.

The Russia-China relationship has grown very fast during the last one decade, particularly after the Western sanctions against Russia in the wake of its annexation of Crimea in 2014. This greatly deteriorated Russia's ties with the West, making it look at China as an ally and an investor instead of merely a buyer of military hardware. The two countries have enhanced cooperation not only in defence but also in political and economic fields. For China, Russia is the biggest supplier of its weapons and the second largest source of its oil import. And for Russia, China is its top country trading partner and a key source of investment in its energy projects (Rasheed, 2021). The bilateral trade has increased by fourteen times since 2001 (Gabuev, 2021) as it has risen from \$10.7 billion in 2001 to about \$140 billion in 2021. The two countries are part of different regional institutions formed in parallel to the US-led bodies. These include the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS. In foreign policy area, the two countries share approaches towards Iran, Syria and Venezuela; and also urged the United Nations to lift sanctions against North Korea. Chinese President Xi Jinping and President Putin also have personal rapport as they have met thirty times since 2013, and Xi has even called Putin his "best friend" (Rasheed, 2021).

On the other hand, the historical complexities and power asymmetries have raised questions about the sustainability of the relationship. There seem to be four driving forces that improved the Moscow-Beijing relationship. First, they want to maintain peace along 4200-kilometers of border as they do not want to go back to confrontation. Second, the two countries complement each other as Russia has huge natural resources and it needs technology whereas China has the potential to tap these resources. Third, although there are differences in the political setups of the two countries, both are authoritarian regimes. These three drivers would force the two countries to come closer to each other. However, most scholars believe that the main driving force behind the strong Moscow-Beijing opposition is to end the US hegemony. They are of the view that the United States is an aggressor that intends to diminish them.

On the other hand, the United States takes Russia and China as the biggest national security threats. The groups like Quad and AUKUS have been created as anti-Russia-China alliances. In an interview with Financial Times in October 2021, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated that "he does not see China and Russia as two separate threats." He said the two countries work closely together (Rasheed, 2021)."

Despite the fact the China-Russia relationship is getting deeper with the passage of time, there are certain actors that limit the relationship. For instance, both the countries are extremely sensitive about their strategic autonomy and none of them would intend to be part of a NATO like alliance that legally guarantees security. They also have different strategic interests. China does not seem to have interest to support Russia on annexation of Crimea, war in eastern Ukraine and Moscow's military involvement in Syria and Africa. Likewise, Russia does not look to be interesting in backing China on Taiwan issue except giving statements in support of One China policy. The two great powers also carry out espionage against each other. There were evidences in 2020 and 2021 of Chinese spying in Russia for stealing designs of latest weapons. Although the two countries have growing trade ties, Chinese companies do not look keen to invest in Russia mainly because of the frequently changing rules, state dominance and corruption. The US sanctions against the two countries also make the economic cooperation complicated. In view of these limitations, it hardly seems that these two powers would formulate a full-fledged anti-Western alliance.

#### **5.3.4. Pakistan-US strained ties:**

At present, Pakistan and the United States have tense relations. US President Joe Biden has ignored Prime Minister Imran Khan and did not even call him though the US 20-year long war ended in Afghanistan and the US forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021. The United States has been trying to put the blame of its failures in Afghanistan on Pakistan for its alleged support to the Taliban; whereas Pakistan has been holding the stance that the country itself has suffered the most after Afghanistan in the war on terror for suffering a huge loss of both lives and economy.

The trajectory of Pakistan-US relations has been bumpy. During the Cold War, Pakistan joined the Western bloc and signed SEATO and CENTO agreements. However, America's suspension of military assistance to Pakistan in the 1965 and 1971 wars with India developed thinking in Pakistan that the United States is not a sincere ally. Pakistan together with other members of the allies worked for checking communist expansionism in the region. There was critical and crucial cooperation between the two countries for eventual soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989. Following 9/11, Pakistan again became part of the US-led alliance now in the war on terror though not by choice but by coercion. Their bilateral cooperation was pivotal in destroying Al-Qaeda and other military groups. However, a couple of developments in 2011, including the US forces attack on Pakistan army troops in Salala and the killing of Osama bin

Laden in an operation in Abbottabad created cracks in the relationship. Although Pakistan itself had been suffering from economic and human losses during the war on terror, the United States had been accusing it of providing sanctuary to the Taliban leaders and fighters. The distrust deepened with the passage of time despite the fact that Pakistan military carried several operations against the Taliban militants in the erstwhile tribal areas. Pakistan, however, had reservations over India's role in Afghanistan with the US backing. Islamabad had been emphasizing that Pakistan and the United States both wanted peaceful resolution of the Afghan issue. Pakistan also played a facilitating role in the talks between the United States and the Taliban in Qatar. The 20-year US war in Afghanistan ended when the Taliban took over Kabul on August 15, 2021. The Taliban interim government has not so far been recognized by any country in the world and the international community has started raising concerns about human rights, female education and other basic rights. While the United States has frozen the Afghan government's funds and international support to Afghanistan has also considerably reduced, the interim government has been facing extreme economic problems. As a result, the Afghan people have been facing a crisis-like due to shortage of food, medicines and shelter. Pakistan has drawn the world attention to this impending humanitarian crisis; however, the international response to the issue is very slow.

Besides defence ties, Pakistan and the United States also enjoy long-standing economic and trade relations. The United States is the biggest export destination for Pakistan, and the United States also makes investments in Pakistan. However, Washington has been seeing Pakistan through the prism of India, China or Afghanistan, though Islamabad has been insisting on broad-based and multi-faceted relationship with the focus on geo-economics. India is a strategic partner of the United States in the region whereas Pakistan's relevance for the United States would be only for Afghanistan. US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman visited Pakistan in October 2021, and before arriving in Pakistan, she stated in an interview in India that the Pakistan visit is "for a very specific and narrow purpose, we do not see ourselves building a broad relationship with Pakistan." During the Congressional hearings in September 2021, US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Mulley said "we need to fully examine the role of Pakistan sanctuary" to understand how the Taliban prevailed. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also told the Congress that the United States is looking at the role Pakistan has played during the past 20 years and what role the US sees for Pakistan in the future. In a statement in June 2021, Prime Minister Imran Khan also stated that the relationship between Pakistan and the United States is "lopsided."

Earlier, former US President Donald Trump had stated that the United States had given Pakistan billions of dollars, but they had been housing the terrorists who had been fighting against them. Pakistan reacted to that statement by saying that no billions of dollars had been given to Pakistan, and the money provided to Pakistan was payment for the services Pakistan had rendered to the United States in Afghanistan. Scholars described the bilateral relationship as transactional relationship. The interests of the two countries do not converge and they take issues differently. Currently, there is no secret in it that the relationship between Pakistan and the United States is going through a difficult time.

### **5.3.5. Pakistan's Growing Ties With China, Russia:**

China and Russia are two major powers of the region Pakistan is located in. While Pakistan enjoys exemplary warm, trustworthy and friendly ties with China, its ties with Russia have also been on the positive trajectory. While China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has transformed Pakistan-China relationship into all-weather strategic cooperation partnership, a marked improvement has also been witnessed in the Moscow-Islamabad relationship particularly over the last one decade.

The phrase that Pakistan-China relationship is “higher than mountains, sweeter than honey and deeper than oceans” portrays the nature of the bilateral relationship. Established in 1951, the bilateral relationship has been deepening with growing cooperation in multiple sectors, including economy, defence and people to people contacts. This journey of friendship has been aptly described by the words used in official documents and communications. Up to 1970s, the two countries had been calling their ties “friendly relations” while in 1980s, it transformed into “traditional friendship.” The relationship evolved into “comprehensive friendship” in 1990s while the Joint Declaration on Direction of Bilateral Cooperation of 2003 called it “all weather friendship.” The relationship was described as “bilateral strategic partnership of good-neighbourly friendship” in the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations in 2005. With the launch of the CPEC in 2013, the terminology for the relationship further evolved as “China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperation partnership;” and in 2018, it was elevated to “China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and building closer Pakistan-China community of shared future in the new era (Khalid, 2021).”

The following major developments contributed to building the block of this trusted friendship over the past 70 years.

- Bilateral diplomatic relationship was established in 1951.
- Pakistan was the first Muslim country to recognize New China.
- In 1951, Chairman Mao Tse Tung gave instructions to his foreign ministry to develop ties with Pakistan. And later in 1956, he instructed his second ambassador to pay special attention to Pakistan, which was “China’s southwestern gate (Khalid, 2021).”
- Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suharwardy was the first Pakistani leader who visited Beijing in 1956. Two months later, Chinese Premier Zhou En Lai visited Pakistan. Warm hospitality was extended to him during this 10-day trip. Later visiting India, he denied Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s invitation to visit Srinagar. This laid the foundation of mutual trust that grew with every passing day.
- The 1963 border treaty between Pakistan and China further enhanced the mutual trust.
- In 1965, Pakistan criticized the US Two China Policy. This reflected a clear shift in Pakistan’s foreign policy with an intention to get closer to China.
- China’s full support to Pakistan in 1965 Pakistan-India war cemented the Islamabad-Beijing relationship.
- The 1966 decision to construct Karakoram Highway linking China’s Xinjiang region with Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan solidified the relationship.
- China provided Pakistan \$300 million for development projects and extended military assistance. In late 1960s, China also helped Pakistan to build heavy industry capacity in Taxila.
- In 1971 war, China supported Pakistan diplomatically and politically besides continuing military assistance. The same year in July, Pakistan facilitated US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s visit to Beijing, which led to rapprochement between the two countries.
- In 1971, Pakistan fully supported and China became member of the United Nations. In 1972, China exercised its first veto in favor of Pakistan on the question of Bangladesh.
- The frequent high level visits in 1980 and 1990s by the either side further strengthened the bilateral relationship.
- The two countries signed an agreement of civil nuclear cooperation in 1986.
- Co-production of JF-17 Thunder is another landmark project.
- Establishment of CPEC, a flagship project of China’s BRI in 2013, transformed the relationship.

Pakistan takes its relationship with China as cornerstone of its foreign policy and China describes it as its “highest priority.” Pakistan has supported China on Xinjiang, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Tibet and South China Sea issues; and China openly supports Pakistan’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. China has adopted a principled stance on the issue of Pakistan’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group and its inclusion in the grey list of Financial Action Task Force. China considers Kashmir as a dispute between Pakistan and India and also calls for its resolution as per the UN resolutions. It also opposed India’s step to revoke the special status of Kashmir on August 5, 2019.

Pakistan’s relations with Russia have also been improving, particularly for over a decade. Following the Soviet collapse, the first decade was tense with extreme level of mutual mistrust. However, Pakistan’s decision of joining the US-led alliance of war on terror lessened Russia’s concerns about Pakistan vis a vis its support to the then Taliban regime. Bilateral high level visits that began in the early years of the twenty-first century contributed to reducing the level of Soviet-era mistrust. President Musharraf’s visit to Moscow in 2003 and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkhov’s visit to Islamabad in 2007 are the landmark developments in improvement of the bilateral relationship in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The following decade also witnessed some important developments. They include Russia’s criticism of the US attack on Pakistani troops in Salala in 2011; Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu’s visit to Islamabad in 2014 and signing of defence cooperation agreement during the visit; Moscow’s lifting of self-imposed embargo to sell weapons to Pakistan in 2014, signing of North South Gas pipeline project in 2015, which was delayed and then signed again with amended Inter Governmental Agreement in 2021; provision of four advanced attack helicopters to Pakistan in 2017; high level several bilateral visits by the either side and various joint military drills.

Besides bilateral ties, the two countries also seem to be on the point of convergence on various international issues, including Afghanistan, terrorism and narcotics control. Both Islamabad and Moscow have been emphasizing political solution to the Afghan issue for regional peace and prosperity. They also played their positive roles for peaceful settlement of the Afghan issue. Russia hosted various meetings of Moscow Format for consultations on Afghanistan. Pakistan facilitated to bring the Taliban on the table with the United States in Qatar that led to an agreement for withdrawal of the foreign troops in Afghanistan. Following the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, the two countries have also been engaged with the new interim Afghan

government in view of the impending humanitarian crisis there due to shortage of food, medicines and shelter.

#### **5.3.6. Regional factors of realignments:**

In order to safeguard their respective national interests, countries keep on making adjustments in their policies on the external front. The objective of securing national interest, especially in economy and defence, also makes states shift their tilts in international politics. A couple of regional factors like Afghanistan, Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC and SCO carry special significance and also influence policies of the region.

##### **5.3.6.1. Instability in Afghanistan:**

The Taliban are again in power in Afghanistan. While presence of the US forces in Afghanistan was a matter of concern for various regional countries, including Pakistan, Russia and China; control of Kabul by the Taliban, who have a history of violence and usurpation of basic rights during the 1990s regime, also makes them wary. Peace and stability in Afghanistan are imperative for peace and stability in the neighboring and regional states. Pakistan, China and Russia seem to have convergence of interest on the Afghan issue. Each of the three states wants that the United States should neither have its presence nor influence in Afghanistan and that none of them receives any threat from Afghanistan. The three countries remained engaged in the process of negotiations before the US withdrawal and also after the Taliban takeover. Russia's initiative of Moscow Format has held various meetings on the subject. In the joint statement adopted on conclusion of the last meeting held in Moscow on October 21, 2021, the forum vowed to respect sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan. The members also made demands from Taliban. In the existing gap when the United States has left without putting in place a system of government in the war-ravaged country, Pakistan, China and Russia would also try to establish their respective influence in Afghanistan.

After the US withdrawal and suspension of international financial assistance to Afghanistan in the wake of the Taliban takeover, the war-torn country has been facing multiple issues. The United States and other Western countries have frozen Afghan banking assets worth billions of dollars and also stopped development funding, which had been serving as the backbone of the country's economy. According to the UN humanitarian agency, about 22 million people that form more than half of the country's population have been facing acute hunger.



At present, the biggest problem for the interim Afghan government is of its recognition in the world. Addressing a news conference in Kabul on January 19, 2022, Afghan interim Prime Minister Mullah Hasan Akhund urged the Muslim countries to be the first to recognize their government in Afghanistan. Afghan interim Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi said that humanitarian assistance is a temporary solution to the economic problems of Afghanistan; adding that Afghanistan wants to establish economic relations with the international community. He called for implementation of infrastructure projects in the country. UN Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons, who also spoke on the occasion, said that Afghanistan has been facing a serious economic problem, which needs to be addressed by all countries.

Pakistan, China and Russia have been active to help the new Afghan government overcome the challenges. The three countries have kept their embassies open in Kabul after the Taliban takeover. The Chinese envoy has also held talks with the Taliban government. The representatives of the three countries had met the Afghan government officials in Beijing on September 22, 2021 to discuss formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan. On October 18, 2021, Pakistan hosted an extraordinary session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers on Afghanistan. Besides the members, the non-members and representatives of international financial institutions attended the conference. The conference pledged to establish a fund to prevent a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has repeatedly drawn the world attention to the critical humanitarian situation in Afghanistan, calling for engaging with the Taliban and not repeating the past mistake of abandoning them. And for the purpose, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi also visited different countries, including four neighboring states; Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Iran.

#### **5.3.6.2. Belt and Road Initiative:**

China's Belt and Road Initiative, formerly known as One Belt One Road, was launched in 2013 with an aim to promote China's connectivity through Central, South and Southeast Asia into the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The mega project envisages construction of transport corridors on the ancient Silk Road trade routes. "Belt" stands for land roads from China to Europe via Central Asia, Russia and the Middle East; while "Road" refers to maritime route from South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, East Africa and then the Mediterranean (Garlick, 2020). Although there is no so far official BRI map; however, the map circulated in the state media in the early days emphasize

land and sea routes from Asia to Europe. BRI is the key feature of President Xi Jinping's Major Country Diplomacy that calls for China's leadership role in the global affairs. The Chinese government describes the initiative as a bid to promote regional connectivity and find a bright future. It would help China reduce its dependence on the Strait of Malacca, ensuring it access to the Indian Ocean for transportation of oil from the Middle East and Africa to China.

