

**RISING GEOSTRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN
PAKISTAN AND RUSSIA: BILATERAL TO MULTILATERAL
OPPORTUNITIES
(2012-2023)**



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SUPERVISOR CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Rising Geostrategic Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities (2012-2023)**" is the original work submitted by **Ms. Aimen Nisar**, a student of **MS in International Relations** in the Department of Politics and International Relations, Faculty of Social Sciences. This research work has been successfully done under my guidance and supervision. She has fulfilled all the requirements for the award for the MS degree ordinance at the University. This is important to certify that this thesis has not been submitted for attainment of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, or Fellowship from any other university.

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DECLARATION

By submitting this dissertation, I declare that this thesis entitled "**Rising Geostrategic Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities (2012-2023)**" is my original work. This research work was completed under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Amna Mehmood and submitted to the Department of International Relations as satisfying the requirements for the degree of master's in international relations. I have properly referenced and cited the sources of information in my thesis. This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree.

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Dated: _____

DEDICATION

To the memory of Dr. Inayat Kalim,

A beacon of wisdom and an exemplar of dedication, Dr. Kaleem's profound teachings in research methodology has equipped me with invaluable knowledge and instilled in me a passion for the pursuit of truth. His unwavering commitment to education and his ability to inspire curiosity and critical thinking continue to guide my academic journey. Though he is no longer with us, his legacy lives on in the minds and hearts of those he taught.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATION

AUKUS	Australia, United Kingdom, United States
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CENTO	Central Treaty Organisation
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
EAEU	The Eurasian Economic Union
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
IMF	International Monetary Fund
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
QUAD	Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline

ABSTRACT

Under foreign policy and international relations, there is no permanent ally or enemy; the only permanent aspect is national interest. Pakistan has witnessed, rising geostrategic cooperation with Russia, due to the varying geopolitical landscape in South Asia. Traditionally aligned with the US, Pakistan has recalibrated its engagement in international settings to diversify its foreign relationships, especially strategically pivoting towards Russia. The rising cooperation in Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia can be attributed to several important attributes including, economic interests and regional security concerns in Afghanistan. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) plays a vital role in aligning the economic, security, and strategic interests. Under the Umbrella of SCO, the bilateral and economic terms between Pakistan and Russia have witnessed improvement. Both countries are closely collaborating to address security concerns in Afghanistan. The level of geostrategic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan has evolved significantly from bilateral engagements to exploring broader multilateral opportunities within frameworks like the SCO. This cooperative framework facilitates military exchanges and joint exercises. It enhances economic integration through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), where Russia's participation could further bolster connectivity and economic development. Drawing on the theory of complex interdependence, it examines the interconnectedness of Pakistan and Russia's evolving relationship amidst a multipolar global order. It analyses how mutual dependencies in security, economic, and strategic domains shape their bilateral engagements and influence broader regional dynamics. The SCO serves as a crucial platform for promoting mutual understanding and cooperation, emphasizing shared goals of peace, stability, and development across South and Central Asia. For this research, qualitative methodology would be applicable. It will closely analyse Pakistan and Russia's relationship in the changing multipolar world and explore how both States are collaborating in geostrategic settings.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a country with a crucial and the most significant regional standing, which is now recognized internationally. Its geographical location equipped with important sea routes and land, makes it prominent in the contemporary global setting. Recently, Pakistan's foreign policy orientation has impacted regional and global affairs. Pakistan's economic, political, and strategic decisions shape the environment of the whole region. Comparative to Pakistan's relationship with the US, the relationship with Russia remained insignificant due to several factors. Even though, both the States have never faced bilateral disputes with each other. Pakistan's tense relationship with India, and cordial relationship with the US, always cast a shadow on the already tepid relationship with Russia (Raza F. , 2017).

Historically, Pakistan's choice of being an ally of the US has intentionally harmed its chances of forging its bilateral ties with Russia. The other factor which prevented them from getting closer is Russia's Indo-centric policy in South Asia (Naqvi & Masood, 2017). However, a major shift in Russia's policy towards South Asia emerged, which still would not limit Russia's bonhomie with India. Russia in this regard is imitating ties with the countries like Iran, Afghanistan and China, in a way to keep balance with its relationship with India. This will provide Russia with an opportunity to see another potential market for the export of gas and defence equipment. Pakistan in this regard would be its biggest exporter, because it is a highly populous country facing an energy deficit. (Xinhua, 2018). Other than that, Russia never wanted India to get closer to the US, and hence by making a good partnership with Pakistan, it could impede India from getting too close to the US (Criag, 2015).

Moreover, Under the SCO platform, Pakistan and Russia are collaborating in combating three evils that are: terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The terrorism in

Afghanistan and posing instability in the region, especially Central Asia (Khetran, 2019). Under the umbrella of SCO, all the members have realized that these evils cannot be combated only via warheads, instead, cooperation and dialogues are necessary for bringing peace to the region. Moreover, the SCO platform is creating a balanced approach towards both Pakistan and India, where their matters are kept aside, instead Russia and China urge both States to bilaterally resolve the issue (Hindustan Times, 2019). Which is a sign of a better relationship between Pakistan and Russia.

Furthermore, under the administration of Donald Trump, the Pak-US relationship hit a record low. The continuous demands of ‘Do-more’ and disregarding Pakistan’s effort to bring peace in Afghanistan, make solution through negotiation possible. Instead of rewarding Pakistan, the US punished Pakistan by cutting economic aid and terminating the participation of Pakistan in military programs, facilitating closer ties between Pakistan and Russia. Russia took advantage of the US detachment and signed the “Security Training Agreement”, which started a novel period of military cooperation between the two nations. (Dagia, 2021).

Overall, with changing times, the interests of both Pakistan and Russia are also changing, which is bringing both States closer to each other, and creating a new avenue in Pakistan’s foreign policy in a changing multipolar world. Where Pakistan is focusing on regional connectivity, economic, bilateral developments and strong relationships with every State of the world, instead of being in a particular bloc.

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Pakistan and Russia have witnessed rising geostrategic cooperation in their relationship between 2012-2023, under the changing regional and global dynamics. As, Pakistan remained a major hotspot in the regional arena, due to its strategic location and Afghanistan issue. Moreover, the SCO has been increasing the proximity between Pakistan and Russia’s

relationship. Hence, Pakistan's tilt toward a particular bloc is decreasing, and its preference towards regionalism is increasing. However, Pakistan is trying to maintain good relations with every State of the world in the changing global environment. For being a Pakistani, the researcher sees it important to explore Pakistan's geostrategic pivoting towards Russia, and its impact on the regional dynamics.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The foreign policy of Pakistan has experienced rising cooperation in geostrategic settings from 2012-2023, notably in orientation to Russia. This change represents a crucial development in Pakistan's international relations, especially in the context of economy, politics, and security. However, this rise in cooperation poses multiple challenges, as it diverges Pakistan from its traditional ally, the United States. Understanding the complex interplay of historical facts, regional conflicts and global power dynamics has catalyzed the thorough analysis of its foreign policy dynamics. The purpose of this study is to identify the driving forces behind Pakistan's geostrategic orientation towards Russia evolved from bilateral to multilateral opportunities, as well as its impact on regional stability and existing alliances. This study aims to provide an analysis of the future trajectory of Pakistan's foreign policy and its role in the global geopolitical landscape.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study on Rising Geostrategic Cooperation between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities (2012-2023) holds great significance as it sheds light on Pakistan's evolving geo-strategic, economic, and diplomatic evolution towards Russia and how it changing the context for the future of Pakistan's foreign policy. This research will provide an in-depth analysis of the recent developments in the Pakistan-Russia relationship. Moreover, it will answer the untouched questions, that have been ignored in recent studies and will add value to the field of academics and foreign policy. It will provide a broader implication

for South Asia and regional stability. This research will not only add significance to academia but will also provide a practical implication for policymakers to comprehend the future development of Pakistan's foreign policy.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To explore the key drivers behind Pakistan's foreign policy move towards Russia between 2012-2023, particularly in terms of geostrategic and regional security interests in Afghanistan.
2. To examine the level of geostrategic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan primarily focusing on bilateral to multilateral opportunities.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the primary drivers of Pakistan's foreign policy move towards Russia between 2012-2023, notably in terms of geostrategic and regional security interests in Afghanistan?
2. What is the level of geostrategic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan primarily focusing on bilateral to multilateral opportunities?