China's investment in various countries will enhance its influence in those countries. It would further deepen China's relations with the Southeast Asia's nations, increasing regional trade. In the first five years of the initiative, over \$500 billion has flown into Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore and Vietnam (Freeman, 2019). In Southeast Asia, the United States is a security partner of several states and Japan invests massively in these countries. As China's influence grows, the United States and Japan will have to compete for the markets, military access and political influence.

South Asia also carries important status in the BRI initiative as it will connect China to the Indian Ocean. The South Asian nations, having great potential of young population, offer fertile territory for the BRI. With 2.5 billion population, the South Asia's growing market is a lucrative place for investment. Under this initiative, China has been implementing various road, energy and other infrastructure development projects in different countries, including Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives. The projects include the CPEC, Gwadar Port and several wind, solar, and coal power projects in Pakistan; Hambantota Port, the Norochcholai Power Plant and the Colombo Port City project in Sri Lanka and various other projects in Myanmar. China has also brought Nepal, Bangladesh and Maldives into its influence in the wake of their insecurities vis a vis India (Mohan). Except India, the South Asian countries see Chinese presence in the region as favorable to their development and contributing to their national interest. Pakistan and China are strategic partners. Pakistan had long been receiving US economic assistance; however, after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, it has been discontinued. The smaller countries have also resented the Indian dominance in the region; and they have tilted toward China as an alternative. They want to get benefit from China whatever they could without offending the United States and India (Anwar, 2020).

Peace in Afghanistan has been a hurdle in extension of CPEC to the war-ravaged country. There had also been differences between the last Ashraf Ghani-government and Pakistan. With the Taliban in control of Afghanistan and the US withdrawal from the country, China intends to extend BRI to Afghanistan. In a media briefing on September 3, 2021, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said his country is interested to extend BRI to Afghanistan. He said: “China-Afghan cooperation on BRI has delivered tangible benefits (Varma, 2021). He said they have noticed the Afghan Taliban’s statement that they would provide a favorable environment to foreign investors.

#### **5.3.6.3. CPEC:**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a flagship investment project of China’s BRI with a value of \$62 billion. Launched in 2013, the project envisages linking of Pakistan’s Gwadar Port with China’s north-western region through a network of roads and rail and pipelines for transportation of oil and gas. It aims at promoting regional connectivity and trade among SAARC, ASEAN, CAREC and the ECO. The CPEC Authority, official body responsible for overseeing the project, describes it as a “framework of regional connectivity” that will not only benefit Pakistan but would also positively impact Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics and the region. China has planned to develop Gwadar as a modern port and establish a free trade zone next to the port. Under the CPEC, several infrastructure projects of roads and energy have been completed. Other important projects include railway track from Karachi to Peshawar, two hydropower power plants, multiple special economic zones, Huawei fiber optic cables from China to Pakistan (Sacks, 2021). In the ongoing second phase of the project, industrial development, agriculture and transfer of technology are being focused. Since the current government formation in 2018, there has been an impression that the pace of implementation of the project has slowed down. However, China has rejected this impression. Briefing media persons on January 21, 2022, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Linjian said “the CPEC has been moving forward against a headwind posed by Covid-19 pandemic.” He further said, “so-called claim that little has been achieved and no programme was approved over the past three and half years is pure disinformation (APP, 2021).”

Pakistan and China are time-tested friends, and the CPEC has transformed the bilateral relationship into an all-weather strategic partnership. Since the launch of the CPEC, the bilateral relationship has been officially described as “China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperation partnership” in 2013 and “China-Pakistan all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and

building closer Pakistan-China community of shared future in the new era” in 2018 (Khalid, 2021). With enhanced inter-dependence, the two countries are also navigating international power politics. They have been closely coordinating in Afghanistan as well as on international forums such as the United Nations and Nuclear Suppliers Group.

Although the CPEC has been widely welcomed in the region, India and the United States have expressed concerns about it. China’s increased presence in Pakistan through the CPEC, Pakistan’s better economy and infrastructure and Islamabad’s less dependence on the United States do not match the US and Indian interests. Hence, both the countries have been critical of the project. However, Pakistan’s Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa has categorically declared in his statements that the security of the CPEC would be ensured and the project would be completed at all costs. A stronger Pakistan would, however, serve the interests of China by countering India in a better way. The effect of the US pivot to Asia policy will be affected through the CPEC. Islamabad’s relations with Washington have been tense particularly in the context of the US failure in the 20-year long Afghan war; whereas China has been deepening its influence in Pakistan through investment and development projects. However, Pakistan realizes well that China cannot be an alternative to the United States; and therefore, Islamabad has been making efforts to improve its ties with the United States.

#### **5.3.6.4. SCO:**

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is an intergovernmental international organization founded in 2001 to promote regionalism. It consists of eight member states (China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Pakistan, India, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan) and four observers (Afghanistan, Iran, Belarus and Mongolia). Pakistan and India joined the organization as full members in 2017. The SCO’s main goals include regional cooperation in multiple fields including economy, trade, politics, technology, education and energy; undertake joint efforts to ensure peace, security and stability in the region; and move toward establishing a democratic, fair and rational international political order (SCO official website).

Two great powers of the region – Russia and China – are part of the SCO. Being driving force behind the organization, they have been playing a lead role in its development. Cooperation and coordination between the two countries has also been on the rise. Although they want to promote collective security and regional cooperation through the SCO, they also have disagreements. While China is interested to mainly address the challenges of terrorism, extremism

and separatism and make economic collaboration; Russia is more interested to transform the SCO into a forum to counterbalance the US hegemony (Dongchen and Kolotova, 2020). Nonetheless the two countries have a convergence of interest to limit the US influence. The US hegemonic policy has made China and Russia work pragmatically for national security, regional stability and global equilibrium.

For Pakistan, the status of a permanent member of the SCO means a lot. It is a big diplomatic achievement to foil Indian attempt of isolating Pakistan at international level. The BRI and CPEC also have significance in the context of SCO. The SCO could become an effective platform for Pakistan to solve its energy shortage issue through enhanced cooperation with the Central Asian Republics. On the other hand, the SCO could have access to the Arabian Sea through the CPEC. The SCO platform can also be helpful in resolution of the longstanding dispute of Kashmir between Pakistan and India.

## CHAPTER SIX

### **Pakistan-Russia: Convergence of Interests**

The relationship between Pakistan and Russia has improved over the last decade. However, it is also a fact that the pace of this improvement is very slow. There is no mega project, agreement or deal signed or implemented that has the potential to transform the bilateral relationship into a new dimension. Whatever the progress has so far been witnessed in defence cooperation or any other field such as trade and energy is modest. Nevertheless, given the context of the Cold War animosity, the 1980s Afghan war, dissolution of the USSR and the post-USSR decade, the progress of the past decade does not appear meager. The signals being received from the bilateral engagements, exchanges and cooperation indicate that there are several matters of mutual interest and also similarity of views in various issues. The gradual improvement in bilateral relationship implies that the journey of the upward trajectory is not so easy or smooth. There are various challenges, obstacles or factors that impact the progress.

In a bid to understand the current status of the Islamabad-Moscow relationship and the future prospects of growth in the relationship, main areas of convergence as well as divergence of interest have been identified. Questions pertaining to both categories were put before a select panel of relevant experts from Pakistan and Russia. These include former foreign and defence secretaries, former ambassadors and analysts working in think-tanks. A total of six people were interviewed on the same questionnaire designed on the basis of converging interests and challenges. Half of the total 12 open-ended questions represent converging interests of the two countries while the others pertain to the factors that might impede the progress. The data and the opinions of the experts would help the researcher explain the phenomenon of Pak-Russia relationship in an environment of realignments in the region. The study would also help the reader understand the current position of the Islamabad-Moscow ties as well as the possible future scenario.

This chapter contains response of the experts on the matters on which the two countries have converging interests. The responses given in the form of conventional or virtual interview or in writing are being narrated in the following pages. Each question will be answered by all the respondents. The experts interviewed are:

1. **Lt. General (retired) Naeem Khalid Lodhi**, former Defense Secretary

2. **Lt. General (retired) Asif Yasin Malik**, former Defence Secretary
3. **Salman Bashir**, former Foreign Secretary
4. **Asif Durrani**, former Ambassador, currently associated with Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)
5. **Syed Muhammad Ali**, Director Strategic Defense, Security & Policy at CASS
6. **Andrew Korybko**, Moscow-based American political analyst, who is completing his PhD on Pakistan-Russia relations at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, run by the Russian Foreign Ministry

#### **6.1. Question 1:**

How much important is the India-US strategic partnership a factor for Pakistan and Russia to come closer to each other, particularly in the field of defence cooperation?

##### **6.1.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

I think this is a big factor now. Not only this; you must have noticed that even the Quad Plus in which India is partner with America and then Americans are also working on AUKUS. So actually, they are trying to circumvent not only China, but in a way also to stop the Russian routes towards the warm water. You are right. I will agree with you that Indo-US nexus also gives us the environment to get closer to Russia. I was interim Defence Minister for some time and Russians did visit during that tenure, and they were very keen to have good relations with us. Actually, we have been sluggish. They want the relationship to grow more rapidly.

##### **6.1.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

I think that is very important factor. Prior to seeing Russian-Pakistani relationship, we should see the Russian-Indian relationship; that has now almost changed its total dimension after the Indians fell in the lap of Americans. I would say it was 60-70 years change of the Indians. They have always been in the Russian camp, and there was fraud of non-aligned countries, which were the eastern bloc countries. Therefore, once the Indians started hobnobbing with the Americans, the Russians have the second thought; and over the last 10 years, the Indians have jumped on the American bandwagon being part of the Quad against China. Russia values China's relationship. Russia-China relationship is very important; they are neighbors; and two are very strategically powerful neighbors. Russia could not go to the Indians when they were creating problems for China. Pakistan came in the factor that Pakistan has played an important role in Afghanistan, and did not allow even our own policies to go against the Russian interests in the region. Then SCO

came in, and we were playing an important role in SCO. Similarly, CPEC will contribute to the stability of the region if Afghanistan becomes part of it which China is trying its best. Any development or prosperity in Afghanistan would close doors or reduce the possibility of any anti-Russian or anti-Central Asian people getting a foothold in Afghanistan. Therefore, I think this is triangular arrangement; India-Pakistan, Russia in which there was change. We must see on India-Russia and Pakistan-Russia relations that have the equation that has now changed.

#### **6.1.3. Salman Bashir:**

India-Russia partnership no longer poses insurmountable impediments to Pakistan-Russia cooperation, including in the field of defense. In fact, Pakistan-Russia defence collaboration including sale of military equipment and joint training exercises have become a norm.

#### **6.1.4. Asif Durrani:**

I think Russians will take their own time, and because of that you cannot ignore India. India is a huge market. It is a market of \$1.3 billion, and so this is why the United States has been attracted. That is why you have seen that from zero to \$20 billion of armaments, which has been sold, and again, not only that; in terms of trade now, the United States and Indian trade is now close to \$150 billion, which is unprecedented. And it is much more than the India trade with Russia. Same is the case with China. In fact, China-India trade, despite tensions, is close to \$100 billion. Trade has got a lot of attraction. And your economic muscles, in fact, also play a substantive role in influencing the policies of other countries, even if they are in your adversaries. So the lesson learned from these examples; for instance, even China-India clash in Galwan Valley and Ladakh region that shows that the trade, in fact had the upper hand; which is why that the two countries also backed out. The balance of trade was in China's favor. Indians did try to impose sanctions on some of the companies, but they had to lift it because ultimately it was harming Indian trade interests than China's, and even if the balance of trade is in Chinese favour, whatever India is importing from China is quite essential for its industrial growth. You know, trade as well in the world; so these are a complementary issues, even if you may have a negative trade or a balance of trade is not in your favor, but if you are importing certain machines or certain items, which in fact can contribute to your further industrialization or may enhance your exports. So it is a profitable business, even if the balance of trade is in other's favour. Coming back to Russia and Pakistan trade; I have mentioned the reasons which are causing slow-paced trade between the two countries; still avenues are vast. North-South corridor, which has been opened by Russia through Bandar



Abbas in Iran to Caspian Sea and to Russia, is in fact also a route, which we can explore. In fact, we tried the benefit of being a neighbor of Iran. We are direct neighbors. So our products can go straight from land up to the Caspian Sea and onwards to Russia. So the avenues are quite open and vast.

India-US strategic partnership could be some way, but not much; no. I do not think that even Russia and the United States would be looking at each other in adversarial terms for a longer period because in politics, you know, these relations can always change depending on what kind of interest you have. If you look at; let us say in the 9/11 environment; so what happened, in fact, even then, there was tense relationship between the United States and Russia. But when 9/11 happened; it in fact transformed the world not only in the United States but elsewhere in the world as well. The question or issue of terrorism was so stark and so serious that Russians even, in fact, lent cooperation to the Americans. This is something we have to be mindful of the fact that the world now is looking at Pakistan with some suspicious eyes as well. Especially in terms of al-Qaeda and others those who have been either living in Pakistan or transacting through Pakistan; so Pakistan had to do a lot during the past twenty years, and I think that is also one of the reasons that Russia and Pakistan have come closer, as I mentioned that there is a working group between the two countries to have cooperation in counter-terrorism. Now another reason is that the two countries have come closer further. They have come closer further in recent past years that now Pakistan is also a full-fledged member of the SCO; so that is also contributing.

#### **6.1.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

The close and deepening Indo-US relationship is a significant factor which has encouraged Moscow to improve its relations with Pakistan. But that does not mean that Moscow views Islamabad as a substitute to New Delhi. However, it wants to build better relations with Pakistan gradually and incrementally. In fact, both Islamabad and Moscow do not expect some large major deals in security and strategic subjects very soon. Since my first book was on Indian nuclear program, let me recall that the entire Indian nuclear programme consisting of 22 reactors is primarily of Russian design. There is not even one reactor that India operates which is of non-Russian design. And in future as well, despite US offer on the table for the last 14 years, India has not bought one reactor from the US, and it continues to rely on the Russians for future expansion of their nuclear program. That indicates that both countries have very deep and close relations. Indians have also benefited a lot from Russian technology in terms of developing their BrahMos

Cruise Missile. They have heavily relied on Russian technical assistance in developing their Arihant Ballistic Missile Nuclear Submarine designs. It has a Russian reactor. At some point in time, Pakistan also raised concerns that supply of Russian design to India, which helps use its ballistic missile nuclear submarine military purposes is not a contribution to peace and stability in the region. But that indicates that India-Russia relations are not just close but are consistently improving. However, what Pakistan expects is basically a gradual cooperation in energy, power sector, infrastructure development, aviation and heavy industries. We also do not see it because India continues to influence Moscow's ability to offer major defence cooperation.

#### **6.1.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Officially speaking, their ties are not driven by any third parties nor are they aimed against them, but it is impossible to deny the observation that Russian-Pakistani relations have improved in parallel with the improvement of US-Indian ones. The de facto US-Indian anti-Chinese alliance – which is imperfect and still beset by some differences of vision – was a regional strategic game-changer that compelled Russia and Pakistan to reconsider their respective policies towards one another. The prior unease that each might have felt engaging with the other due to their traditional Indian and American partners' sensitivities gradually disappeared as they began to view each other through a more pragmatic lens. Russian-Pakistani relations help each country flexibly adapt to the rapidly changing geostrategic situation in South Asia and especially the impact that this development has had on the US-Chinese New Cold War. To be clear, however, neither Russia nor Pakistan wants to replace their traditional Indian or American partners with their newfound one, nor are they taking any steps with one another that could risk threatening those other countries' interests, which explains why their military cooperation has hitherto been limited to the anti-terrorist domain and has yet to evolve beyond it, though that might eventually change.