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

Firstly, the study focuses exclusively on Pakistan's relationship with Russia between 2012-2023. It confines the study to this specific period; therefore, it does not include events or developments before 2012. Secondly, the study centers on the geopolitical landscape, that influenced the foreign policy of Pakistan vis-à-vis Russia during a specified period. Hence it does not cover the global events, that do not directly apply to this specific shift. Moreover, the study does not cover the social or cultural factors, unless they directly impact the geopolitical alignment between the two States. Furthermore, the study is conducted in the English language and is based on primary and credible secondary sources. Therefore, other languages except English could not be utilized in the study.

1.7 Literature Review

The historic relationship of Pakistan towards the US and Russia towards India was the major backdrop in the relationship between the two States, which even kept influencing their relationship under the contemporary setup. However, the Two States converge on the same issue which is the security concern posed by the militant groups. Russia is concerned about the security of Central Asia and Pakistan is concerned about its western borders. Hence, due to the mutual concern, which is not only Pakistan's and Russia's issue China and India are also concerned about it, and Pakistan is the only State, that could mitigate the issue by negotiating with the Taliban. Therefore, there is hope that positive development could be seen in the relationship between the countries (Amin, 2016).

Pak-Russia Rapprochement: Challenges and Prospects in Evolving Regional Dynamics presents an evolving relationship between Russia and Pakistan. The book identifies key findings related to historical context, geopolitical shifts, counterterrorism cooperation, economic collaboration, regional dynamics, and diplomatic challenges. It emphasizes that while significant prospects exist for deepening cooperation, addressing challenges and nurturing mutual trust will be crucial for the success of this rapprochement. The findings underscore several challenges that could impede the progress of the Pak-Russia rapprochement. These challenges include historical mistrust, divergent geopolitical priorities, Pakistan's traditional alliances, and Russia's relations with other regional actors. The book emphasizes the importance of addressing these challenges through sustained dialogue, confidence-building measures, and a pragmatic approach (Naqvi , 2015).

Pakistan and Russia's history shows that the Pakistani decision-making elite lost opportunities at the expense of logic and national interests, mainly in Pak-Russia relations. Over the past sixty years, there has been increasing scrutiny of the core values associated with the Western and the U.S. influence globally. Pakistan's foreign policy has resulted in greater

dependency, suggesting a need for reevaluation. Pakistan must abandon outdated perceptions and embrace a fresh perspective to move forward. The evolving geopolitical and geostrategic landscape demands new interpretations and strategies. It is crucial to avoid repeating past oversights in future policies. The Pak-Russia relationship merits rational understanding and a bold start. Nevertheless, no nation can survive in diplomatic and economic isolation in this globalized world. Hence, this newly discovered love of Russia should not be confused with rationality and national interests once more (Hussain N. , 2012).

Pakistan and Russia's relationship has been smooth since 2000 when Pakistan stood against terrorism and detached itself from the Taliban since they remained a serious threat to Russia and also impacted central Asia via Afghanistan. The relationship further boomed, when both the States signed a defense agreement and did mutual exercises. When India's relationship with the US started growing and the trade between India and Russia declined, this made Russia get closer to Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's membership in SCO and its role in Afghanistan is the breakthrough in the relationship between both States. Moreover, Pakistan's geographical importance, the project of CPEC, and the Russian interest in accessing warm water resources have further attracted Russia and Pakistan as well to get direct access to central Asia to fulfill their energy need bringing both nations close. A proactive policy is needed for Pakistan to sustain its relationship with Russia (Khan M. F., 2019).

The world is changing from unipolarity to multipolarity and with the changing dynamics of the world, the foreign policy of Pakistan is also changing. Since the US undermined Pakistan and its growing relationship with India, the tilt of Pakistan is directed towards Russia. However, the relationship of Pakistan towards Russia has never been that strong, the way they remain with the US. However, despite Pakistan's relationship weakens to the US, it still wants to balance its relationship with Russia and the US at the same time, but it is difficult. Pakistan's strong ties with China are negatively interpreted by the US. On the other

hand, the new bloc and world order are increasing the risk of a new cold war and providing geopolitical opportunity to Pakistan (Khan M. F., 2018).

Russia and Pakistan have gone through a significant transformation in recent years. The bilateral talks have been increasing between the two States, whether it is military-to-military contact or inter-state relations, that is security issues in Afghanistan. Moreover, President Putin has recently remarked Pakistan has been a “reliable and important partner”. In the past, Pakistan’s alliance with the United States was a hindrance to a smooth relationship with the former USSR, since Pakistan was a member of SEATO and CENTO, which was created by the US to detain the USSR. Moreover, Russia’s cordial relationship with India encouraged Pakistan to build a strong relationship with the US. Where on the Kashmir issue, Russia has always vetoed Pakistan’s stance. Moreover, during the Cold War, China was another factor in Pakistan’s divergent relations with the Soviets, where the deteriorated Indo-Sino and Soviet-Sino relationship, resulted in a new partnership in the region (Siddiqi, 2017).

The US and China’s involvement in Afghanistan characterize the competition between the two rivals, where the South Asian significant geo-strategic location is the root of both economic giants, where the interests of US and China converge and diverge at the same time. US military involvement in Afghanistan is to expand the role of India in South Asia by limiting China’s role. In the meantime, US eyes are on Afghanistan’s mineral resources. On the other hand, China under the SCO platform refers to the US presence in Afghanistan as a threat to regional security. On the other hand, China’s interest in Afghanistan is based on its ‘Grand Strategy Plan-2025’, which is part of its BRI project. China is offering developmental projects to Afghanistan, at the same time protecting its Xinxiang province and also importing raw materials; from Afghanistan, which is making China as largest importer of Afghanistan. The Sino-US involvement in Afghanistan is raising security concerns in the region, especially

in the western borders of Pakistan, where the Indo-Afghan partnership could dilute the security concerns in the region (Imran, 2019).

The Russian-Pakistan relations have been witnessing improvement. With the inclusion of SCO, both countries are collaborating on regional security. Drug trafficking via the route of Afghanistan towards Central Asia and Russia is a cause of the humanitarian crisis in Eurasia. Russia is concerned about tackling the drug trafficking. Pakistan is partnering with Russia in this regard. Moreover, a breakthrough in the field of economy has been witnessed, where Russia uplifted the arms embargo from Pakistan and created balance in the region (Belokrenitsky & Kamenev, 2013).

The existing literature on Pak-Russia foreign policy is mostly related to the Cold War era and is viewed through the lens of Soviet-Russia and US-Pakistan relations. The theoretical framework under the existing literature supports the “zero-sum” game, the structuralism of Kenneth Waltz. The most recent literature, however, provides a regional consideration of Russia using Afghanistan, which could affect the peace of Eurasia, which aligns with my approach. However, most of the literature neglects the Russia-Pakistan relationship individually or bilaterally, solely in terms of the need of both the State towards each other, instead of relating it to the US or India. Where, Russia is facing heavy sanctions in Europe and the West due to its involvement in Ukraine, and hence it needed a potential buyer, who could import gas and military equipment through Russia in the meantime, Pakistan needs Russia to fulfil its energy needs. On the other hand, to bring peace to Afghanistan and protect Eurasia, Pakistan is the more suitable partner in South Asia due to its strategic location and better relationship with the Taliban, which could not be neglected by Russia.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

For theoretical explanation, under the title, “Rising Geostrategic Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities (2012-2023)” the study is based on liberalism in general and Neo-liberalism in particular.