#### **6.2. Question 2:**

Do you think Russia is pursuing a policy of diversification in its relations with South Asian countries, and Pakistan is also trying to increase its options after strained ties with the United States?

##### **6.2.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

China is a rising power, which fortunately is our old friend and time-tested friend. You must have heard the latest statement which has come out after the meeting between President Putin and the Chinese President. So that also indicates the direction of foreign policy for Pakistan and

also foreign policy of Russia. Russian foreign policy is now very clear that they will be closely working with China. They are interested in Indian Ocean; they are interested in Iran; they are interested in India; and we are quite close to all these areas. So I think it is good for both the countries for our future direction of foreign policy. Of course, foreign policy does not change direction overnight; it takes some time. And I am not suggesting that we should sever our relations with the West or Americans as they are still power to be reckoned with. Pakistani Diaspora is also living in America, UK and Middle East. And Middle East is more under the influence of America; we know that. We have to tread that way very carefully. We cannot fall in the back of China-Russo Alliance and antagonize the entire Middle East and the Europe and America. So very cautious policy changes are required, which should be based on our own interest, on our economic interest and political interest. Of course, balance may not be possible because one side is behaving much better with us than the other side. But I would suggest that keep relations on all sides, but make your relationship stronger towards the East; and I am indicating China and Russia.

[Q] Can we describe it as diversification of foreign policy on part of Pakistan and Russia? I think that would be a better approach because we know that the relationships of any country, two countries are of multi layers. There are so many layers of relationship. There is economic relationship and political relationship and diplomatic, even military relationship, people to people. So I think all other avenues, especially people to people connections, the economic relationship. I think once we have a North South corridor and we have good connectivity with Russia, we will be able to export many food items to Russian Federation and probably we can get some technology. So I agree with you that diversification is a better terminology rather than change in foreign policy.

#### **6.2.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

I would not put it in that way. It is not either or a sort of arrangement that since Pakistan and Washington had increased distance, so Pakistan went to Russia. Pakistan was trying the Russian interest for a long time even when the Americans were close to us. But then we were involved in active combat and all that. I do not think it is either or issue. Pakistan has, for a change after a long time, come up to its own interest-based policy. If the Russians are helping us in whatever way politically, economically, militarily or whatever the outcome of this visit [Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Russia on February 23-24, 2022]; we have not closed doors to the Washington avenue also. The Prime Minister, in an interview a couple of weeks ago, said that we are always willing to have good relations with the United States. The important thing that we must

understand is that if we do not want our relations with any other country to be dictated by somebody, we should also not force the Americans or the Russians to have either or policy between us and India. If the Americans are finding interest in India, they should have it as long as that interest does not compromise Pakistan's strategic interests. If that happens; yes, we should then have a conditionality. But it is a bilateral benefit of the United States and Russia, and we have a bilateral benefit between Pakistan and Russia or Pakistan and Washington or Delhi and Washington, we should accept it in the new geopolitical environment which has now changed to geo-economic. It is not that since we pull back from Washington, we are going to Russia. We have been trying but as luck would have it; the timing has changed. And probably, the Indian factor; Indo-Russian relationship has more to do than Pak-US relationship. The Indians have been going wild buying American weaponry and armaments. They have got S-400 from Russia, which will now go under sanctions, and Indians will not be able to operate that system if the American sanctions become effective. They will be in a very difficult situation as far as S-400 is concerned. While there will be sanctions on the system; if they break the sanctions, Americans will have to punish the Indians.

[Q]: Do you think Russia wants to improve its relations with Pakistan besides its strong ties with India in South Asia; and Pakistan is also trying to enhance its relations with Russia keeping intact its traditional ties with the United States? Exactly. Pakistan has been trying even after the Prime Minister's statement of "absolutely not." Pakistan has not said that we do not want good relations with the United States, but on the condition of mutual interest. It cannot be a one-way traffic and Americans cannot bully us into a policy shift. Similarly, the Russians have now realized that Pakistan's strategic location has been a source of interest for all countries; China, the United States; and now Russia also. We must also remember that CPEC in Pakistan is opening doors for the Central Asian countries, which are under the Russian influence. If there is prosperity and good environment in Central Asian countries, it suits the Russian interest. There is a vacuum in Afghanistan, which is now attracting both Russia and China. Afghanistan, apart from strategic location, has economic overtones also. It has mineral wealth. Afghanistan is very interesting; it is the backyard of almost every country in the region, including Iran, Pakistan, China and Russia indirectly. Russia and China both would like to have influence in Afghanistan.

### **6.2.3. Salman Bashir:**

Russia probably sees merit in Pakistan's strategic location and its constructive role in promoting regional stability. India's defence partnership with the US to contain China, close Russia-China relations and strained Russia-US ties are significant new strategic indicators that will for now dampen past Russian enthusiasm towards India.

### **6.2.4. Asif Durrani:**

I won't use the term diversify. In fact, you can use the term that now they are in fact strengthening their relationship. Diversification is different; you are going east and now you are turned to west. Now, this is something it has been an evolutionary process. Now I think Pakistan is actually heading towards a strong regional policy, whereby it has strong relationship in the region which would in fact give more dividends to Pakistan than looking for allies far away. It is better if you have good relationship in your neighborhood. Your security concerns; your strategic concerns will be addressed by having improved better relationship or friendly relationship with your neighborhood. That is also a part of the strategy. The realization, in fact, we are facing this scourge of this Afghanistan situation for over four decades when the Soviet troops entered Afghanistan, and then we had influx of millions of Afghan refugees. At one point of time, we had almost five million of Afghan refugees. Then we have also seen that with regard to Afghanistan we have suffered more than our three wars with India. If you look at the number of Pakistanis who have been killed during the past two decades is close to eighty thousand, including eight thousand of our law enforcement agencies personnel. This number we never had in even during three full-fledged wars with India. We did not have these kinds of losses. In economic terms, when we say we lost \$150 billion opportunity cost means that we lost into businesses. Those countries who have not been directly neighbor with Afghanistan, their economies have gone up while our economy has actually gone down; our exports have not risen during the past twenty years. This is something we have to seriously look into.

### **6.2.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

Let me answer this question at three levels; at global level, regional level and bilateral level. At the global level, what Russia aspires under President Putin is a multipolar world order. Ensuring that US does not dominate or enjoy unchallenged influence in any region is a principle of Russian foreign policy. In that context, it does not want to allow Washington exceptional excess to Indian defence or economic markets, and that also explains why they want to continue maintaining

relations with New Delhi as well that New Delhi does want to become completely dependent on US for future economic and defense. Second level is the regional level. Russia is also offering cooperation in economy, energy, industry and to some extent, defence cooperation to other countries as well including Iran, Saudi Arabia and Bangladesh. It has sold SU-30s to Malaysia as well. It is also exploring its markets with Indonesia. And after the withdrawal of the US forces from Afghanistan, although Pakistan has lot of expectations that Moscow will play an important role in the security and stability of Afghanistan, but Moscow considers US military departure as a positive sign. However, it has concerns in terms of extremism, terrorism and drugs in that region. I think there are a lot of areas in which the two countries can gradually come together. They are reaching out to every country whichever is willing to offer to extend to improve relations with Moscow. Absolutely, Pakistan is also diversifying its foreign policy options because Pakistan's security and economic relations with US are no more the same. It is also looking for other options; and Moscow is also important in that terms. We are exploring opportunities for improving relations in economy, education, research, science and technology, energy, heavy industry and other different sectors. We have had joint military exercises and exchange visits. So, the whole canvass of bilateral relations is witnessing expansion and improvement. But it should be seen as I earlier pointed out primarily because Moscow wants to reassert itself on the world stage as a global power, as a great power. It is also conscious that it needs to improve its image; not just be seen as an aggressive power but as a power which is more reliable than perhaps Washington and less coercive than what US has been. It is also carefully and tactfully building its soft power. Its intervention has been at times in a different manner. You see its behavior in Syrian conflict and in other countries as well. So it is reaching out, and it is giving three signals to US-led world order. The challenge is ideological, geopolitical and strategic. It is challenging them in all three domains simultaneously. It is posturing very aggressively in Mediterranean Sea and Atlantic Sea. It has revived its long-range bumper patrols; it has redeployed its forces near Ukraine; it has improved its nuclear and ballistic missile arsenal. So its posture is very confident and aggressive toward the West. Its geoeconomic posture is positive towards the developing countries especially which do not enjoy good relations with Washington. It sees opportunity there. It is also exploring new markets for its industries.

#### **6.2.6. Andrew Korybko:**

The greatest force shaping the emerging world order right now is the US-Chinese New Cold War, which Russia and Pakistan are reacting to. The de facto US-Indian alliance is an outcome of that global struggle since both Great Powers share the same goal of “containing” China, hence why they have moved closer to one another at the perceived expense of their relations with their traditional Pakistani and Russian partners respectively. Russia's 21st-century grand strategic ambition is to become the supreme balancing force in Eurasia, to which end it is seeking to improve its relations with non-traditional partners like Pakistan, which is also attempting to do the same for reasons of preventing any perceived disproportionate dependence on any one partner (be it the US like in the past or China at present). Both countries want to diversify their partnerships in order to reap more economic dividends thereof. Russia aims to do this through its Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) while Pakistan could build upon CPEC in order to branch it out along the northern, western, and southern cardinal directions via the corresponding N-CPEC, W-CPEC, and S-CPEC visions. The northern one complements Russia's efforts to pioneer a southern-directed connectivity corridor, which is another factor explaining the confluence of their interests in Afghanistan where these visions intersect for geostrategic reasons.

#### **6.3. Question 3:**

What interests Pakistan and Russia have in Afghanistan; and do these interests converge?

##### **6.3.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

There is a very important convergence. One, Russia is very much interested to politically be there so that it can undo all the, you know, bitter feelings which Afghans have against Russians. And secondly, if this North-South communication and connectivity gets established, it can only pass either through Iran or through Afghanistan; and after Afghanistan, it will have to pass through Pakistan. So I think there is a lot of convergence of interest, especially in the economic field and also political.

[Q: And security as well?] I cannot say to a large extent because our security interest is closer to Chinese. There is some equipment related things because Russians are very good in anti-missile technology and anti-aircraft technology. We are already getting engines of some tanks from Ukraine. There is some interest in the military field also. But I think politically and economically, we can come closer. [Q: Actually, instability in Afghanistan has been a matter of concern for Pakistan and Russia]. True. You are right.

### **6.3.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

On a larger perspective, they converge as peaceful and a stable Afghanistan is in the Russian interest and in Pakistan's interest. If you go on the economic side, Pakistan and Russia have different perspective on Afghanistan. We have sort of tactical economic interest with Afghanistan. Our trade is mostly on daily use items such as wheat and rice whereas Russia and China are looking at strategic economic interests of exploiting their mineral resources, becoming hub of some economic activity between the Indian ocean and the Central Asian countries and China. There is similarity of interest, but the level of interest is different. We are more interested in sort of tactical economics; our people are going for constructing roads; whereas the Chinese, the Americans and the Russians are looking at strategic economic interest.

### **6.3.3. Salman Bashir:**

Restoration of durable peace and stability in Afghanistan is a shared goal. Our interests largely converge in Afghanistan.

### **6.3.4. Asif Durrani:**

The peace in Afghanistan is a must and imperative for Pakistan; and that is why Pakistan has been seriously pursuing the return of peace to Afghanistan. After the change of government in Afghanistan, Taliban are there; peace has returned by and large, but Taliban regime is under sanctions. The result is that it is also a source of concern for Pakistan; not only for Pakistan, for all the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan because they fear that if people have to face humanitarian crisis; they do not have anything to eat food or medicines; they will, in fact, look for those areas where they could get, and they will have to migrate and population influx can take place to any direction in the neighborhood, especially Pakistan; and Pakistan becomes a natural route for them because not only traditionally, we have been a trading route for Afghanistan, but the divided tribes between Pakistan and Afghanistan and this is unprecedented, which is not the case with Afghanistan's neighborhood. For instance, Afghans do not have common ethnicity with the Iranians. They do not have that common bonding with Tajikistan, Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan because those Turkmen, Tajiks or Uzbeks; they do not identify with the Uzbeks, Tajiks or Turkmens of Afghanistan because they have almost changed during the seventy years of Communism. With China, they do not have common ethnicities. But in Pakistan, we have divided tribes on both sides. So that is the reason that indeed these factors will be impacting us, will be impacting the Russians; they have realized. For them, they may not be direct neighbors, but they



are responsible for the security of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, and they are part of that security arrangement under CIS. Russia also faces problems in Chechnya and Tajikistan. Uzbekistan faces probably an Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Tajiks have not maintained any relationship with the Taliban. They are skeptical of the Taliban; they are harboring Ahmad Shah Masood's son and Afghanistan's former Vice President Amrullah Saleh. These are also difficulties in the region. These are side issues, but I wanted to mention them.

4. [Q: Are Pakistan and Russia getting closer to each other because of having convergence of interest in Afghanistan?] Yes. I think so. Afghanistan is also factoring in coming closer to each other. Yes, it is contributing.

#### **6.3.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

Yes, the interests are not identical, but there are similarities of interest, which are primarily four. Both have a common interest that we do not want an unstable Afghanistan, an Afghanistan which becomes a source of instability in the region. Both countries have common interest that we would contribute toward building a stable Afghanistan. And that explains three subsequent common interests, which are extremism, terrorism and also the drugs trade. These are areas of common concern, and that explains why despite Islamabad's best efforts and also some overtures by the Afghan Taliban and their visit to Moscow as well, Moscow had a somewhat skeptical approach toward new administration in Kabul because they expect a more broad-based and inclusive government, which also allows some representation from ethnic Tajik and Uzbek elements because in the Central Asia, there are countries which continue to enjoy goodwill of Moscow, and I think Moscow has an interest in ensuring that these countries maintain their leverage within Afghan polity and political system. If I see Afghan Taliban showing more accommodation and tolerance toward Tajik and Uzbek elements then I hope that the relations between Moscow and the new administration in Afghanistan will improve; and perhaps Moscow will also encourage the Central Asian countries to contribute more proactively toward progress and development.

#### **6.3.6. Andrew Korybko:**

The most important common interest that Russia and Pakistan have in Afghanistan is to stop regional terrorist threats like ISIS that might emanate from that war-torn country. It was this serious concern that drove those two together in the first place once ISIS-K began to enter the battle space. In addition, that black swan event also showed Russia that the Taliban – which is

officially designated by Moscow as a terrorist group – is the most effective on-the-ground anti-ISIS force in Afghanistan. With this in mind, Moscow started behaving more pragmatically towards the Taliban by politically engaging it for the purpose of advancing the fledgling peace process. This ultimately resulted in Russia hosting the Taliban in its capital for talks on several occasions, something that would have been unthinkable just a few short years ago, let alone when considering the bitter legacy of the 1980s Afghan War.

The second interest that those two countries have there is to prevent an intensification of the civil war which could catalyze a large-scale regional refugee crisis. This would most directly affect Pakistan but is also very worrying for Russia due to its close relations with the Central Asian Republics. Most of them have visa-free access to the Eurasian Great Power and there is a fear that terrorists might masquerade as refugees in order to slide through Central Asia en route to Russia by exploiting that visa-free regime. At the very least, they might stir trouble in those former Soviet Republics, which could in turn catalyze its own refugee crisis as well in the worst-case scenario. The goal, then, is to jointly contain the unconventional (terrorist/refugee) threats coming from Afghanistan.

The third interest relates to regional connectivity since Russia wants to pioneer access to the south while Pakistan aims to the same to the north, with their respective visions geo-strategically intersecting in Afghanistan. Connectivity is one of the top trends of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and it is already beginning to manifest itself in the region through this year's earlier agreement between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan to build a railway between them that can casually be referred to as PAKAFUZ for convenience's sake. This mega project could become the core of N-CPEC+, which in turn might be rebranded as the Central Eurasian Corridor (CEC) in order for Russia to participate more directly in it without offending India's sensitivities related to CPEC (despite PAKAFUZ/N-CPEC+/CEC not transiting through disputed territory that New Delhi claims as its own per its maximalist approach to the Kashmir Conflict).

#### **6.4. Question 4:**

SCO is a regional platform of economic, political and defence cooperation. CPEC is also being described as a game changer project not only for Pakistan but for other countries of the region as well. Do you think Russia, China and Pakistan can enhance mutual cooperation through these platforms?

##### **6.4.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

SCO is a very important regional organization because the Central Asian countries are also part of it besides Russia, China and Pakistan. This can be a very good platform for mutually beneficial economic cooperation. Although it does state that issues of resolution can also be put up there, but probably, in our case, SCO is more beneficial as far as economy is concerned and as far as connectivity is concerned. So I think we should leverage our presence over there. We are lucky that we are already there. SCO, with the passage of time, will become more potent. Russia and China have challenged the political hegemony of America in their last statement, which means that they have challenged unipolarity of the world and the world has now become bipolar, if not multipolar at least for the time being again; it has become bipolar. So that way because of our vicinity as far as physical geography is concerned and because of our diversity in our foreign policy, this has become very suitable platform for Pakistan which we must benefit.

#### **6.4.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

These three countries are indirectly already cooperating. Some of the parts of JF-17 come to China from Russia. For a long time, its engines were coming from Russia. It was being jointly made by Pakistan and China. There has already been defence cooperation. We already gave Ukrainian tanks, which used to be part of the Soviet Union and the Russian bloc. Tanks had been jointly manufactured by Pakistan and China, and for some time, they had Ukrainian engines with them. There is already trilateral cooperation in some form or the other taken place, but I do not see sort of formal defence agreement between Russia, China and Pakistan. They would continue to cooperate in the dimensions of SCO on a multilateral basis. I do not think that Pakistan would like to get involved in power politics of China and Russia and commit its defence or strategic orientation that would create problems for the balance that we are trying to achieve vis a vis the United States and the European countries. That is not in our interest also.

The relevance of CPEC for Russia is important from two angles. First, when Afghanistan becomes part of CPEC, it will bring economic prosperity. The other issue is of the infrastructure that CPEC is creating to Gwadar and the Indian Ocean. That is historical desire of the Soviets or now the Russians; and by default, that infrastructure will help them trading and having economic activity from the Central Asian states and even from Russia to the Indian Ocean. If you see the map, the other choices to reach the Indian Ocean are longer and they are vulnerable to blockades and all that. This is the reroute which is open; which is safe. There is no doubt that the Russians

are interested in many dimensions of CPEC, economic also, political stability in Afghanistan, economic stability and, opening doors for Russian influence in Afghanistan.

#### **6.4.3. Salman Bashir:**

Absolutely, SCO and CPEC platforms are increasingly important in promoting stability, peace and development in the wider region. China, Russia and Pakistan can utilize these platforms for more proactive partnership for development and peace.

#### **6.4.4. Asif Durrani:**

Let CPEC take off; it is still in the formative stages. When the route will be open; and the trade will be at its full swing. Russians have also evinced interest. There is likelihood. Likelihood is that the almost full Central Asia and Russia would like to use that route.

#### **6.4.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

In future, SCO will play the role of a very important forum. It is emerging as a very important geopolitical and security forum for building a close cooperation between Pakistan, China, Russia, Central Asian countries, Iran and Afghanistan. India is also a member. You will be surprised that in some of the very senior level meetings, Pakistani delegations witnessed some divergences between the Indian delegates and the Russian delegates because now the closing proximity of New Delhi and Washington is seen with suspicion both in Beijing and Moscow. That allows Pakistan a greater space and accommodation. In September-October, we had exercises under SCO framework. If the region wants to learn from its history and wants to restrict and reduce the intervention or extra-regional powers, they have to build a regional approach to finding regional solutions to regional security, economic and political issues. Unless the regional countries take the lead and cooperate jointly to find regional solutions to regional security, political and economic issues, they cannot blame extra-regional countries to continue to interfere and influence the dynamics of this region.

CPEC can be explored. Basically, CPEC represents energy projects and economic corridor. There are areas in which Pakistan can benefit from Russian experience, knowledge and technical expertise in terms of infrastructure, and what I mean specifically not just trading routes or the energy projects, but there will be six economic zones that have to be built. If Pakistan aspires to gradually evolve as a trading nation, then trading zones can be established as industrial hubs. And in that case, Pakistan should timely and meaningfully engage with the Russian leadership that what are the areas in which Russian industry can invest. If substantive and long-term Russian investment

becomes part of these projects in terms of different industries that will not just help Pakistan develop itself and bring in foreign investment but that will in geo-politics also symbolize a lasting Russian interest and stake in Pakistan's peace and development; and most importantly, it will work as a deterrent against anybody who wants to harm CPEC because harming CPEC will then not mean only harming Pakistani or Chinese interest, it will mean harming or threatening Russian interest as well. So, success of a trading nation is its ability not just to build a high-tech infrastructure but to attract global interest and stakes, which itself ensure their own mutual security; and this incentivizes any spoilers or extra-regional forces trying to harm them.

#### **6.4.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Russia is extremely unlikely to participate in any officially CPEC-branded projects out of fear of offending India's sensitivities as was explained above. It will also not invest in Azad Kashmir or Gilgit-Baltistan for the same reason that it regards those regions as disputed and is aware of India's claims to them. Nevertheless, private companies can still take part in such projects, at least theoretically. In addition, state companies are seeking to invest more in Pakistan too as evidenced by the recent agreement to construct the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline (PSGP). Both private and state Russian companies can also obviously use Chinese-backed infrastructure projects in the rest of Pakistan outside of those two earlier mentioned regions to facilitate economic access to the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It should go without saying that PAKAFUZ will probably play a key role in this upon its completion too even though it's not Chinese-backed but is nonetheless conceptualized as a northern branch of CPEC.

#### **6.5. Question 5:**

How does Russia view Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism and its efforts for regional peace and stability?

##### **6.5.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

Russians' definition of terrorism naturally keeps changing as it happens with everyone. Whenever there is something against you, you call them terrorists. And if they are fighting against your enemy, then they are freedom fighters. So the same freedom fighters, which are today freedom fighters, were actually terrorists for Russia for some time ago. And Pakistan has been helping in both the tenures. I think they will put this thing aside, and this thing will not become an impediment between Russia and Pakistan, if you look at it in the new environment. One thing from where Pakistan can benefit a lot from the Russian experience. They have a lot of experience about

the insurgency in Baluchistan. They were actually doing it themselves about 20 30 years back. When Pakistan has close relations with Russia, it will help us to overcome the terrorist outfits which are operating in our own area. There can be cooperation as far as the counterterrorism techniques are concerned.

[Q: Does Russia recognize Pakistan's efforts against terrorism?] Yes, this has been stated also because we have succeeded in overcoming the domestic terrorism to a large extent, and countries all over the world acknowledge that our policy, and the way we countered them; and the way we fought with them; the results are in front of the entire world. Russians also appreciate the way we have fought this menace within our own country and how we are struggling to overcome it, but mainly we have succeeded. So they do acknowledge that.

#### **6.5.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

Russians understand our perspective and they have always agreed with our view of terrorism, and they have always appreciated our role in counter-terrorism in the region. We have cooperated. There has been intelligence cooperation between Russia, China, Pakistan and regional countries against terrorism. Whatever one may say; we are the only country which put heart and soul in fighting terrorism and succeeded albeight at higher price. But then we were determined and last 15 or 10 years have been fight of Pakistan which is unparallel in the history globally as well as regionally. China or Russia has no reason sort of doubt or second thought about our counter-terrorism efforts and policies. My view is that they would like to further enhance this cooperation vis a vis the new situation in Afghanistan if there are any possibilities of terrorism against Russia.

#### **6.5.3. Salman Bashir:**

Russia is appreciative of Pakistan's role in combating terrorism.

#### **6.5.4. Asif Durrani:**

They are appreciative of Pakistan's efforts. But at the same time, they were apprehensive of the American presence in Afghanistan; so are the Chinese; so are the Iranians. Now the Americans are out. They would be satisfied, including Chinese and Iranians. Probably another positive sign is in the whole region, especially immediate neighbors of Afghanistan that the immediate neighbors of Afghanistan have unanimously decided to recognize Taliban regime simultaneously, which is why that none of immediate neighbors has recognized the Taliban regime so far. This is also a positive development towards regionalism; and that can positively give dividends to all its stakeholders.

#### **6.5.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

As you earlier mentioned the history of Pakistan-Russia relationship has been tarnished primarily because of diverging interests spread over last 43 years because we have been supporting different factions in Afghanistan. And still, I think, there are divergences. However, there are some areas which can allow both Islamabad and Moscow to build and improve their relations beyond this historical baggage; and that is the common threat of Da'ish because Moscow has played the leading role in the decisive defeat of Da'aish in Syria. Iran and China also had an important role as part of the coalition, which defeated Da'aish in Syria. Iran, Pakistan, China and Russia have commonality of views regarding growing influence of Da'aish in Khurasan, and they have a common interest in ensuring that this outfit does not gain influence and space in this region because they see it as a potential threat to the geo-economic and regional connectivity projects that China is constructing and also is harmful to the interests of Moscow which expects stable and secure near-abroad and sphere of influence whereas Pakistan and Iran also want that this region recovers from extremism and terrorism; and gradually an era of development and progress can unfold. I see possible area of convergence which requires lot of astute, timely and proactive diplomacy to bring all these four countries on the same page to ensure they contest and deny the space to spoilers and extra regional forces or to terrorist outfits.

#### **6.5.6 Andrew Korybko:**

Russia has praised Pakistan's contributions to the war on terror and was so impressed that it even agreed to stage yearly anti-terrorist drills from 2016 onward in one another's mountainous territory (alternating the host country each year). It is also supportive of Pakistan's political contributions to the Afghan peace process, with which it officially cooperates as part of the Enlarged Troika. Additionally, Russia hopes that Pakistan and India can peacefully resolve their dispute over Kashmir, though Moscow considers the issue to be a bilateral one despite its predecessor state of the Soviet Union supporting the respective UNSC resolutions on the matter that de jure multilateralized it while Islamabad regards the dispute as multilateral for that very same UNSC reason. Their disagreement over how to approach the Kashmir Conflict has not impeded their rapid rapprochement in recent years though since they have seemingly decided to compartmentalize it separately from the areas of shared interest that they are cooperating on.

#### **6.6. Question 6:**

How do Pakistan and Russia act on issues of mutual interest at international level such as terrorism, narcotics control and nuclear non-proliferation?

**6.6.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

I think leaving the nuclear non-proliferation aside because Pakistan cannot do much about that. However, the other two fields are very important; terrorism and narcotics control. Russians have a lot of experience in both these fields because they have tackled the twin menaces for a long time. So any cooperation between Russia and Pakistan; Pakistan also has a lot of experience as far as terrorism and narcotics control are concerned. The two countries can collaborate a lot and especially, narcotics, they emanate from Afghanistan and some Central Asian countries. So we are quite close to this region where terrorism and narcotics are prospering or they were prospering. I think with the help of Russia, Pakistan within the country and the countries around can help a lot to overcome narcotics especially and terrorism within our own country especially in Baluchistan.

**6.6.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

We have been cooperating on various issues. As far as nuclear non-proliferation is concerned, let me say very bluntly it is a big farce and fraud for smaller countries. Nobody is talking of Israeli nuclear programme or American nuclear issues; nobody is challenging the Indian nuclear development. You must be knowing a couple weeks ago, there was a big scam of nuclear fuel being stolen or caught in India. Nobody even talked about it whereas we have a secure strategic security system in place, and not a single incident of carelessness, and yet they had been harping the theory of our nuclear weapons falling in the hands of terrorists and what nonsense. So there is a design in it, which is being worked against Pakistan nuclear programme. Russians understand that; they have never even talked about it. As I said nuclear non-proliferation activities are big farce and fraud of the P-5 or the major side countries. It is being applied selectively against Pakistan. It is not being applied against any other country. They could not do much about North Korea even. Why is Pakistan number one on their list? It is a political matter.

**6.6.3. Salman Bashir:**

There is good and close cooperation in multilateral forums on shared global issues.

**6.6.4. Asif Durrani:**

They are, in fact, on the same page. That is a positive sign. At international level and the multilateral level, both Pakistan and China; they are in fact on the same page. Russia, China and Pakistan; this trio is also emerging.



#### **6.6.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

Both countries have been building consistent but gradual cooperation on three issues; terrorism, narcotics control and nuclear non-proliferation, and there is a lot of room for further improvement. Unfortunately, the baggage of history and sometimes limited resources impede maximum development of cooperation in these areas. But I think both countries are very respectful and reciprocate each other's interests and concerns in terms of extremism, terrorism and also drugs. These three issues also reinforce each other because it is the drug money that terrorists use to run their operations and fund their terrorist actions. There is a nexus between drugs trade and terrorism, which both countries recognize. They have also been cooperating at international forums on these issues as well. It was unfortunate that drug trade could not be managed in the last 20 years. It is very important that the international community, including Russia, play their due role in the security, stability and also development and progress of Afghanistan. Because unless development and economic progress of the Afghan nation is ensured by regional countries and also by the international powers, including Russia; only that will disincentive and reduce the space and influence of extremists, terrorists as well as drug traders because if there is no investment from Russia, China, Iran and other countries; not only it will fuel extremist tendencies, it will encourage drug producers and traders to enjoy greater space and opportunity. It will also make it more difficult for the regional countries and international community to expect Afghanistan to return to peace and become a stable and secure state.

#### **6.6.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Russia and Pakistan cooperate through the SCO and have shared interests in Afghanistan through the Enlarged Troika that they also participate in. They are both in support of a two-state solution for Palestine too but have not cooperated towards that end. Russia and Pakistan are against unilateral sanctions and foreign meddling, and they also play important transit roles in China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) through their hosting of the Eurasian Land Bridge and CPEC respectively.

#### **6.7. Data Review:**

This qualitative research is an attempt to explain important developments taken place in the bilateral relationship of Pakistan and Russia in the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to help understand the complex phenomenon of strategic dimensions of Islamabad-Moscow ties. Under the explanatory form of Case Study research design, the data – both secondary and primary – explains as to why and how the two countries are coming closer to each other. The growing India-

US ties and the mutual interest of Pakistan and Russia in various fields provide context to explain the phenomenon.

The developments of bilateral relationship form the secondary source data while the primary source data consists of the opinion of a select group of experts on these developments and other matters of mutual interest between the two countries.

#### **6.7.1. Secondary source data:**

The secondary source data, gathered from newspapers, journals, official statements and books has brought forth the main developments of the bilateral relationship from the 2003 General Pervez Musharraf's visit to Moscow to Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Russia in February 2022. These developments include bilateral exchanges and interactions by the civil and military leadership, cooperation in defence sector and similarity of views and support to each other on various international issues.