The study backs the theory of complex interdependence put forth by Joseph Nye and Robert Keohane. According to the complex interdependence:

Issues in international relations are interconnected. States frequently interconnect under diverse problems and collectively find solutions. The practice of issue linkages enables States to discover interests in various areas, fostering cooperation even amid conflict (Keohane & Nye, 2011).

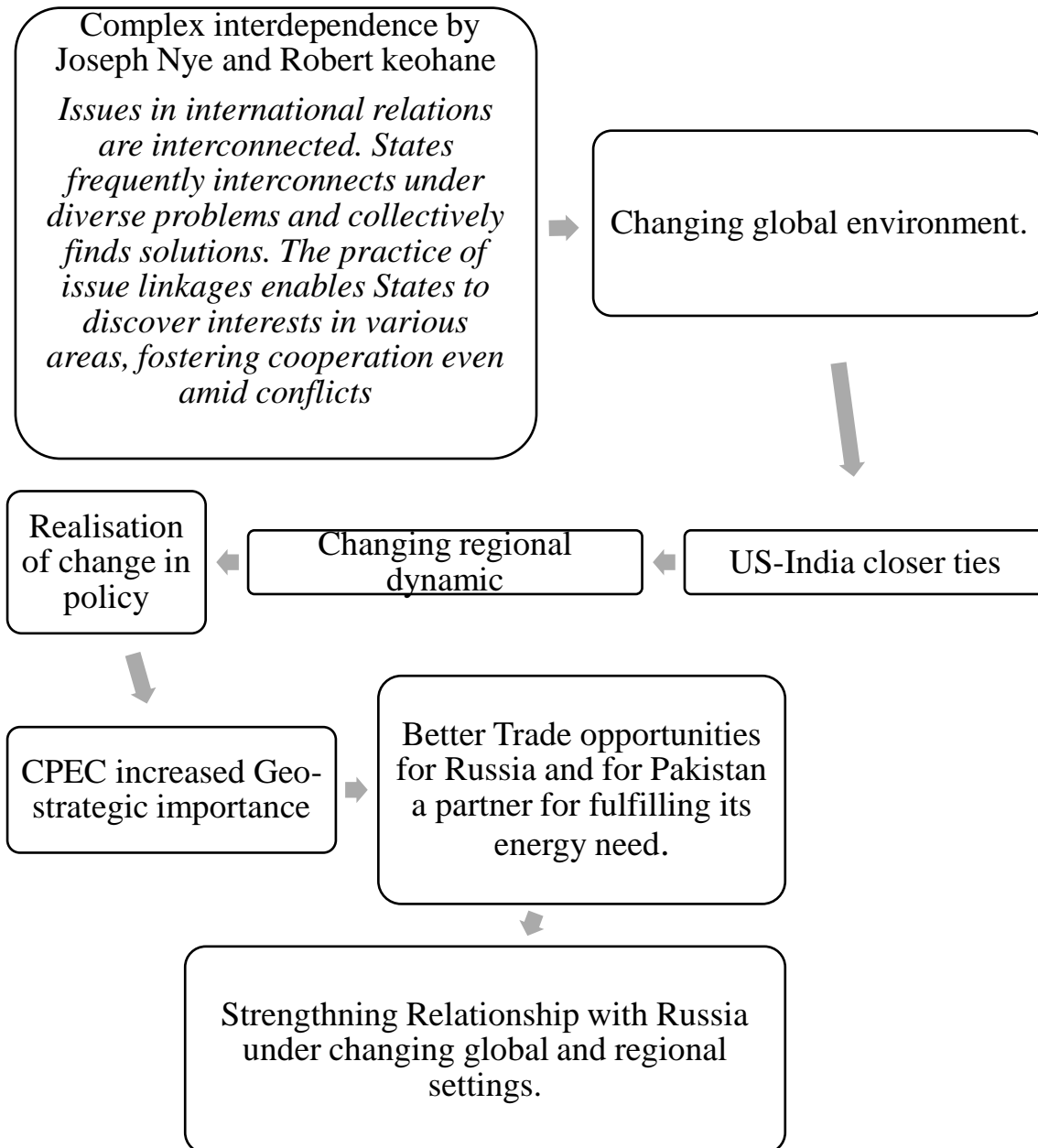
The interests of a State never remain constant, they change with the changing environment. When the US started developing a strong relationship with India, both Russia and Pakistan realised the need for change in their foreign policy towards each other. Where Russia wanted to build a strong relationship with Pakistan due to its geo-political importance and a better trade opportunity under the umbrella of CPEC. Pakistan wanted to build its relationship with Russia to fulfil its energy needs, direct access to Eurasian countries, and defence imports from Russia to strengthen its military capability. Moreover, through the platform of SCO, both Russia and Pakistan are collaborating to combat terrorism in the region. Hence the dynamics in the Pak-Russia relationship vary under changing world from unipolarity to multipolarity, where China and Russia could be the game changers in the future.

Rising Geostrategic Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities

(2012-2023)

1.8.1 Diagrammatical Illustration of Theoretical Framework

Figure1



(Keohane & Nye, 2011) Compiled by author.

1.9 Research Methodology

1.9.1 Research Design

The study uses a qualitative research design to examine the Rising Geostrategic Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia: Bilateral to Multilateral Opportunities (2012-2023). The qualitative research approach is appropriate because it allows an in-depth analysis of the factors discussed in the thesis and provides a more detailed understanding of the dynamics of the Pak-Russian relationship. For this research, the exploratory and analytical methods will be used.

1.9.2 Population

The population of this study consists of key policymakers, diplomats, and government officials from Pakistan and Russia, who are actively engaged in the decision-making process related to the shift in the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Russia.

1.9.3 Sampling

For sampling, convenient sampling techniques would be utilized. Where the people relevant to this research who are easily accessible, would be approached like Political scientists and Academicians.

1.9.4 Operational Definition

1. Geostrategy

Geostrategy is the interplay of strategic and geopolitical factors defining a specific geographic area (Merriam Webster, n.d.).

1.9.5 Data Analysis

The content analysis technique would be preferred for data analysis through which the content of interviews, official documents, and media sources would be analyzed to understand the pattern of the rising geostrategic cooperation and the changes observed in Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia. Moreover, the independent variables such as economic, strategic, and regional security will be measured.

1.9.6 Ethical Consideration

The interviews for this research would be conducted under the ethical consideration of research, where the anonymity of the interviewee would be protected and the information would be used with the consent of the interviewee.

1.9.6 Data Collection

For the data collection, both primary and secondary sources will be used. For primary sources, the interviews, and official documents from governmental institutions like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs(MOFA), would be utilized for content analysis. For secondary sources, books, journals, theses, newspapers, and other internet sources would be used for the accumulation of data and better understanding of the title.

CHAPTER TWO

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Historically, the relationship between Russia and Pakistan was characterized by tension, suspicion, and limited cooperation. Especially during the Cold War era, which lasted roughly from the end of World War II in 1945 to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, has influenced Pakistan with the broader geopolitical dynamics and alliances that were dividing the world into two orders. However, there are several areas including defence and intelligence where Pakistan and Russia cooperated.

Pakistan's emergence as an independent State backdrop to the world on the brink of ideological warfare. The Cold War period appeared for both the United States and the Soviet Union largely to engage in propaganda to stagnate each other's ideology. Under a bipolar world, newly independent States were given the choice to become an alliance with any of the nation either the USSR or the US. Amidst the chaotic geopolitical landscape, Pakistan made a strategic choice and prioritized its national security. By recognizing the looming threat by its regional rival India, Pakistan opted to align with the United States. The strategic partnership was opted by the decision-makers after a critical evaluation aimed at safeguarding Pakistan's interest amidst the uncertainties of the international arena (Khan M. T., 2019).