The leaderships of the two countries have held many interactions at various levels. However, the top-level exchange of visits and meetings are as under:

- Former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf's visit to Russia in 2003
- Former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov's visit to Pakistan in 2007
- Former President Asif Zardari's visit to Moscow in 2011
- Former Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar's visit to Moscow in 2012
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Islamabad in 2012
- Former Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu's visit to Islamabad in 2014
- Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Islamabad in 2021
- Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Moscow in 2022
- Former Army Chief General (retired) Ashfaq Pervez Kayani's visits to Moscow in 2009 and 2012
- Former Commander-in-Chief of the Ground Forces of the Russian Federation Col. Gen. Vladimir's visit to Pakistan in 2013
- Russian Air Force Chief's visit to Pakistan in 2013
- All the three Commanders-in-Chief of Russia's armed forces visited Pakistan in 2014
- Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General (retired) Raheel Sharif paid a visit to Russia in 2015
- Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Moscow in 2018

Pakistan-Russia signed an agreement of North-South Gas Pipeline project in 2015 for laying gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore. The project, however, could not be implemented and the agreement was signed again in 2021. The bilateral cooperation in defence sector includes:

- Lifting of self-imposed arms sale embargo on Pakistan by Russia in 2014
- Joint military exercises since 2016
- Delivery of four Russian Mi-35 attack helicopters to Pakistan in 2017

The two countries mutually cooperated with each other at various international forums and issues.

- Russia supported Pakistan's application for full membership of SCO
- Russia condemned US forces attack on Pakistani soldiers in Salala in 2011
- Afghanistan issue
- Counter-terrorism efforts
- Russia's silence on Kashmir issue; no support to India's stance
- Russia's no objection over Pakistan's application for membership of Nuclear Suppliers Group

Since the reactivation of the bilateral ties in 2003, the two countries have held interactions at various bilateral forums such as inter-governmental commission, strategic dialogue and political dialogue. The political and military leaderships have exchanged multiple visits. Representatives from the two countries have also attended several multilateral huddles on international issues of mutual interest such as Afghanistan.

These facts and the data cited above indicate that there has been positivity in the bilateral relationship for over two decades. The historical context of the relationship reveals that as compared to the Cold War and the post-Cold War one decade, the relationship has been on the positive trajectory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. At least, the two countries have not worked against each other nor is there any tension in the bilateral relationship. The level of warmth or the pace of improvement in the relationship in two decades can be debated; however, it cannot be stated that they have hostility or enmity against each other as they had in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pakistan's strategy of not being hostile toward Russia despite being part of the US-led war on terror alliance during the first two decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century appears to be a positive shift in the country's foreign policy orientation in a world moving from unipolarity to multipolarity. This has also been reflected in Prime Minister Imran Khan's statements given on different occasions. In his budget speech in the

National Assembly on June 30, 2021, Imran Khan criticized the country’s past policies of joining the US-led war on terror, categorically stating that Pakistan could be partner with the United States in peace but never in conflict. In an interview to a Russian television channel, telecast on February 22, 2022, a day before his two-day visit to Moscow, he stated that Pakistan suffered a lot because of bloc politics, and it would henceforth not become part of any bloc.

**6.7.2. Primary source data:**

A select group of experts on the subject has been interviewed on 12 unstructured questions, and their responses form the primary source data. Six of the questions were based on the areas in which the two countries are cooperating or their interests appear to be converging. The transcript or detailed answer to these six questions has been presented in the preceding pages. Here, short answers or summaries of the answers are being reproduced to draw an understanding and develop a clear picture of the research.

1. Of the question regarding India-US growing ties as a factor for better Russia-Pakistan relationship, four experts have clearly responded in affirmative; one says it could be a factor in “some way but not much,” while another did not clearly address the question in his answer.

| Sr.No. | Response  | Impression |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1.     | A big factor  | Positive   |
| 2.     | Important factor  | Positive   |
| 3.     | India-US partnership not insurmountable impediment for Pak-Russia cooperation                     | Neutral    |
| 4.     | India-US partnership could be some way, but not much.   | Neutral    |
| 5.     | A significant factor  | Positive   |
| 6.     | Impossible to deny that Russia-Pakistan relations improved in parallel with growing India-US ties | Positive   |

2. Three of the six respondents replied that Pakistan and Russia are trying to diversify their foreign policy options by improving ties with each other. Three other persons explained the phenomenon in a different way.

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | A better approach to term diversification in foreign policies of Pakistan and Russia | Positive   |

|    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 2. | Not put it in that way. It is not either or issue. For Russia, it is not between us and India.  | Negative |
| 3. | Russia probably sees merit in Pakistan's strategic location and its constructive role in promoting regional stability                                 | Neutral  |
| 4. | I won't use the term diversify. In fact, you can use the term that now they are in fact strengthening their relationship. It is evolutionary process. | Negative |
| 5. | Moscow wants to reassert itself on world stage. Pakistan is also diversifying its foreign policy options.   | Positive |
| 6. | Both countries want to diversify their partnerships in order to reap more economic dividends  | Positive |

3. Five of the respondents agreed to the viewpoint that interests of Pakistan and Russia converge in Afghanistan, whereas one person opined that the interests of the two countries have similarity, but they are not identical.

| Sr.No. | Response  | Impression |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1.     | A very important convergence  | Positive   |
| 2.     | On a larger perspective, they converge as peaceful and a stable Afghanistan is in the Russian interest and in Pakistan's interest | Positive   |
| 3.     | Restoration of durable peace and stability in Afghanistan is a shared goal.   | Positive   |
| 4.     | I think so. Afghanistan is also factoring in coming closer to each other. Yes, it is contributing.                                | Positive   |
| 5.     | The interests are not identical, but there are similarities of interest   | Neutral    |
| 6.     | The most important common interest that Russia and Pakistan have in Afghanistan is to stop regional terrorist threats             | Positive   |

4. Regarding SCO and CPEC, four interviewees replied that the two countries can enhance their cooperation through these platforms; however, one suggested for waiting until operationalization of CPEC while the other was of the view that Russia would not like to join CPEC fearing deteriorating of ties with India.

| <b>Sr.No.</b> | <b>Response</b>  | <b>Impression</b> |
|---------------|--|-------------------|
| 1.            | This [SCO] can be a very good platform for mutually beneficial economic cooperation.   | Positive          |
| 2.            | These three countries are indirectly already cooperating.  | Positive          |
| 3.            | Absolutely, SCO and CPEC platforms are increasingly important in promoting stability, peace and development in the wider region.   | Positive          |
| 4.            | Let CPEC take off; it is still in the formative stages.  | Neutral           |
| 5.            | The closing proximity of New Delhi and Washington is seen with suspicion both in Beijing and Moscow. That allows Pakistan a greater space and accommodation. ... CPEC can be explored. | Positive          |
| 6.            | Russia is extremely unlikely to participate in any officially CPEC-branded projects out of fear of offending India's sensitivities as was explained above.                             | Negative          |

5. Five interviewees clearly stated that Russia recognizes and appreciates Pakistan's efforts against terrorism; while the other indirectly responded that the two countries can cooperate against terrorists.

| <b>Sr.No.</b> | <b>Response</b>   | <b>Impression</b> |
|---------------|---|-------------------|
| 1.            | Yes, this has been stated also because we have succeeded in overcoming the domestic terrorism to a large extent, and countries all over the world acknowledge that our policy | Positive          |
| 2.            | Russians understand our perspective and they have always agreed with our view of terrorism, and they have always appreciated our role in counter-terrorism in the region.     | Positive          |
| 3.            | Russia is appreciative of Pakistan's role in combating terrorism.   | Positive          |
| 4.            | They are appreciative of Pakistan's efforts.  | Positive          |
| 5.            | There are some areas which can allow both Islamabad and Moscow to build and improve their relations beyond this historical baggage; and that is the common threat of Da'ish.  | Neutral           |

|    |  |          |
|----|--|----------|
| 6. | Russia has praised Pakistan's contributions to the war on terror and was so impressed that it even agreed to stage yearly anti-terrorist drills from 2016 onward | Positive |
|----|--|----------|

6. Two respondents replied in clear words that Russia and Pakistan are cooperating on international issues such as terrorism, narcotics control and nuclear non-proliferation at multilateral forums; four others talked about general bilateral cooperation instead of being specific. However, none of them answered in negative.

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | The two countries can collaborate a lot and especially, narcotics.   | Neutral    |
| 2.     | Russians understand that they have never even talked about Pakistan's nuclear program  | Positive   |
| 3.     | There is good and close cooperation in multilateral forums on shared global issues.  | Neutral    |
| 4.     | They are, in fact, on the same page.   | Positive   |
| 5.     | Both countries have been building consistent but gradual cooperation on three issues; terrorism, narcotics control and nuclear non-proliferation | Positive   |
| 6.     | Russia and Pakistan cooperate through the SCO and have shared interests in Afghanistan through the Enlarged Troika that they also participate in | Neutral    |

#### 6.8. Discourse Analysis:

The secondary source data shows that the leaderships of the two countries have held several interactions since 2003. In this regard, the years 2007 and 2014 have been quite important when the then Russian Prime Minister and the Defence Minister, during their visits to Pakistan, made solid progress respectively. There have been a great many understandings and commitments by the either side for enhanced bilateral cooperation. Particularly since 2010, the progress was comparatively better. Russia's lifting of embargoes on sale of military hardware to Pakistan in 2014, joint military exercises since 2016 and hand over of four attack helicopters can be referred as evidence as relatively better ties.

As far as the data derived from the primary source is concerned, majority of the experts who were interviewed opined that the two countries have common interests in different areas. The

regional realignments, Afghanistan factor, efforts for elimination of terrorism and narcotics control, strategic environment, diversified foreign policy options and the two countries' perspective on various international issues indicate that the bilateral ties are deepening.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **CHALLENGES IN PAK-RUSSIA GROWING TIES**

Following the Soviet disintegration and the Taliban regime in 1990s in Afghanistan, the Pakistan-Russia relationship was reactivated. There was a little progress in the advancement of the bilateral ties in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; however, in the second decade, some improvement was witnessed. Nonetheless, there was no major concrete development that has potential to transform bilateral relationship into a new dimension. Besides a few steps of cooperation in defence sector, the two countries signed North-South Gas Pipeline Project in 2015, but that too could not be implemented; and they again signed the agreement in 2021, renaming the project as Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline. Gradual trust building through exchange of visits is an achievement because there was no mutual trust after the Soviet collapse.

The trajectory of the bilateral relationship does not seem smooth because after two decades of normalization of ties, there is nothing substantial. The main possible factors, causes or challenges in the way of speedy improvement in the bilateral relationship were identified and experts' opinion was sought. The apparent hurdles have been presented in six questions to experts. The responses have been reproduced hereunder.

#### **7.1. Question 1:**

Do you think Pakistan and Russia have buried the Cold War hatchet or the historical baggage of mutual distrust still shadows their advancement in bilateral relations?

##### **7.1.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

We became party to the alliances in the West and then there was a long Cold War; that was a reason and a very close coordination and understanding between Russia and India. We helped Americans in Afghanistan, and that also became one of the reasons for breaking up of Russia. So all these things, there are an array of reasons. That is why there was a mistrust and antagonism between Russia and Pakistan. Now that we have gone very close to China and there is a very close cooperation between Russia and China, and Americans are not very happy with that and we are also not very happy with America. Naturally, the environment is there for us to go closer to Russia. But I think it is our fault that we are still looking at Russia from the prism of India because Russia is still having a lot of good relations with India. But in my opinion, that should not stop us from cultivating our own relationship with Russia because they are much closer to us as compared to

Americans, and also, they are close ally to Chinese, which are our best friend. You must have noticed that announcement has been made that our Prime Minister is going to Russia at the end of this month [February 2022]. I think things are moving in the right direction. But I agree with you that we have been slow. We should have been much agile as far as listening with the Russian concern. We must culture good relations with Russia. We must establish strong relations with Russia. They also need us because they want a North South corridor. They want to come to Central Asian countries and go to warm waters at the Indian Ocean. So I think we must enhance our efforts.

**7.1.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

I think distrust is not finished; it has come to the minimum level because of Pakistan's new foreign policy and new regional environment that has developed, particularly Pakistan's role in the last decade in Afghan war that is now very clear. Pakistan has not worked in any way on a bloc policy after 2010-11. Pakistan is pulling back from power blocs in the world, and that included the Western bloc of the United States. The final factor came when this government took over and Prime Minister Imran Khan very clearly spelled out his policy of priority to the regional countries rather than to the far off overseas countries, and that includes Russia. Pakistan has been extending an olive branch to Russia for last so many years, but Russia was looking on a larger perspective. Mr. Putin is a very shrewd politician. Even this visit of the Prime Minister [Imran Khan]; I am privy to it that it has been tried for the last five to seven years. But the Russians were of the opinion that they would not like to have any visit either from that side or this side as a photo off, rather it should bring out concrete advantages or outcome of that visit, which we hope this time it will be. Therefore, that hatchet has almost been buried unless somebody, we or the Russians, prove otherwise.

**7.1.3. Salman Bashir:**

Pakistan-Russia relations have been on an upward trajectory since the end of the Cold War. Recent years have witnessed a marked improvement in nearly all spheres of cooperation. Both countries have built trust based on similarity of interests and views on regional and global situation.

**7.1.4. Asif Durrani:**

It is an evolving relationship. Russia itself came out of the shadows of the former Soviet Union. It was a superpower of its time and then somehow Soviet Union got fizzled out into fifteen states. Still Russia is militarily a formidable power and it has almost matching number of nuclear arsenal as far the United States is concerned. It is the legatee of the veto power; from Soviet Union

it transferred to Russia. There has been some baggage of the past. Of course, it is quite inherent in the system. President Putin recently talked about the breakup of the Soviet Union and he considered it as the most unfortunate event and a blender. President Putin is reasserting himself ever since he has come to power. I think Russia has attained stability in its polity, even if the West may criticize Russia for being more autocratic. They are being accused of human rights violations; but for Russia, their economic stability is of prime importance. They have taken measures in order to “correct the mistakes of the past,” which is why you would see Russia's drift with Georgia and Ukraine.

I am saying this first just to make a preface that how and in which direction Russia is moving. The United States and Russia already they have initially they had some bonhomie during Boris Yeltsin time, but subsequently, when Putin came to power so there have been tensions between the two countries. The United States has imposed sanctions on Russia in primary and secondary sanctions. These sanctions are in the energy sector and in some great areas. These sanctions are on Russian government personalities. Of course, Russia is also reciprocating; it has imposed those sanctions. The cumulative effect is that there is tension. At the same time, Americans are also wary of Russia coming closer to China. And then there is a new wave of cold war between the United States and China. So that is causing problems again at the regional and international level. In this milieu when we look at Russia and the Russia-US relationship, tension is formidable, but since both are nuclear powers, so they are maintaining a balance. Still, they are continuing with enhancing their influence.

Now coming to Pakistan, we have now the breakup of Russia; almost it completed three decades ago. And they have seen ups and downs both in the social, political and economic terms.

Still, Russia is in terms of economy it is almost 1.7 trillion dollars economy. You can say that it is one third of American economy and in terms of comparison with China; so again, it is almost one eighth of the Chinese economy. Still Russia's importance is because of its military prowess. Russia is still the largest supplier of military hardware to India. Almost sixty seven percent of Indian military hardware comprises Russian armaments, weapons and equipment. Recently, they signed rather delivered S-400 ballistic missile defence systems.

It is an evolving relationship; and that hatchet when you look at the hatchet, then that is not so pronounced, but Russians have themselves said that they will take time to come closer to Pakistan. They are also mindful of their relationship with India, which is quite formidable. Now

you have seen that Indians are coming closer to the United States. They have become strategic partners, and India has, in fact, in terms of Russian armament, they have reduced the number of imports of Russian armament. They have increased their imports from the United States. In 2000, India's weapon imports from the United States were zero, but in 2020, those increased to \$20 billion per annum. So it is a big leap, and it is likely to go on in future, which looks that gradually Indians would phase out the Russian armament with Americans. That is the source of concern for the Russians also, which I think they have demonstrated, which is why that they opened up a little bit to Pakistan, which is why that we could get Mi-17. We are also a candidate to get SU-35 from Russia. They have not come back to us on that and it is ongoing process; it takes time. Of course, the two countries have come closer because of certain common interests, including counter-terrorism. There is, in fact, a working group between the two countries on counter-terrorism. There is also a dialogue going on between the two countries, and they have already signed many MoUs with regard to scientific cooperation, cooperation in agriculture and industry. Exports are low between the two countries. There are host of reasons. For instance, the flights and connectivity is a problem between the two countries. Banking system is another issue, which are in fact not proper between the two countries. Then there are high tariffs which are applied by the two countries; then Russia is following strict visa regime for the traders, which is a discouraging aspect, and there are no direct passenger or cargo flights; and lastly is the long shipment period. These are the factors which are not contributing positively towards enhanced trade between the two countries. Nevertheless, there are tremendous opportunities as well as trade is concerned, and Russians are quite optimistic and enthusiastic about that. More importantly, just a couple of months ago, Pakistan and Russia signed the north-south pipeline agreement. It is close to \$3 billion, and this in fact is the ice breaker and it has opened up new vistas of economic cooperation between the two countries.

#### **7.1.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

Three factors have influenced Pak-Russia relations – strategic culture, geo-political and geo-economics. In terms of strategic culture for the last 70 years, most of the debate focuses on either the post-Soviet Union Russia or the Soviet Union or the czarist Russia. But essentially what we see today is a revival of the nationalist Russian thought, which seeks to recover from the age of humiliation which they consider the unipolar era and revive their prestige and influence in the international system. In this context, they have yet to completely recover from their experience,

which shapes their perception toward Pakistan because Pakistan has been a close ally of the US during the SEATO, CENTO era in which Pakistan offered Badaber base or eavesdropping inside Soviet Union which led to direct threat given to Pakistan and the second stage in which Pakistan was a key ally of the US in the Afghan Jihad. This strategic culture of Russia does not forgive its adversaries very easily. The second factor is geopolitics, and Russia sees some transformation in the geopolitics of this region as well as some changes in the world order, which makes it consider improvement of bilateral ties with Pakistan in Moscow's national interest. And the main reason is because New Delhi is also becoming close to Washington. So, it also forces Moscow to hedge its options and diversify its relations in order to ensure a balanced approach toward its relations and influence within South Asia because the engagement with Islamabad is not only meant to cultivate Islamabad as a strategic ally but to also ensure that the US does not enjoy exceptional influence within the South Asian region. It wants to balance US growing influence within South Asia by counterbalancing Indo-US relations by developing better relations if not equally close relations with Islamabad as well. Now comes the third; the geo-economics factor. Obviously, India provides one of the largest markets to Moscow particularly for its defence industry, not just the largest but also one of its oldest markets. And despite close relations between Washington and New Delhi, Indian Army, Navy and Air Force and also their space programme continue to heavily rely on equipment and weapon systems of Russian origin not just in terms of market but also in terms of future joint production projects as well. It would be useful for you to know that despite the Indo-US nuclear deal signed between New Delhi and Washington 14 years ago, India will acquire another nuclear-powered submarine from Moscow very soon. This indicates that despite close relations between Washington and New Delhi, India is reluctant to reduce the history and the proximity of its relations with Moscow. And that also provides Moscow sustainable long-term market for its defence industry. Unfortunately, because of Pakistan's economic challenges, Pakistan has not been able to benefit extensively from operation in the defence sector with Moscow because Moscow looks at its defence exports; also from its economic aspect unlike China and other countries which might provide some financing facilities because they will expect hard cash in return for whatever equipment Pakistan is willing to buy. In fact in the last visit of Foreign Minister Lavrov, he mentioned that Pakistan can buy anything that they want but it is up to Pakistan to decide what they could afford it or not.

#### **7.1.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Yes, they certainly have buried the hatchet, at least on the official level. In terms of civil and elite society, however, not everyone might have moved on. The memory of the 1980s Afghan War still lingers on these levels, which third parties like the US and India can take advantage of in Pakistan and Russia respectively. Nevertheless, policy in both countries is formulated by their permanent military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracies (“deep state”) and doesn't take public opinion into account, nor should it considering the national security priorities at play in their relations. That's not to say that their people are against their relations, but just that the state is leading the way in the hopes that the rest of society will eventually follow with time if relations succeed in diversifying beyond energy and security cooperation like optimists expect.

#### **7.2. Question 2:**

What is Russia's perspective on Pakistan's nuclear programme and its nuclear doctrine?

##### **7.2.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

I think they are not much worried about Pakistan's nuclear programme because China is supportive of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine and Pakistan's nuclear program. They have a close relationship with China. On this strategic matter, which is a political strategic matter, they have not said anything before. Of course, initially about 10 years back when they had very close relations with India, they were against our atomic programme and they were against our blasts. But today, I would say that they have no concerns as far as Pakistan's nuclear policy is concerned.

##### **7.2.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

Russia has no issue with our nuclear strategic orientation as well as our strategic capability because they understand our logic or our reasons for becoming a nuclear state. It is not in any way against Russia or its interests; they understand that. We have defence-oriented strategic plan and strategic regime, which has nothing to do with Russia. The Americans have been after our nuclear programme; this is not a hidden secret or something because they feel threatened with Pakistan's potential to harm its interests in the region, and particularly now India is their strategic partner; they are singing the song that Indians sing. Whereas Pakistan has always declared that there has to be any move against nuclear proliferation, it should be in regional dimension. India and Pakistan could jointly work on that. But Americans do not utter a word about the Indian nuclear programme whereas they are tooth and nail against our program. Therefore, Russians have no interest or comments on this programme because they understand our compulsions. They also understand

that this programme has nothing to do in hampering or harming the Russian interests in the region or anywhere else.

#### **7.2.3. Salman Bashir:**

Russia, it seems, has no apprehension about Pakistan's nuclear program. On the contrary, there could be cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear technology.

#### **7.2.4. Asif Durrani:**

Russia did go according to the international mode; they would express their concern. But at the same time, Russians have not been that skeptical; they would realize that our nuclear programme was in reaction to what India did in the region. We only restored the strategic balance, which was disturbed due to India's action. I think they are appreciative of that; at the same time, they are also appreciative of Pakistan's measures taken for the safety of its nuclear program. By and large, I think Russians understand our position.

#### **7.2.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

When it comes to Pakistan's nuclear program, then Russia has no concerns regarding Pakistan's nuclear program. In fact, Pakistan and Russia have been exploring opportunities as part of their bilateral strategic dialogues to build some cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. And Pakistan has considered that in future there should be some possible cooperation between the two countries. However, there is a hurdle which is that Pakistan is seeking the membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Pakistan as a first step expects Russian support for Pakistan NSG membership. Pakistan and India both are applicants, and if both become members, we will be able to enjoy cooperation with 47 other countries, including Russia to benefit from nuclear technology or peaceful purpose. As far as nuclear doctrine is concerned, I have not come across any specific statement of concern from Russia because Pakistan's nuclear doctrine's key elements are very clearly and consistently articulated for the past 24 years; which are essentially three; (i) Pakistan's nuclear deterrence is a factor of shabbily in the region; (ii) it is meant to prevent any type of aggression against Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity and it is primarily aimed at deterring India; (iii) Pakistan's another important principle of its nuclear policy is that it strongly adheres to non-proliferation principles, which means that we will not share its nuclear technology, know-how, equipment or weapon system with any country under any conditions. So Pakistan's long-standing non-proliferation commitment and Indo-centric nature of its doctrine

ensure that Pakistan's nuclear programme does not post any threat and should not be a source of concern for anyone. And Russia understands this.

**7.2.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Russia is against nuclear proliferation but tacitly acknowledges Pakistan's status as a nuclear power. It presumably takes note of Islamabad's defensive nuclear doctrine too.

**7.3.Question 3:**

Historically, Russia has been supporting India on Kashmir issue. New Delhi has been accusing Pakistan of backing the freedom fighters in Kashmir. Do you think Kashmir issue or Pakistan's alleged support to the freedom fighters in Kashmir impedes advancement in Pakistan-Russia ties?

**7.3.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

I do not think so, though we will not get any support as far as Kashmir is concerned from Russians at least for some time. Actually, that is one of the reasons that we must have strong relations with Russia because may be with the passage of time, we can change their mind. It all depends. We all understand. It all depends on the interest of the countries and it is not a moral stance or something. So as we cultivate stronger relations with Russia and India keeps on going closer to America, I think time might come that Russians might become so close with Pakistan that they might help us in the resolution of Kashmir and they may support us our stance on Kashmir. But for the time being, I think we should not demand and we should not ask Russians any support on Kashmir because presently it cannot come.

**7.3.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

Russia for some time has been quiet on the Kashmir issue vis a vis India. I do not remember any important statement from the Russians on Kashmir issue. They have sort of gone quiet on the issue, and it will not become an impediment between Pakistan and Russia as long as Pakistan does not ask Russia to take side. Bilateral policies should remain bilateral. We should not ask Russia to design its policies in our interest; they should not ask us to design our policies in their interest. They should be mutually beneficial and the third country relationship should remain bilateral between both the countries. So, I do not think Kashmir will become an issue.

**7.3.3. Salman Bashir:**

Kashmir issue is not a factor in Pakistan-Russia relations.



#### **7.3.4. Asif Durrani:**

I think states have their own interests. Russians would not comment on that, but at the same time, they would encourage both India and Pakistan to resolve their disputes amicably through dialogue. This has been the position of the Russians. But at the same time, when it was Soviet Union after 1954 when Pakistan joined SEATO and then in 1955 CENTO, then the former Soviet Union in fact openly sided with the Indian position on Kashmir. But subsequently, now Russia, they have not said anything about it. They have maintained near neutral stance on the Kashmir dispute. But when you talk about terrorism, then Indians in fact manipulate the language in bilateral statements. They interpret that the two countries, when they talk about terrorism, cooperation or condemnation. So, condemnation of terrorism, they in fact equate it with Pakistan. That's a wrong interpretation, but that is what Indians try to interpret things to their advantage. But I do not think that Russia is openly supporting Indian instance on terrorism. They are maintaining neutrality, which is good for us.

#### **7.3.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

Pakistan's long-standing position on Kashmir has been that we stand by the UN resolutions, and we are extending our political, diplomatic and moral support to Kashmiris in their own just and UN-recognized struggle for their independence as defined by the UN Security Council resolutions. Our diplomatic and moral support is primarily aimed at helping them get their right which UN and international community has promised them to hold plebiscite in Kashmir, which allows them the right to decide their future. If the Kashmiris, particularly in the "Indian illegally occupied Jammu and Kashmir territory," decide that they want to resort to use of force for protection of their life, honor and property; and to seek their independence from the Indian oppression and occupation, then that is their individual right which is also recognized according to international law against a foreign occupying force.

#### **7.3.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Officially speaking, Pakistani support of Kashmir is strictly political though there have been a lot of reports for quite some time that it occasionally provides other forms of support as well. Even so, Islamabad doesn't agree with New Delhi's accusations that it supports jihadi elements in any way since it regards the groups that it extends political backing to as freedom fighters. As for Russia's stance towards all of this, it is of course against Pakistan or India supporting armed groups in the parts of Kashmir under the other's control but it wouldn't ever

publicly criticize New Delhi despite Islamabad's accusations that it's guilty of this and purported proof in its possession to that end. Nonetheless, because Russian-Pakistani relations are primarily guided at this moment by their shared security concerns stemming from Afghan-emanating threats and then secondly by energy and connectivity cooperation, Moscow doesn't let the unresolved Kashmir Conflict and its many complicated dimensions interfere in its bilateral relations with either Islamabad since it hopes to have pragmatic ties with it and doesn't want that issue spoiling this.

#### **7.4. Question 4:**

Do you think Russia's preferred defence relations with India become an obstacle in the growth of Islamabad-Moscow ties?

##### **7.4.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

I think it should not because Americans are also giving arms to India and the UK is also giving arms to India. And we are still having relations with them. So Russians are giving arms to Turkey also, which is our friend. Just import and export of arms should not become an impediment between the relations and we should not think in that way. Russians definitely will never think on those lines.

##### **7.4.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

No I do not think. Firstly, Pakistan has diversified its defence requirements from solely being US or West based to wide spectrum of countries with which we are cooperating. We are cooperating with Turkey, China and other countries also. We have stopped our dependence on the West. As far as India is concerned, it has also diversified on a very big way, and Indians have lost their position to blackmail the Russians vis a vis Pakistan. They have been blackmailing the Russians for the sale of any defence equipment to Pakistan. About four years ago, Russians gave us Mi-35 gunship helicopters against the Indian sort of objections. After the Indian strategic alliance with the United States, the Russians do not see Indian sort of blackmail or something to look up to and they are going to have independent policies vis a vis Pakistan.

##### **7.4.3. Salman Bashir:**

No longer.

#### **7.4.4. Asif Durrani:**

I do not think so. We should not forget that Russia now has over seven decades of cooperation, and we had nothing. We should not be linking it. There is no linkage. They already had that relationship.

#### **7.4.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

India's preferred and strong defence relations with Russia definitely have an impact on the slow progress in Pakistan-Russia defence relations. Russian Foreign Office and defence industry are deeply conscious of their interest in maintaining India as a large growing and long-term defence market and the recent sale of S-400 Missile System, the negotiations regarding future acquisition of S-500 and acquisition of Russian nuclear submarine indicate that Indian dependence on Russian defence equipment in Army, Navy and Air Force is growing. In Indian Army, 70-80 percent equipment is of Russian origin. In Air Force, their frontline fighters are being produced under license in India under Russian support and facilities. Although Americans have been offering them specialized F-16, but they rejected that. If you come to Navy, most of their aircraft, including aircraft carrier and warships, are primarily of Russian origin. Their surface to surface missiles, sub-surface to surface and air to surface have been developed with Russian assistance. And last their space programme, Russia is heavily cooperating with India because Russia also offers cost effective launch facilities, which by the way Pakistan can also explore. As for defence cooperation with Pakistan, that is actually the intent or the signal from Moscow. Pakistan also wants to diversify its options in terms of defence supplies. But that is not easy. Right now, Pakistan is not using any major weapon system of Russian origin in Navy, Air Force or Army. There are also issues of culture, transfer of technology, training; and also that system needs to be integrated with other systems as well. It is only dependent on money or politics but there are technical limitations. Let me give you example of JF-17 Thunder, which Pakistan has developed with the help of Chinese. The design is Pakistani, but it was developed in China. The airframe is being built in Pakistan. Avionics and radar system are of Chinese origin, but the engine is of Russian origin. So in future, Pakistan Air Force or aerospace development; I think Pakistan could explore the possibilities of some direct bilateral adventure or acquisition or joint production of more advanced engines. Pakistan can perhaps benefit from cooperation in also R&E, training of scientists and engineers in metallurgy, avionics, radar technology, engine development, missile development and other aspects of aerospace industry. Pakistan Air Force, in particular, has been a very agile and prudent

service. Because after the 1990 position of US Pressler Amendment sanctions, Pakistan Air Force was a worse hit. That made the Air Force realize that it needs to reduce its dependence on one single source of technology, and that led to the idea that you see manifested in JF-17 Thunder. And that idea is still there; and that is why we are acquiring J-10C from China. J-10 also has a Russian engine, but we expect that China will perhaps develop a better engine. Perhaps more so in aerospace sector, there are areas in which both countries can explore for close cooperation for mutual benefit of the two countries.