However, as time unfolded, the calculus of Pakistan's foreign policy evolved. Under the administration of President Ayub Khan, Pakistan embarked on a path to normalize diplomatic relations with the USSR, unlike the entrenched animosity characterized by its relationship with India. (Lerski, 1974). The historic visit of President Ayub Khan to the USSR in 1965, marked a significant diplomatic development in Pak-Russia relations. Subsequently, during the Indo-Pakistan war in 1960, the USSR played a crucial role as a mediator and facilitated negotiation that directed to the Tashkent agreement (Amin T. , 1980).

Historically, Pak-Soviet or present Russia was adversely harmed by Pakistan's selection to become an ally of the US and Russia's Indo-centric foreign policy, which compelled both States to trust each other (Naqvi & Masood, 2017).

The diplomatic collaboration comes with its own set of challenges. Pakistan's alliance with the US strained its ties with the USSR. Similarly, Russia's Indo-centric policies have added another layer of complexity lead a legacy of mistrust and suspicion.

Pakistan's foreign policy reflects the evolving geo-political landscapes, where States adopt partnerships and alliances, that suits best to their interest. From Cold War tension to diplomatic cooperation, the national interests are always in influx as the ever-changing global order.

2.1 Cold War Dynamics: Pakistan's Strategic Positioning

Pakistan's alignment with the superpowers is dynamic and is based on the changing global environment and geo-strategic, economic, and security interests. Historically, Pakistan has maintained a closer tie with the US, but its relationship with China has significantly intensified over time. Pakistan initially forged strong ties with the US during the Cold War era due to mutual strategic interests and the need for support on regional security matters. However, with the evolving global interests, Pakistan began to align with other global and regional giants beyond its traditional ally.

Under the historical context of Pak-Russia relations, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of alliances. The prevailing security concerns approaching India's military exploitation and economic dominance had strained Pakistan to seek foreign defence cooperation. However, at that time, traditional allies like Britain were prioritizing India and showed reluctance to cooperate with Pakistan in this regard (Tellis, 2008).

Despite the initial hesitance, the US has recognised the geostrategic significance of Pakistan. The US chief of staff in early 1954, recognized the importance of Pakistan's

geostrategic significance especially in terms of possible air operations against the Soviet Union and the Karachi-Lahore bases were a great spot to achieve the target. The US was also concerned about evoking the Middle-Eastern oil reserves and in this regard again, Pakistan was providing proximity to the Persian Gulf. Hence, the geographical location and geostrategic significance of Pakistan could not be ignored. Hence, this recognition has also evoked the development of an Indian-centric policy, because it could pertain to the interest of the United States (United States Department of Defence, 1974).

The Pakistani leaders at that time were watchful of the Geo-strategic importance of the country and were promptly emphasizing it in front of foreign diplomats. The Finance Minister of that time Ghulam Muhammad, in a meeting with a visiting assistant secretary of State emphasized the importance of the Muslim Bloc as the counterbalance to Soviet's communist ideology. Ambassador McGhee of the United States was in by Pakistan's directness to align with the US bloc to deter and limit the Communist expansionist policy in South Asia. Pakistan's open support with the US-lead ideology has deteriorated Pak-Soviet relations before they could get started (United States Department of Defence, 1974).

2.1.1 US-Pakistan Relations: The Influence of Super-Power Alliances

The alliance between the US and Pakistan was formed in the mid-20th century when Pakistan was entitled to the "Most Allied Ally" by the US. Several national and international treaties were being assisted through these alliances between Pakistan and the US. Pakistan became a member of the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) in May 1954, through the Mutual Defense Assistant Agreement. Initially, the ties between the US and Pakistan were motivated by an anti-communist approach which was associated with the former Soviet Union (US National Intelligence Estimate, 1955). However, these alliances have deteriorated Pakistan's relationship with Russia (USSR) and added a layer of complexity to Pakistan's foreign policy calculus.

Both Pakistan and the US were motivated by their mutual interests. On the one hand, the US wanted Pakistan's support to contain the Soviet Union to resist the domino effect of communism in South Asia. On the other hand, Pakistan was concerned about the perceived threat of Indian dominancy in the region. Also, the Soviet Union was acting as a major partner of India.

The US supported the nuclear program of Pakistan while providing economic and military aid including weapons and infrastructural development. In reciprocity, Pakistan gave access to its intelligence-gathering facilities to the US. Besides sharing a strong partnership and alliance, Pakistan still faced challenges. Firstly, it has faced criticism by the Muslim countries for being an envoy to imperialists. Secondly, the Pakistani public showed a lack of support. Additionally, the US silence over the Kashmir issue and growing defence commitments with India have ignited the uncertainties of Pakistan and demonstrated a dearth of commitment by the American side (Hussain T. , 2005).

2.1.2 Security Concerns and Soviet Interests in South Asia

The interest of the Soviet Union in Pakistan was interrelated to gaining access to warm water resources and intensifying its dominance and influence across the South Asian region, following the inception of Pakistan (Pakistan Times, 1951). However, the possibility of the two States getting closer to each other could not be probable due to the Soviet's communist ideology, which was posing a hindrance to Islamic ideology. Besides that, the absence of Pakistan's embassy in Russia has hampered the possible engagement between the two states (Ahmed, 1970). As a substantial opportunity missed by Pakistan considering its diplomatic settings, it has been critically viewed by Pakistan, as this opportunity could have strengthened the regional standing of Pakistan, mainly by the United States. Pakistan's inclusion in the US-led bloc and military alliances like SEATO and CENTO, which were created to contain the Soviet Union provoked the USSR resulting in its frequent anti-Pakistan stance, in all

international forums. Such as vetoing Pakistan's ask for the Kashmir issue in the United Nations Security Council.

Pakistan's move towards the US-China settlement during the 1970s was retaliated by the Soviet Union by signing a treaty for supporting India in the Indo-Pakistan War in 1971. That war resulted in the disintegration of Bangladesh from Pakistan where it emerged as a new country (Mastany, 2010). As a payback for the Soviet Union's role in the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, Pakistan aligned with the US to wage a war to disintegrate the Soviet Union. Hence, the Soviet's pro-India stance and its communist ideology which did not resemble Islamic ideology has challenged closer ties with Pakistan. The lack of diplomatic channels has also hindered the conception of bilateral relations. This has impeded Pakistan from complex-level play in the region with provocative treatment by the USSR (Sunawar & Coutto, 2015).

The Cold War cast a long-lasting shadow on Pak-Russian relations. The historical baggage stayed even after the end of the Cold War. Pakistan suffered from the US abundance after the soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. The alignment during the Cold War heavily strained Pakistan's relationship with the USSR and even its support to the US left it with a heavy cost. As the US left Pakistan isolated (McMahon, 1988).

2.1.3 Strategic Importance of South Asia for the Soviet Union

South Asia holds great significance due to its geography. During the Cold War for the Soviet Union, States like Pakistan, India and Bangladesh held great importance because of the Indian Ocean, for its quest to access warm water resources. The Soviet Union was planning to establish an influence on this region by amplifying naval control, and geopolitical reach by taking over the region and spreading its communist ideology (Fernando, 2023).

The utmost concern of the Soviet Union in South Asia was to counterbalance US-led capitalist ideology and to contain the US in the region. In this regard, the Soviet Union

strengthened its ties with India through military cooperation, military training and arms sales. USSR aimed to spread strategic control and prevent the influence of the Western regime. (Blood, 1975). The dynamics of South Asia's geopolitics were imperative for the Soviet Union. To counterbalance the Western alliances, it was inevitable for the Soviet Union to maintain its presence and safeguard its interests in the region (Cohen, 2019).