#### **7.4.6. Andrew Korybko:**

At the moment, neither Russia nor Pakistan officially regards their relationship as being strategic even though there are unquestionably strategic dimensions to it concerning their political and security cooperation in the face of Afghan-emanating threats. Having clarified that, Russia reaffirmed on several occasions that its incipient defence cooperation with Pakistan is not aimed against India. That's why it has thus far mostly remained within the realm of anti-terrorist equipment and not anything more significant that could drastically affect the balance of power between those South Asian states. That might change like everything else depending on the US-shaped regional strategic dynamics such as if Western companies continue to cut into Russia's dominant position in India's arms marketplace, especially if their wares greatly upset the balance of power, but it would probably still take some time to play out in any case and thus won't happen anytime soon.

#### **7.5. Question 5:**

Do you think Pakistan's historical defence ties with the United States and growing Pakistan-China strategic cooperation have any negative impact on the Islamabad-Moscow ties?

##### **7.5.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

It is possible because a thing which is available from China and we go to Russia to purchase it, probably they will mind it. But there is something which is Russian specialty which is not available in China, then probably they will not mind it. As far our historical relationship with China and America is concerned, you know with America, we have a checkered history. At times, they were good to us. At times, they were very bad to us. At times, they were neutral to us. China has been our friend throughout. There is no negativity in the entire history of Pak-China friendship. There can be some slowing down and some fast track, but it never happened that there was total cold shoulder being given by either of the two sides. So China is much more reliable as compared

to America. And now that Russia has come very close to China, it is natural for us to have better relations with Russians also irrespective whether somebody minds it or not. But of course, we have to keep the Chinese on board. Our relationship with Russia should not transcend our relations with China. China-Pakistan relationship should remain our priority and everything else should be later on.

#### **7.5.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

For a quite some time, Pak-US military relations or that equipment that we had been buying from the United States has been diluted to a large extent by our diversification project plus our indigenous production because all the American equipment that was given had conditions attached to it and very high prices also; difficult to maintain also. We learned our lesson in the 1990s when we went under sanctions and Pakistan had very difficult time maintaining the American equipment. I do not think it will have any impact on Moscow-Islamabad defence ties because Pakistan is no more dependent on US military equipment or military cooperation with the United States. The Pakistan-Russia defence cooperation would be almost independent of Pak-US defence cooperation. If there be a condition by the Americans in that context, I am afraid we will have to take tough decision in that context also, and should take tough decision. We cannot be blackmailed by a country for a couple of helicopters or a couple of planes.

I do not think that China will mind it. Russia and China are already collaborating. Please understand it is not either or strategy that Pakistan is following or will follow. We will continue to get our cooperation with China while we will also increase our cooperation with Russia. It is not that we go to Russia, we will stop or reduce cooperation with the Chinese. We are now in a very active collaboration with Turkish military also in helicopter and aircraft manufacturing etc. Therefore, I do not think Chinese will look at it. Chinese are very sharp and pragmatic people. We cannot just imagine how they think. In any case, Pakistan's defence cooperation with China is not of quantum or the amount of money that is exchanging that it would affect Chinese economy or their defence industry or something like that whereas Pakistan militarily continues to cooperate with China on bilateral plane, also on the SCO plane. Therefore, I do not think that China will have any issue of our any cooperation with Moscow.

#### **7.5.3. Salman Bashir:**

No. Times have changed.

#### **7.5.4. Asif Durrani:**

Russia and China are equally friendly countries. Their relationship has grown from strength to strength; that should complement Pakistan. I wish we could emulate the Chinese way of conducting diplomacy. They are very mature people. Chinese themselves have defence relationship with Russia and we also have a very strong relationship with China. Russians are not overnight jumping to replace the governance system in Pakistan. Moreover, big wars are out of question when countries become nuclear. There could be some pinpricks; there could be some proxy operations, but not direct confrontations. Therefore, we should be mindful of the fact that Pakistan is a nuclear power; so, no countries are going to take liberty whatsoever. They should source of solace and comfort. For me, progressing in the economic sphere would be of more importance than the military because ultimately it is your economic muscle that also contributes to strengthening of your defence muscles.

#### **7.5.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

We should not see these relations in zero sum perspective. It is always useful to diversify your sources of technology. In that context, India itself is a good example. It has American weapon system, but it still has heavy reliance on Russian equipment. China itself has benefited from the Russian defence industry. Although their defence industry is trying to develop new engines, but most of their engines are still coming from Russia. Considering the world trend in geopolitics, China and Russia might even improve and expand their defence cooperation. I see possibility of increasing defence cooperation between China and Russia; and in that context, Pakistan as well.

#### **7.5.6. Andrew Korybko:**

Not at all. Russia and China are comprehensive strategic partners so Moscow doesn't regard any of Beijing's ties with third countries as threatening or an obstacle to its own cooperation with those states. If anything, the closeness of Chinese-Pakistani and Chinese-Russian relations implies that China would actually welcome two of its closest strategic partners cooperating with one another in the hope that this could strengthen trilateral cooperation between them all, especially in Afghanistan.

Islamabad wants to avoid returning to the prior position of perceived disproportionate strategic dependence on the US. It is for that reason why it's so actively diversifying its relations with Great Powers like Russia. Pakistan has demonstrated that it is behaving increasingly independently, especially after Prime Minister Imran Khan's refusal to host US bases after America's impending withdrawal from Afghanistan by September 11<sup>th</sup>. The historical American

factor doesn't negatively affect Russian-Pakistani relations in the present day, especially since the latter's improvement also doesn't have any seriously negative consequences for the US.

#### **7.6. Question 6:**

Do you consider Pakistan's weak economic condition as a constraint to enhance defence cooperation with Russia?

##### **7.6.1. Naeem Khalid Lodhi:**

We know that the Russians themselves, they do not have a very strong economy and not so far. So, I think it will be not very logical to expect Russia to give us things or loan on deferred payments. For the time being, it seems that it is not easy for us to buy very expensive equipment like S-400, etc.; but we can negotiate with them that if they are ready to give us on deferred payment, we can have some mutual understanding that we can give them passage. So, there are better ways and means of overcoming this problem. If we really want S-400, we can always get it; definitely on cash payment. It will be very difficult because we are short of money and short of cash, but I am sure of other ways of doing that.

##### **7.6.2. Asif Yasin Malik:**

I do not think Pakistan is interested in S-400. We have robust anti-aircraft defence mechanism in place. It will be counter-productive if the Indians have S-400 and we also have S-400; and it will not be economically suitable purchase for us. Maybe I may be wrong, but my opinion is that Pakistan is not interested in any strategic military cooperation with Russia. We are interested in sort of other things; we may buy aircraft or gunship helicopters something like that. I do not think it will be an economic constraint on us because one; the Russian equipment is not exorbitantly expensive as the Western equipment is, and two, that is a catch in our developing relations with Russia that they may be financing those deals on a delayed payment or something like that. We do not expect to have a free lunch but definitely there are mechanisms that larger countries can help smaller countries economically while giving them defence equipment.

##### **7.6.3. Salman Bashir:**

Weak economic conditions and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures are probably impediments.

##### **7.6.4. Asif Durrani:**

No, we do not have that money. Economic muscles do matter. That is the most important factor. Even the Americans would be ready to sell you nuclear technology provided we pay them

cash. So, you have to build your economic muscles. For instance, we took almost more than a decade to sign an agreement on north-south pipeline because of lack of investment available. If you build up your economic muscles; the whole world would rush to you.

#### **7.6.5. Syed Muhammad Ali:**

When you talk about defence equipment, there are three considerations for any country in the choice of weapon system. One is obviously the economic issue that you mentioned; whether we can afford it or not. Second is technical feasibility and third is how effective it is. For Pakistan to acquire a major Russian weapon system like S-400, I do not think that it will be considered very favorably in Pakistan for two reasons. First, India has already acquired it. The norm in international defence cooperation is that if your adversary has acquired it; out of ethics, you would not offer it to that adversary. Secondly, they have acquired it, they have greater experience of using it. The technical aspect is very important and I would give you the example of S-400 induction by Turkey. Why America is so worried about it? It is because if Turkey operationalizes S-400; for repair and maintenance, they will still depend on Russia. Turkey is a member of the NATO and it has American forces deployed in Turkey. It has nuclear weapons deployed in Turkey. All that operational data, which will be stored in computer and radar systems; if Russians come, it will be accessible to them; so, the Americans are sensitive of that. The same thing is with India. On January 29, 2022, in the State Department briefing, the question was raised how does the US view acquisition of S-400 by India. The answer was obviously diplomatic, but it was not favorable because they have identical concerns toward India. If Indian air defence system is still heavily dependent on Russian radars, computers, data linkages and weapon systems; and the American data, servers and radar; all their activity will be recorded and all their frequencies will be monitored by the Russian system. That is a huge vulnerability that Americans identify. I am giving that example because that is a similar concern for Pakistan as well. I do not think Pakistan will try to acquire a weapon system which is already in service in India. If we try to explore some weapon system, it might be other than what the Indians already have. It can be SU-35, MIG-35 or S-500. As for funds, some arrangement can be explored for that. We are already getting J-10Cs from China, which is quite expensive weapons system. I think in terms of aerospace, Pakistan Air Force is strictly following a policy of indigenization. There is a very significant possibility that in future, as part of project Azm, we might develop our own fifth generation fighter; and obviously we are looking for technical cooperation from other countries.



### **7.7. Data Review:**

The journey of Pakistan-Russia relations is not smooth. The Cold War animosity, Pakistan's alliance with the West during the Cold War, Soviet Union's support to India in the wars with Pakistan, Pakistan's role in the first Afghan war leading to disintegration of the USSR, and Pakistan's joining to the US-led war on terror form the major portion of the Islamabad-Moscow ties. India's close, traditional and strategic partnership with Russia cannot be set aside while studying Islamabad-Moscow ties. Normalization of ties during the Cold War period was short-lived, and the relationship again turned cold. However, construction of Pakistan Steel Mills in Karachi stands a symbol of bilateral cooperation.

#### **7.7.1. Secondary source data:**

The secondary source data about the questions implying challenges or obstructions in growth of bilateral ties over the past two decades indicates that there is no reversal or deterioration of ties. However, it can also not be denied that progress in expansion of the ties is very slow. We have a period of two decades of normal relationship, but we do not have any major agreements, deals or initiatives of mutual cooperation between the two countries. In 2012, it was reported that President Putin would visit Pakistan, but the visit could not be materialized. The two countries signed North South Gas Pipeline project in 2015, but it could not be implemented. Islamabad and Moscow have no hostility against each other, but it also appears that they are not heading boldly towards improving their ties. The traditional relationship of Pakistan with Washington and of Russia with India is still very important for both Islamabad and Moscow. It is out of question that Pakistan or Russia is going to find its new ally or replace the existing one; i.e., the United States and India respectively.

#### **7.7.2. Primary source data:**

In a bid to understand and explain this complex phenomenon, experts were interviewed on 12 questions – six showing possibilities of enhancement of ties while six others identifying factors that appear to be impeding progress or making the pace slow. The experts' answers to the six questions that reflect a sense of challenges in improvement of the bilateral relationship have already been narrated in detail in this chapter; however, in the following lines, their summary is being presented for drawing a clearer picture.

1. To a question whether the Cold War antagonism and distrust are still impacting the bilateral relationship, two of the six experts were of the view that the two countries have built trust

burying the past hatchet and there is marked improvement in the bilateral relations during the recent years. Three were of the view that the distrust has reduced, but not yet finished; and they are slowly moving ahead. One described it as “evolving relationship.”

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | There was a mistrust and antagonism between Russia and Pakistan. Now that we have gone very close to China and there is a very close cooperation between Russia and China. | Neutral    |
| 2.     | I think distrust is now not finished; it has come to the minimum level.  | Neutral    |
| 3.     | Both countries have built trust based on similarity of interests and views on regional and global situation.   | Positive   |
| 4.     | It is an evolving relationship. ... There has been some baggage of the past. Of course, it is quite inherent in the system.  | Neutral    |
| 5.     | This strategic culture of Russia does not forgive its adversaries very easily.   | Negative   |
| 6.     | Yes, they certainly have buried the hatchet, at least on the official level.   | Positive   |

- Four of the six respondents clearly stated that Russia has no concerns with Pakistan’s nuclear programme and the nuclear doctrine. One stated that Russia understands Pakistan’s position of balancing strategic deterrence in the region after the Indian nuclear programme; while another was of the view that Russia is against proliferation, but it tacitly acknowledges Pakistan’s status as a nuclear power.

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | They have no concerns as far as Pakistan’s nuclear policy is concerned.                        | Positive   |
| 2.     | Russia has no issue with our nuclear strategic orientation as well as our strategic capability | Positive   |
| 3.     | Russia, it seems, has no apprehension about Pakistan’s nuclear program.                        | Positive   |
| 4.     | I think Russians understand our position.  | Neutral    |

|    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 5. | I think Russians understand our position.   | Neutral  |
| 6. | Russia is against nuclear proliferation but tacitly acknowledges Pakistan's status as a nuclear power | Positive |

3. Two experts opined that Kashmir is not a factor in Pakistan-Russia relationship, while two others stated that Russia has not commented on Kashmir issue for quite some time. Another one said that Moscow would not like let Kashmir issue interfere in the bilateral relationship, while another one did not directly answer the question.

| Sr.No. | Response  | Impression |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1.     | I do not think so, though we will not get any support as far as Kashmir is concerned from Russians at least for some time.  | Positive   |
| 2.     | They have sort of gone quiet on the issue, and it will not become an impediment between Pakistan and Russia as long as Pakistan does not ask Russia to take side.               | Neutral    |
| 3.     | Kashmir issue is not a factor in Pakistan-Russia relations.   | Positive   |
| 4.     | I do not think that Russia is openly supporting Indian instance on terrorism. They are maintaining neutrality, which is good for us.  | Neutral    |
| 5.     | Pakistan's diplomatic and moral support is primarily aimed at helping them get their right which UN and international community has promised them to hold plebiscite in Kashmir | Neutral    |
| 6.     | Moscow doesn't let the unresolved Kashmir Conflict and its many complicated dimensions interfere in its bilateral relations with either Islamabad                               | Neutral    |

4. One respondent said that Russia's preferred defence cooperation with India has an impact on Islamabad-Moscow defence cooperation. Three experts gave opinion contrary to that. One of them viewed that it should not be; while another quoted Russia as having stated that its defence cooperation with India is not aimed against Pakistan.