The motive of USSR in South Asia was motivated by the need to balance the regional dynamics in terms of nuclear proliferation. Especially in the context of Indo-Pak security concerns. However, initially, it was not the Soviet's concern to focus on South Asia's power dynamics. The primary focus of the Soviet Union during the Cold War was to protect its borders with neighbouring States such as Europe, China and Northeast Asia. Whereas, in terms of third-world States, South Asia came after the Middle East (Mediansky, 1984).

2.1.4 Security Concerns in Afghanistan and Central Asia

For the Soviet Union, South Asia holds great significance due to its security concerns in Central Asia and Afghanistan. South Asia is in proximity to Central Asia and serves as a buffer zone in shielding the threat from the Middle East to its territory. Soviets were anxious about the emanating threat in Central Asia and Afghanistan from Islamic extremism, which could lead to a thorough revolt in the soviet States. Besides that, the increasing concentration and acceptability of the Western bloc and the presence of the US were alarming signs for it (Destradi, 2015).

The strategic significance of Afghanistan and Central Asia lay in their role as a barrier against destabilizing forces that could impact Soviet security. The Soviet Union's efforts to maintain control and stability in these regions were driven by the need to protect its borders and prevent the infiltration of ideologies perceived as threatening to its regime (Ashraf, Begum, & Jathoi, 2018). The rise of Islamic fundamentalism and the potential for Western interference

posed significant challenges that the Soviet Union sought to address through strategic interventions and security measures.

Moreover, the geopolitical dynamics of Afghanistan and Central Asia were intertwined with broader regional security concerns, including terrorism, border conflicts, and political instability. These factors not only posed direct threats to the stability of the region but also had implications for global security (Laumulin, 2011). The Soviet Union's security interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia were shaped by the complex interplay of internal and external factors, highlighting the multifaceted nature of security challenges in these regions.

2.1.5 Pro-Soviet Regime Support

The Soviet Union actively wanted to foster alliances with governments in South Asia that shared its ideological inclinations and strategic objectives. This involved backing socialist and communist movements, as well as regimes that were sympathetic to Moscow's ideology. An instance of this was the support provided by the Soviet Union to India, both militarily and economically, especially during periods of conflict like the Indo-Pakistani wars (Chandra, 1991).

The Soviet Union's approach was not solely based on military aid but also extended to economic assistance and political support to enforce pro-Soviet regimes in the region. By cultivating relationships with governments that aligned with its interests, the Soviet Union aimed to strengthen its influence and advance its geopolitical agenda in South Asia (Blood, 1975). Furthermore, the Soviet Union's backing of pro-Soviet regimes in South Asia was part of a broader strategy to expand its sphere of influence and counter Western powers in the region. This support was instrumental in shaping the political landscape of South Asia during the Cold War era, with the Soviet Union playing a significant role in supporting governments that shared its socialist or communist ideologies.

The Soviet Union's support for pro-Soviet regimes in South Asia was a strategic tactic aimed at cultivating alliances, promoting its ideological agenda, and advancing its geopolitical interests in the region. This support encompassed military aid, economic assistance, and political backing to strengthen ties with governments that aligned with Moscow's objectives.

2.1.6 Balancing Power Dynamics

The involvement in South Asia by the Soviet Union was significantly influenced by the need to balance the power dynamics and counteract the influence of rival superpowers, particularly the United States. Pakistan's alignment with the US demonstrated through military agreements and alliances such as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), spurred Soviet initiatives to offset American influence in the region (Price, 2010).

This led to increased Soviet engagement in South Asia including military assistance to countries like India to counterbalance US influence and safeguard its strategic interest. The strategic landscape in South Asia was shaped by a complex interplay of alliances and power struggles between the superpowers. The US was driven by a desire to maintain a strategic equilibrium and prevent the consolidation of American dominance in the region (Gnguly, 2002).

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was not only interested in South Asia for security reasons but also to promote regional stability and resolve conflicts. Moreover, the Soviet Union's efforts to counteract American influence in South Asia were part of a broader geopolitical strategy aimed at expanding its sphere of influence and ensuring a multipolar world order. By actively engaging in the region and supporting allies like India, the Soviet Union sought to challenge US hegemony and establish a more balanced power dynamic in South Asia (Robert & Hardgrave, 1966).

The Soviet Union actively engaged in mediating disputes between India and Pakistan, notably during critical junctures like the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to uphold influence and stability in the region (Rizvi, 2016).

The multifaceted nature of Soviet involvement in South Asia was driven by a combination of security imperatives, geopolitical ambitions, and the aspiration to counterbalance rival superpowers. This comprehensive approach included military assistance, economic aid, and diplomatic interventions, significantly influencing the region's dynamics and interactions within the broader East-West conflict landscape (Keshari, 2017).

The engagement of the Soviet Union in South Asia was driven by the need to balance power dynamics and counteract the influence of rival superpowers, particularly the United States. The strategic manoeuvres undertaken by the Soviet Union in response to Pakistan's alignment with the US underscored the complex geopolitical dynamics at play in the region during the Cold War era.

2.2 Pak-Russia Post-Cold War Relation

The Pakistan-Soviet (and later Russia) relationship has shilly-shallied over the years. During the Cold War, Pakistan associated itself with the United States, joining defence pacts such as CENTO and SEATO. After the Cold War, Pakistan and Russia instigated to rebuild their relationship, with Russia in quest of strengthening its ties with South and West Asian countries, including Pakistan. Pakistan perceives Russia as an important partner in its foreign policy, and Russia intends to expand its economic ties with Pakistan and other Asian countries.

Since the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, Pakistan's relations with the Russian Federation have evolved, building on over four decades of previous interactions. Initially, Moscow showed amplified attention to Pakistan, leading to reinforced ties during Nawaz Sharif's rule. Pakistan sought military equipment from Moscow, and both nations collaborated on development

strategies. After the Cold War, Pakistan and Russia drew closer, addressing common development challenges. The international political system shifted from bipolar to multipolar, with the United States and G-7 coalition dominating the global economy. Pakistan seeks improved relations with the US, resolving nuclear disagreements, reducing India tensions, and promoting Third World unity through Kashmir conflict resolution. Pakistan's leadership in the Islamic movement could enhance its global status and influence (Azizian & Vasileiff, 2003).

The relationship between Pakistan and Russia has been based on friendship and mutual trust since the end of the post-Cold War period. The absence of territorial disputes and ideological differences has contributed to this positive relationship. Despite a brief setback in 1992 when the United States refused economic assistance and military weapons to Pakistan, leading to a barter deal between Moscow and Islamabad, the two nations have maintained a strong bond. The resignation of Michel Gorbachev in 1991 marked the end of the Soviet Union and the Cold War, leading to a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. Russia emerged as a powerful leader in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and India's trade partner and weapons supplier. Although India was initially anxious about Russia's reliability due to its economic reliance on the West, their friendship was restored through joint production in defence technology (Grekov & Solodovnik, 1991).

Putin's Russia and its relations with Pakistan highlight the trilateral policy consisting of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan. Putin aimed to increase foreign investment and integrate Russia into the global economy by promoting inter-bank relations. Both countries improved their economic and military relations, despite Taliban opposition. After the Cold War, Pakistan leaned towards Russia, while India moved closer to the United States. The US had allegations and suspicions against Pakistan, especially after 9/11 (Ahsan, 2004).

The emergence of two categories - capitalism and communism - and the conflicts that arose during the Cold War era, affected the international political system and development. The crisis faced by the two nations had a significant impact on the province and geopolitical systems (Sakwa, 2015). The potential for Pakistan and Russia to reinforce their relationship through a focus on geo-strategic and geo-economic policies. Key aspects include promoting democracy, human rights, peace, and stability, as well as resolving disputes and developing trade relationships. Russia is expanding its ties with South and West Asian countries, including Pakistan, to benefit from regional markets. Peace in Afghanistan would enable smooth trade routes and development for Pakistan. Advocates for a multilateral approach to international affairs, with Moscow playing a key role in Pakistan's economic policy, leading to greater stability and alignment with regional geo-economic and geo-strategic requirements (Owais, 2007).

CHAPTER THREE

GEOSTRATEGIC DRIVERS OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS RUSSIA

The period between 2012 to 2023 has been marked by a significant transformation in global power dynamics. The decline of Western dominance and the emergence of Asian powers, notably China, have had far-reaching implications for international relations. Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic alignment with Russia have been particularly effected by these changes. This chapter delves into the impact of shifting global power structures on Pakistan-Russia relations, with a focus on the geostrategic and regional security interests of both nations, particularly in the context of Afghanistan. The analysis will explore how these changes have created new opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between Pakistan and Russia, and what this means for the future of regional and global politics.

Two major factors are contributing to Pakistan's foreign policy move towards Russia under geostrategic settings that are:

1. Shift in global power dynamics
2. Strategic balancing against regional and global powers.

3.1 Shift in Global Power Dynamics and its Impact on Pak-Russia Relations

The global power dynamics have undergone profound transformations over the past decade, precipitating a significant impact on the strategic negotiations of numerous nations, including Pakistan and Russia. A comprehensive understanding of these shifts is essential to interpret the evolving trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations between 2012 and 2023. The altering geopolitical landscape, characterized by the rise of new global actors and the reconfiguration of traditional power structures, has created novel opportunities and challenges

for both nations, necessitating an adaptation of their foreign policy approaches and bilateral engagements.

3.1.1 Rise of China and Pakistan's Strategic Realignment

The emergence of China as a global economic giant has been a pivotal development in the evolving landscape of international relations. China's remarkable economic trajectory, coupled with its visionary initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has significantly reshaped the geopolitical dynamics of Asia. For Pakistan, China's rise has precipitated a substantial deepening of economic and military cooperation, exemplified by the BRI project. CPEC is a milestone project and its collaboration has far-reaching implications for Pakistan's strategic posture and its role in the regional security architecture (Lindsay, 2023).

CPEC is a flagship project that aims to surge the connectivity chance of Pakistan and China with the CARs, and raise the attention of Russia in favour of Pakistan to seek and expand its influence in the region. CPEC not only motivates Pakistan to increase its connectivity but also enhances the geopolitical role, that aligns with the prospect of China and Russia's vision of the multipolar world (Small, 2015).

By strengthening economic ties with China, Pakistan reduces its reliance on Western financial aid, creating opportunities for cooperation with non-Western powers like Russia. CPEC positions Pakistan as a key player in regional geopolitics, aligning with China and Russia's vision of a multipolar world order. Pakistan's growing ties with China and Russia are evident in joint military exercises and counter-terrorism initiatives (Wolf, 2020).

The energy sector is another area of cooperation, with Russia showing interest in Pakistan's gas pipeline projects. CPEC also facilitates Pakistan's participation in regional forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), enhancing diplomatic engagement

with Russia and other member states. Ultimately, CPEC enables Pakistan to balance its relations with global and regional powers like the US and India (Fair & Ganguly, 2022).

3.1.2 Decline of Western Dominance

The 2008 global financial crisis, termed The Great Recession, has a profound impact on the United States, leading to a significant transformation of its economic landscape. Between 2007 and 2009, the U.S. GDP experienced a 4.3% contraction, marking the most severe recession since the Great Depression (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2009). The unemployment rate peaked at 10% in October 2009, indicating substantial job losses across various sectors (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The crisis led to the failure of major financial institutions and necessitated significant government interventions, including the \$700 billion Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) to stabilize the financial system (Paulson, 2010).

The crisis presented opportunities for China and Russia to enhance their geopolitical influence. China maintained robust economic growth during the crisis, largely due to its substantial fiscal stimulus package and relatively insulated financial system (Naughton, 2009). This resilience allowed China to consolidate its economic power, increase global investments, and launch initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to expand its economic influence. China positioned itself as a stable partner in global governance institutions, promoting alternative institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Chin, 2016).

Russia capitalized on the crisis to advance its strategic interests, leveraging Europe's energy dependency to its advantage in geopolitical negotiations. The crisis allowed Russia to pursue assertive policies in its near abroad, reasserting its influence in the post-Soviet space. Additionally, the crisis accelerated Russia's pivot towards China, culminating in significant energy deals, such as the 2014 gas agreement between Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC), bolstering Russia's strategic position and providing a counterbalance to Western sanctions (Lo, 2015).

This decline has given rise to a more multipolar international order, wherein emerging powers like China and Russia have assumed greater prominence. In response to China's growing influence, the United States' "Pivot to Asia" strategy has introduced new complexities into regional geopolitics, prompting Pakistan to pursue a more diversified approach to its strategic partnerships, including a strengthening of relations with Russia. This shift marks a significant departure from the historical alignment of Pakistan towards the West and underscores the evolving nature of international relations in the 21st century (Rong, 2023).

The diminution of Western global influence has precipitated a significant rapprochement between Pakistan and Russia, marked by a strategic recalibration and diversification of their diplomatic partnerships. This shift has yielded enhanced economic cooperation, notably in the energy and infrastructure sectors, and reinforced defence and security collaboration through joint military exercises and arms sales. Both nations share a common interest in maintaining regional stability, particularly in post-withdrawal Afghanistan, and have found convergent interests in multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Bhadurkumar, 2021).

Furthermore, Pakistan and Russia are leveraging their burgeoning ties to counterbalance Western policies and gain strategic leverage, with Russia seeking to expand its presence in South Asia and Pakistan diversifying its foreign policy options. This evolving partnership reflects a broader trend of emerging powers asserting their influence in the context of waning Western dominance (Stratfor, 2023).

3.1.3 Russia's Revival in Global Affairs

During the presidency of Vladimir Putin, Russia has re-emerged as a significant force on the global stage, actively challenging Western dominance through various actions, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its military intervention in Syria. Russia's assertive foreign policy has led to enhanced cooperation with nations seeking to counterbalance Western

influence. Pakistan, in particular, has capitalized on this development, fostering increased military and economic cooperation with Russia. Both countries share common interests in maintaining regional stability and combating terrorism in Afghanistan, creating a foundation for strengthened bilateral ties and a more multipolar international order (Ahmad, 2021).

3.1.4 South Asia's Evolving Geopolitical Landscape

The South Asian region has emerged as a critical arena for the unfolding global power dynamics. The strategic location of Afghanistan, situated at the confluence of Central and South Asia, has rendered it a pivotal hub for regional security concerns. In the wake of the U.S. withdrawal, Pakistan and Russia have discovered converging interests in stabilizing Afghanistan, combating terrorism, and mitigating the influence of extremist entities. This shared agenda has served as a primary catalyst for the strengthening of relations between Pakistan and Russia, as both nations seek to promote regional security and stability in the face of evolving geopolitical realities (Pant & Shah, 2019).

3.1.5 Bilateral and Multilateral Initiatives

Pakistan and Russia have undertaken various bilateral and multilateral initiatives to fortify their strategic partnership. These endeavours include Joint military exercises, augmented defence trade, and collaboration in regional forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Additionally, they encompass bilateral political consultations, enhanced cooperation in agriculture and energy, increased parliamentary exchanges to deepen bilateral cooperation, and meetings of the Inter-Governmental Commission and the Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability. These initiatives are designed to leverage their mutual interests and bolster their geopolitical standing in an increasingly multipolar world.