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | Russians definitely will never think on those lines. | Positive   |
| 2.     | No I do not think.                                   | Positive   |

|    |   |          |
|----|---|----------|
| 3. | No longer.  | Neutral  |
| 4. | I do not think so.  | Positive |
| 5. | India's preferred and strong defence relations with Russia definitely have an impact on the slow progress in Pakistan-Russia defence relations. | Negative |
| 6. | Russia reaffirmed on several occasions that its incipient defence cooperation with Pakistan is not aimed against India.                         | Neutral  |

5. Referring to Pakistan's policy of diversification in purchase of military equipment rather than depending only on the United States and the strong Russia-China relationship, three analysts were of the view that Islamabad's traditional defence ties with Washington and strategic partnership with China will not have any impact on Pakistan-Russia defence cooperation. One, however, was of the view that China would mind it if Pakistan goes to Russia to purchase military equipment that is available with China. Another one opined that we should not see the relationship in zero sum perspective. Another one was of view that "times have changed."

| Sr.No. | Response   | Impression |
|--------|--|------------|
| 1.     | It is possible because a thing which is available from China and we go to Russia to purchase it, probably they will mind it.   | Negative   |
| 2.     | I do not think China will mind it. Russia and China are already collaborating. Please understand it is not either or strategy that Pakistan is following or will follow. | Positive   |
| 3.     | No. Times have changed.  | Positive   |
| 4.     | Russia and China are equally friendly countries. Their relationship has grown from strength to strength; that should complement Pakistan.                                | Neutral    |
| 5.     | We should not see these relations in zero sum perspective.   | Neutral    |
| 6.     | Not at all.  | Positive   |

6. Three experts stated that economic constraints of Pakistan could not become any impediment in enhancement of bilateral defence cooperation as some mechanism can be developed for it and funds can be arranged. Two others gave a totally opposite viewpoint

saying that economy is the most important factor in this regard. This question was not put to the sixth one.

| Sr.No. | Response  | Impression |
|--------|---|------------|
| 1.     | It will be very difficult because we are short of money and short of cash, but I am sure of other ways of doing that. | Negative   |
| 2.     | I do not think it will be an economic constraint on us  | Positive   |
| 3.     | Weak economic conditions and cumbersome bureaucratic procedures are probably impediments.                             | Negative   |
| 4.     | No, we do not have that money. Economic muscles do matter.  | Positive   |
| 5.     | As for funds, some arrangement can be explored for that.  | Positive   |

#### 7.8. Discourse Analysis:

The evidence of non-implementation of any major project of Islamabad-Moscow cooperation or any breakthrough in the ties over the past two decades suggests that all is not well. There must have been some issues that hindered the pace of progress. The experts, who were interviewed, were also of the view that the path of progress is not smooth. It is important that the mistrust of the Cold War period has not yet been completely overcome. During the past two decades, the two countries had a lot of opportunities of interactions and they also gained, though little, out of them. However, at the same time, it can also be stated that the gain is not of the nature that can give a totally new shape to the relationship. Economic interests of Pakistan and Moscow attached with their traditional allies – the United States and India respectively – cannot be set aside. Both Pakistan and Russia are not strong economies; and the latter is not in the position to economically help the former. Pakistan's military imports from China are another important point to mention here. If Pakistan imports its defence hardware from Russia directly, it might have negative implications for Pakistan-China relationship. While India's defence cooperation with Russia is another important aspect of the issue, majority of the analysts were of the view that it might not have any negative impact on the Islamabad-Moscow ties.

There are difference challenges in the Pakistan-Russia ties, which might have a little impact on the pace of the progress. However, the primary source suggests that there is not a single challenge that can stop the progress.



## CONCLUSION

With the reemergence of Russia as a great power and China's strong economy, the world order has been in a process of transition from unipolarity to multipolarity. China's containment seems to be the primary objective of the United States in Asia. On the other hand, China and Russia that are strengthening their bilateral relations have been pursuing the foreign policy priorities aimed at breaking the US hegemony. While Asia remains the focus of international politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, realignments are taking place and countries are readjusting their positions.

In the prevailing changing geopolitical environment in which India is deepening its ties with the United States, the strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations have been studied in this dissertation. India's strategic partnership with the United States does not imply that New Delhi has abandoned Russia or vice versa; however, the level of warmth in the bilateral relationship might not be the same to that of the days when India did not enjoy such level of closeness with the United States.

The study suggests that Pakistan and Russia have a complicated relationship. The history of unfriendly ties is long beginning from the very emergence of Pakistan on the map of the world. The entire Cold War period was composed of hostility between the two states. Some of the developments have left very deep marks on the fabric of the relationship; and these include Soviet support to India in 1971 war against Pakistan and Pakistan's support to the United States in the Afghan war against the Soviet Union. After the Soviet collapse; antagonism, hostility and distrust continued to shadow the relationship in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The ice on part of Moscow started melting from the point when Pakistan decided to join the US-led war against terrorism. Although Islamabad's this decision too was in alliance of the United States, it sent a signal across the globe including Russia that Pakistan would be fighting against terrorism, shunning its backing to the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Violence, terrorism and lawlessness were matters of serious concern for Russia as well; and Pakistan's decision of joining the global war on terror was taken as a positive sign in Moscow.

A little reduction in distrust led to exchange of visits by civilian and military leadership from both sides. Among them, the important visits included former President General (retired) Pervez Musharraf's visit to Moscow in 2003, former Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov's visit to Islamabad in 2007; and then former Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's visit to

Pakistan in 2014. These visits contributed to building trust between the two countries. In addition, India's tilt toward the United States; and particularly its diversification of arms acquisition from the international market since 2010 created a space for Pakistan and Russia to improve bilateral relationship. The slow improvement witnessed lifting of Russian arms embargo on Pakistan in 2014, provision of four attack helicopters to Pakistan in 2017 and joint military drills from 2016. However, the relationship did not grow beyond exchange of visits and a little defence cooperation. In the backdrop of long hostility spreading over more than 50 years and the two countries' persistent interests with their rivals – India and the United States – this progress means a lot. Russia's support to Pakistan to become permanent member of SCO and Moscow's endorsement to Islamabad's stance of criteria-based approach for NSG's membership are also not less important developments for Pakistan. Today, Afghanistan appears to be a common ground of engagement for the two countries. The leaderships of the two countries have been interacting with each other on the Afghan issue for their mutual benefit as well as for the interest of the region at large.

Whatever the improvement Pakistan and Russia have achieved in their bilateral relationship, it does not mean that Pakistan has shifted its alliance from the West to the East or Russia has moved from India to Pakistan. The fact of the matter is that an approach of diversification in foreign policy of the two countries has been observed.

As for academic contribution, this study is likely to be a useful addition to the existing literature on the subject, which is unfortunately not very much extensive. The history of Pakistan-Russia relations does not contain a lot to talk about. However, the available literature on the subject is even less than that. While the world is now focused on Asia, it is need of the hour to study these two countries independently as well as in respect of their bilateral ties. The contextual factors in the Moscow-Islamabad growing relationship also need to be studied at length to have better understanding of the latest developments taking place in international politics. This study would hopefully draw attention of other scholars to give due attention to this area.

### **8.1. Findings of the study:**

The question of the current status of Pak-Russia relationship and its future prospects is tried to be understood on the basis of the data of their bilateral ties for the last two decades and views of experts. Keeping in view the main points of convergence of interests by the two countries and the hurdles they appear to be facing, a questionnaire was prepared; and six experts on the subject



were interviewed. On the basis of the data and answers to the questions, following findings have been drawn.

1. Although Pakistan and Russia are building their ties, the distrust developed during and after the Cold War period in 20<sup>th</sup> century has not completely ended. They are slowly and cautiously moving toward improving the bilateral ties.
2. The prevailing environment in international politics and the dominant opinion of the experts suggest that India-US deepening ties are an important factor in the closeness between Pakistan and Russia.
3. The evidence of the secondary source data and a mixed response from the experts interviewed indicate that Pakistan and Russia are diversifying their foreign policy options. They have a little bit drifted away from their traditional allies – the United States and India – and exploring new avenues to enhance cooperation for mutual benefits.
4. The secondary source data shows that Afghanistan is an important factor for Islamabad and Moscow to cooperate for their common objectives. Similarly, majority of the experts also clearly stated that the interests of Pakistan and Russia converge in different respects for an overall objective of a peaceful and stable Afghanistan.
5. Russia has supported Pakistan for membership of SCO. Majority of the respondents are of the view that SCO could prove to be an important platform for Pakistan, Russia and China to cooperate and enhance mutual cooperation in diverse sectors. CPEC has also been described as an important initiative for regional connectivity and prosperity.
6. The primary as well as secondary data – responses of the interviewees and the official statements – show that Russia recognizes Pakistan's efforts against terrorism. There is no doubt about Russia's perception of Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts.
7. It was learned from the interviews that Pakistan and Russia are cooperating in various fields; however, one-thirds of the sample was clear in its responses that they are mainly cooperating in anti-terrorism and narcotics-control efforts. The secondary data also implies that the two countries are very much concerned and also actively engaged in these areas.
8. There was a majority opinion that Russia has no concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme and the nuclear doctrine. Statements were also not found that show Russia's doubts about Pakistan's nuclear program.

9. One-thirds of the interviews clearly stated that Kashmir issue is not a factor in Pakistan-Russia ties. Two others almost gave similar response but in vague words; while another one did not directly answer to the question. During the Cold War period, Russia had been clearly backing India's stance on Kashmir. However, for years, Moscow has not issued any statement clearly supporting New Delhi's position on Kashmir.
10. Three of the six respondents were of the view that India-Russia preferred strategic ties would not impact Pakistan-Russia relationship. However, the secondary data suggests that the strategic relationship between India and Russia is of great importance for both the countries. It merits a mention here that India had objected to Russia's decision of starting joint military drills with Pakistan in 2016.
11. Half of the persons interviewed said that Pakistan's historical defence ties with the United States and its strategic partnership with China would not have any impact on its defence cooperation with Russia.
12. Half of the interviewees opined that economic constraints would not hamper the bilateral cooperation between Islamabad and Moscow.

## **8.2. Conclusion:**

The findings of the study, based on both primary and secondary source data, suggest that possibilities of enhancement of cooperation between Pakistan and Russia are more than the hurdles or challenges they are facing in the way. These hurdles or challenges caused by the factors of historical baggage and mutual distrust, India, the United States and economic constraints are not of so serious nature that they cannot be surmounted. Even in the presence of these challenges, the two countries have the potential and higher common objectives to move ahead at a fast pace on the path of bilateral cooperation for their mutual benefit. However, the challenges mentioned in the study are not of less importance that they can totally ignored. The slow progress made so far suggests that the path is not so easy to move on. Pakistan and Russia have already covered a long journey of two decades to build trust and take small steps for bilateral cooperation. There are incremental changes in the foreign policy orientation of the two countries to come closer to each other. Now as the United States has quit Afghanistan; Pakistan, Russia and China have been mutually engaged as well as with the Afghan government to address the issues having regional implications. There is a suitable environment for Islamabad and Moscow as well as other countries of the region to forge regional cooperation through bilateral and multilateral forums for peace and

prosperity of the peoples. Pakistan and Russia have ample opportunities and possibilities to strengthen bilateral cooperation in defence sector and other areas of mutual benefit. These may include:

- Frequent exchange of high-level visits to build mutual trust
- Peace and stability in Afghanistan
- Cooperation to control terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking
- Provision of military equipment to Pakistan
- Continuation of military drills between armed forces of the two countries
- Early implementation of Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline project and initiation of other projects for helping Pakistan meet energy requirements
- Russian investment in energy sector of Pakistan [During Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Russia in February 2022, Russia expressed interest to establish LNG terminal in Gwadar]
- Bilateral cooperation in energy, trade and investment
- Expansion of cooperation in diverse sectors through SCO
- Regional integration and trade connectivity through CPEC
- Russia's access to Arabian Sea and the Gulf through Pakistan
- Increase in Pakistani exports to Russia in agricultural and dairy items
- Cooperation in infrastructure development, heavy industry and technology transfer to Pakistan
- Russia's support to Pakistan's Nuclear Suppliers Group membership bid on criteria-based approach
- Russia's positive role for easing tensions between Pakistan and India
- Pakistan's strong ties with China to help build enhanced and durable cooperation with Russia

There are multiple dividends of improved Islamabad-Moscow ties, including more space for Pakistan at international level and multilateral forums like the UNSC, economic progress and prosperity in the region, promotion of regional approach to resolve regional issues and increased options for Pakistan in international system.

### **8.3. Recommendations:**

This study was an attempt to explain the complex phenomenon of strategic dimensions of Pakistan-Russia relations, in the backdrop of their past historical cold and hostile relations as well as the deepening India-US ties. The description of the bitter past of the two countries and then normalization and improvement in the bilateral relationship will provide an insight into the subject for scholars and students. The views of a group of relevant experts about the progress made so far in the bilateral cooperation and the emerging scenario will further enlighten the readers for understanding of the phenomenon. As developments pertaining to the topic continue taking place, scholars need to investigate the matter further in its various aspects.

In the light of this study, following recommendations are being made for mutual benefit of Islamabad and Moscow.

- Bloc politics is not an option for Pakistan in its foreign policy. Islamabad should not become part of any bloc. Instead, it needs to pursue policies aimed at having balanced ties with the world great powers including the United States and Russia. Such an approach has been manifested from the statements by former Prime Minister Imran Khan while speaking about the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the relationship between the United States and China.
- Pakistan's foreign policy approach of putting the entire eggs into one basket needs to be changed. While the world is heading toward multipolarity, Islamabad also needs to diversify its options.
- Pakistan has been enjoying strong relations with China that can help it in building ties with Russia and other countries in the region. However, it does not mean that Islamabad should develop distance with the Western world. Relationship with the United States and Europe are of much importance for Islamabad. It needs to be protected and strengthened.
- Pakistan and Russia need to see their relationship on the basis of their mutual benefits. The third country factor should not matter in the bilateral relationship. The approach of seeing from the prism of other countries such as India and the United States needs to be abandoned.
- There is a need for Russia, China, Pakistan and Iran to develop regional approach to resolve regional issues. SCO can also serve as an effective platform in this regard. The issue of Afghanistan needs to be addressed through a regional approach, involving Pakistan, China,

Russia and Iran. Similarly, the objective of regional connectivity and trade can also be achieved through this very regional approach. Pakistan's policy of geo-economics can be effectively pursued through this strategy. Pakistan is an energy scarce country, and the solution to this problem lies in regional cooperation, particularly with Central Asian States and Russia. The regional approach can also become helpful in reducing tensions between Pakistan and India.

- While Pakistan has not been acquiring military equipment from the United States for some time, it can approach Russia and other countries for the purpose as part of its policy of diversification of options.
- Pakistan needs to offer special incentives to Russian investors to make investments in energy, infrastructure and industrial development
- There is a need for Islamabad to enhance its trade with Russia. Besides military hardware and energy supplies, trade and investment also need to be given due importance for expansion of bilateral ties.

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**QUESTIONNAIRE:**

Open-ended questions: -

1. Do you think Pakistan and Russia have buried the Cold War hatchet or the historical baggage of mutual distrust still shadows their advancement in bilateral relations?
2. How much important is the Indo-US strategic partnership a factor for Pakistan and Russia to come closer to each other, particularly in the field of defence cooperation?
3. Do you think Russia is pursuing a policy of diversification in its relations with South Asian countries, and Pakistan is also trying to increase its options after strained ties with the United States?
4. What interests Pakistan and Russia have in Afghanistan; and do these interests converge?
5. SCO is a regional platform of economic, political and defence cooperation. CPEC is also being described as a game changer project not only for Pakistan but for other countries of the region as well. Do you think Russia, China and Pakistan can enhance mutual cooperation through these platforms?
6. How does Russia view Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism and its efforts for regional peace and stability?
7. What is Russia's perspective on Pakistan's nuclear programme and its nuclear doctrine?
8. How do Pakistan and Russia act on issues of mutual interest at international level such as terrorism, narcotics control and nuclear non-proliferation?
9. Historically, Russia has been supporting India on Kashmir issue. New Delhi has been accusing Pakistan of backing the freedom fighters in Kashmir. Do you think Kashmir issue or Pakistan's alleged support to the freedom fighters in Kashmir impedes advancement in Pakistan-Russia ties?
10. Do you think Russia's preferred defence relations with India become an obstacle in the growth of Islamabad-Moscow ties?
11. Do you think Pakistan's historical defence ties with the United States and growing Pakistan-China strategic cooperation have any negative impact on the Islamabad-Moscow ties?
12. Do you consider Pakistan's weak economic condition as a constraint to enhance defence cooperation with Russia?