Pakistan and Russia have substantially strengthened their bilateral ties, particularly in the energy sector. A notable example is the North-South Gas Pipeline project, valued at \$2

billion, which aims to transport liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Karachi to Lahore (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, 2017). Additionally, defence cooperation has intensified through joint military exercises, such as "Druzhiba" (Friendship), which commenced in 2016 and have since become an annual event (Inter-Services Public Relations, Pakistan, 2019). Several Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) have also bolstered trade and economic partnerships, with a focus on sectors like energy, agriculture, and information technology (Pakistan Ministry of Commerce, 2015).

On the multilateral front, both nations are active members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which fosters regional security, economic cooperation, and cultural exchanges across Eurasia. Pakistan's full membership in the SCO in 2017, supported by Russia, underscores the significance of this platform in promoting regional stability and cooperation (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2017). Furthermore, Pakistan and Russia have played key roles in the Afghanistan peace process through multilateral forums like the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan. The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) provides another framework for collaboration, with Russia holding observer status and engaging with ECO member states, including Pakistan, on various economic and trade projects (Economic Cooperation Organization, 2020).

These bilateral and multilateral initiatives demonstrate a growing partnership between Pakistan and Russia, aimed at enhancing regional security and economic cooperation. By diversifying their engagements, both nations strategically position themselves within the region and beyond.

3.2 Pakistan's Strategic Balancing Against Regional Power

The global power dynamics have undergone profound transformations over the past decade, precipitating a significant impact on the strategic deliberations of numerous nations,

including Pakistan and Russia. A comprehensive understanding of these shifts is essential to decipher the evolving trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations between 2012 and 2023. The altering geopolitical landscape, characterized by the rise of new global actors and the reconfiguration of traditional power structures, has created novel opportunities and challenges for both nations, necessitating an adaptation of their foreign policy approaches and bilateral engagements. Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia is significantly influenced by regional dynamics, with a focus on promoting stability, counterterrorism, and strategic alliances.

Pakistan's geopolitical approach is guided by the necessity to counterbalance the influence of regional powers, notably India while navigating relationships with significant regional and global actors. This strategic balancing is reflected in Pakistan's defence policies, diplomatic engagements, and economic partnerships. Pakistan's defence and security policy are shaped by its longstanding rivalry with India and has historically relied on its alliance with the United States (Ministry of Defense, Pakistan, 2020).

However, Pakistan has recently diversified its defence partnerships, particularly with China and Russia. Diplomatically, Pakistan employs a multifaceted approach to maintain regional balance, actively participating in organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and engaging in the Afghanistan peace process through the Moscow Format. Economically, Pakistan has pursued partnerships that complement its strategic objectives, including the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and initiatives aimed at boosting trade and energy cooperation with Russia and Central Asian states. By diversifying its strategic ties and leveraging regional organizations, Pakistan aims to enhance its security, economic stability, and geopolitical standing in a challenging regional environment (Ministry of Commerce, 2021).

3.2.1 Afghanistan and Counterterrorism Cooperation

The geopolitical situation in Afghanistan is a persistent concern for both Pakistan and Russia, with the shared goal of preventing the spread of extremism and terrorism into their territories. Consequently, they have increased cooperation in intelligence sharing, military training, and diplomatic engagements aimed at fostering a stable government in Kabul (Siddique, 2023).

Pakistan's foreign policy under PM Imran Khan's tenure, regional cooperation was given a significant rank and considered by both States for mutual benefit. Pakistan shares a border with the war-torn State of Afghanistan, which just came out of US forces and the Afghan Taliban took charge of Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares a borderline with Central Asian countries, which are under the influence of Russia. Russia is also a neighbour to them and never wanted regional conflicts due to Afghanistan in Central Asia. Furthermore, Pakistan's security and energy concerns push her to support the cause, which is the mutual concern of both States.

On June 15, 2021, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov exchanged telephone calls, upon which both agreed to cooperate for Afghan settlement (Dawn.com, 2021). Cooperation on regional security is one of the essential points in Russia's foreign policy. Under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, PM Imran Khan has addressed Afghan security issues several times. In September 2021, PM Imran Khan addressed to SCO summit held in Dushanbe, Uzbekistan, in which he emphasized the point that, a coordinated approach towards regional cooperation and Afghan issues is needed for regional stability (Naz, 2021).

3.2.2 India-Pakistan Rivalry and Strategic Alliances

The ongoing India-Pakistan rivalry drives Pakistan's foreign policy, with the abrogation of Article 370 by India in 2019 further straining relations. In response, Pakistan seeks strategic alliances to counterbalance India's regional dominance. Russia, despite historical ties with

India, has engaged with Pakistan through military exercises and defense agreements, indicating a nuanced approach to its South Asian strategy (Khan F. H., 2021).

This shift is partly driven by Moscow's desire to expand its influence in South Asia and reduce dependency on traditional allies. Joint military exercises, defense cooperation, and energy projects like the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline illustrate the growing depth of Pakistan-Russia relations (Amin S. M., 2021).

3.2.4 Multilateral Forums and Strategic Autonomy

Pakistan's participation in multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) demonstrates its commitment to regional security and economic cooperation. The SCO provides a platform for Pakistan and Russia to collaborate on issues ranging from counterterrorism to economic development, enhancing Pakistan's strategic autonomy.

Regional dynamics, including the situation in Afghanistan, the India-Pakistan rivalry, and strategic projects like CPEC, significantly influence Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia. These factors contribute to a pragmatic partnership to address mutual security concerns and foster regional stability. As geopolitical landscapes evolve, Pakistan and Russia's relationship will likely to adapt, driven by shared interests in counterterrorism, economic cooperation, and regional security (Khan M. F., 2019).

3.3 Factors Driving the Increasing Cooperation Between Pakistan and Russia

Over the past decade, the relationship between Pakistan and Russia has undergone a remarkable evolution. For years, the two nations were locked into opposing camps, with Pakistan closely tied to the United States and Russia firmly aligned with India. But as the global landscape has shifted, so too have the dynamics of their bilateral relationship.

Today, Pakistan and Russia are finding common ground on a range of strategic issues, from security and counter-terrorism to trade and energy. This new era of cooperation is driven by a shared desire for stability and prosperity in the region and a recognition that their interests are increasingly intertwined. As they work together to address common challenges, they are forging a new model of international partnership - one that is based on mutual respect, trust, and a commitment to collective progress. By exploring the factors that have driven this transformation, we can better understand the complex forces that shape international relations - and the political dynamics that are redefining the global landscape (Amin S. M., 2021).

3.4 Pakistan and Russia Geo-Strategic Interests

Between 2012 and 2024, Pakistan and Russia embarked on a journey of cooperation, driven by a shared desire for security, stability, and prosperity. Working together, they have discovered that their strategic interests align profoundly. Both nations have realised that collaboration is key to addressing their deepest concerns - from the threat of terrorism to the need for economic growth and geopolitical stability.

At the heart of this partnership are shared values and a common purpose. Pakistan and Russia are united in their quest for peace, commitment to regional stability, and determination to secure a brighter future for their citizens. By examining the strategic interests that drive cooperation, we gain a deeper understanding of the people and priorities that shapes the future of international relations (Khan F. S., 2020).

3.4.1 Afghanistan and Counter-Terrorism Efforts

The quest for stability in Afghanistan and the combating of terrorism has emerged as a shared strategic imperative for Pakistan and Russia. The withdrawal of U.S. forces in 2021 and the subsequent rise of the Taliban have introduced new complexities and opportunities for regional security collaboration. Both nations are united in their determination to prevent

Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for terrorist entities that could imperil regional stability and jeopardize human security. This shared concern has fostered enhanced cooperation in counterterrorism endeavours, encompassing intelligence sharing and joint military exercises (Ramani, 2021).

A notable example of this cooperation is the Druzhba series of joint military exercises, inaugurated in 2016. These exercises concentrate on counterterrorism operations and have significantly enhanced the interoperability between the Pakistani and Russian armed forces. Such collaborative engagements underscore the mutual acknowledgement of the perils posed by terrorism and the necessity of concerted efforts to address this menace, ultimately contributing to the promotion of regional peace and stability (Kugelman, 2021).

3.4.2 Bilateral Engagement Between Pakistan and Russia on Geo-Strategic Interests

Pakistan's foreign policy landscape has undergone extensive transformations in recent decades, driven by changing geopolitical forces, regional security reservations, and economic necessities. A prominent feature of Pakistan's foreign policy development has been its reconsideration of alliances with prominent global actors, including Russia. Between 2012 and 2023, Pakistan's interactions with Russia experienced a noteworthy revival, diverging from historical trends marked by Cold War-era hostilities and consequent alienation.

Against the complex regional challenges, including the ongoing conflict and instability in neighbouring Afghanistan, Pakistan's diplomatic strategy against Russia has garnered significant attention. This period saw a convergence of interests between Islamabad and Moscow, fuelled by a combination of geostrategic compulsions and shared anxieties over regional security, particularly in Afghanistan.

Areas of cooperation, particularly in counter-terrorism and stability in Afghanistan, have emerged as key pillars driving their relationship forward. Notably, economic ties, energy

cooperation, and shared strategic interests in regional stability have laid the foundation for a promising partnership. As both nations navigate through historical legacies and external pressures, the evolving dynamics of their relationship reflect a strategic recalibration towards mutual interests and shared objectives (Trade Development Authority of Pakistan., 2022).

In 2012, a Russian delegation visited Pakistan, resulting in the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) aimed at expanding Pakistan Steel Mills, enhancing cooperation in the energy sector, and modernizing the railways department. Following this, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, then Chief of Army Staff, visited Russia in October 2012. During this visit, he engaged in discussions with senior Russian military officials and politicians, with a focus on developing defense relations. Additionally, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov visited Pakistan in October 2012, where he held significant meetings and made important statements regarding Pakistan-Russia relations(Dawn, 2012).

In 2013, Russia and Pakistan initiated strategic dialogues, establishing an institutional framework for their renewed interactions. In April 2013, the Russian Air Chief visited Pakistan, leading to three notable milestones in the following year (Yousuf, 2013).

In August 2014, the Russian Naval Chief visited Pakistan, followed by a visit from Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in November 2014, marking the first visit by a Russian Defense Minister to Pakistan in 45 years. This visit culminated in a Defense Cooperation Agreement between the two countries, encompassing the exchange of information on politico-military issues, collaboration to enhance international security, intensification of counter-terrorism and arms control activities, and sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations (Dawn, 2014).

In 2014, Russia lifted a self-imposed arms embargo on Pakistan in 2014, and Pakistan and Russia signed a breakthrough defence deal in 2015, which comprised the sale of four Mi-35 'Hind E' attack helicopters to Pakistan (Raza S. , 2018). In 2016 Russia and Pakistan conducted their first-ever joint military drills. By December 2016, Pakistan and Russia signed an agreement for the Pakistan Stream Gas pipeline from Karachi to Kasur and reached a price accord. In November 2016, Pakistan decided to grant Russia access to the Gwadar Port, a warm water seaport (Gady, 2016).

In 2019, the Russian Foreign Minister and Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi engaged in a vigorous meeting. On the sidelines of the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Bishkek on May 22, 2019, Foreign Minister Qureshi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. The two ministers exchanged views and expressed their appreciation for the development of bilateral relations, which had seen significant progress in various areas. They agreed that the upcoming Deputy Foreign Ministers level talks would further invigorate the already positive momentum in bilateral relations. Foreign Minister Qureshi commended Russia for its role in facilitating Pakistan's integration into the SCO process, while Foreign Minister Lavrov described Pakistan's SCO membership as a highly positive development.

Additionally, the Foreign Ministers addressed critical issues affecting regional and global stability, agreeing that a successful reconciliation process in Afghanistan was crucial for peace, security, and stability on both regional and global levels (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2022). Thus, Pakistan's active inclusion in the SCO has further strengthened the bilateral relationship, providing both states with opportunities to discuss regional and international issues and enhance their cooperation.

Pakistan's foreign policy under PM Imran Khan's tenure, regional cooperation was given a significant rank and considered by both States for mutual benefit. Pakistan shares a border with the war-torn State of Afghanistan, which just came out of US forces and the Afghan Taliban took charge of Afghanistan. Afghanistan shares a border line with Central Asian countries, which are under the influence of Russia is also a neighbour to them and never wanted regional conflicts due to Afghanistan in Central Asia. Furthermore, Pakistan's security and energy concerns push her to support the cause. Which is the mutual concern of both States.

On June 15, 2021, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov exchanged telephone calls, upon which both agreed to cooperate for Afghan settlement (Dawn.com, 2021). Cooperation on regional security is one of the essential points in Russia's foreign policy. Under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, PM Imran Khan has addressed Afghan security issues several times. In September 2021, PM Imran Khan addressed to SCO summit held in Dushanbe, Uzbekistan, in which he emphasized the point that, a coordinated approach towards regional cooperation and Afghan issues is needed for regional stability (Naz, 2021).

Moreover, the military cooperation between Pakistan and Russia has also been increasing and strengthening. Since 2010, the relationship between both States has been improving. In April 2018, COAS General Qamar Javed Bhajwa visited Russia for joint military training. It was the third consecutive visit by the Pakistani military official (Dagia, 2021).

Moreover, an agreement was signed between the military officials of both States, Concluding the inaugural session of the Russian-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee(JMCC), the defence ministry characterized it as a paramount platform for defence collaboration between Russia and Pakistan. (Syed, 2018).

The military training between Russia and Pakistan became active when President US Donald Trump terminated the military training program with Pakistan. Hence it has provided a great opportunity to Pakistan to collaborate with Russia on strategic grounds and balance its position in the region (Iqbal, 2018).

On June 20, 2023, Islamabad hosted the fifth round of bilateral political consultations between Pakistan and Russia. Leading the discussions were Pakistan's Foreign Secretary Dr. Asad Majeed Khan and Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko, along with Ambassador Zamir Kabulov, Russia's Special Representative on Afghanistan.

The talks covered a wide range of topics, including political, economic, defense, and energy cooperation, as well as cultural and scientific exchanges. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the progress in energy cooperation and agreed to enhance collaboration in higher education and culture. They also committed to strengthening security cooperation to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and organized crime.

The delegations discussed regional issues, notably the situation in Afghanistan, and agreed on the importance of peace in the region. The consultations highlighted the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-Russia diplomatic relations and explored new areas for collaboration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, 2023).

3.4.3 PM Imran Khan's Visit to Russian Federation: Amid Russian-Ukraine Crisis

PM Imran Khan's visit is a significant breakthrough in the history of the Pak-Russia bilateral relationship, which the world has highlighted for two reasons. The first is, after PM Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, Imran Khan is the second PM of Pakistan to visit Russia, which happened after 23 years of period. The second most important and most discussed point is the intensity of time. Khan visited Russia in February 2022, a time when a conflict between Russia and

Ukraine was escalating and Russia was planning to enter into war. Right after the visit of PM Imran Khan, Russia jumped into the war, which has been interpreted differently by the international community.

Pakistan's PM visit to Russia portrayed the growing relationship between both States, where, PM Imran Khan was given a red-carpet welcome by Moscow, there was no long table between them, as witnessed in the case of the French President by Russia and the meeting was of three hours long (Yousaf 2022). During the meeting, the officials of both the states have exchanged their view on the bilateral relationship, regional issues and development in South Asia (Hashim 2022). Moreover, the officials of both the sides discussed about the oil import, where Russia offered 30-40% off on crude oil export to Pakistan amid visit.

Pakistan's visit to Russia in a conflictual environment has faced criticism and applause at the same time. Where Pakistan showed unawareness regarding the exploding conflict between Ukraine and Russia could lead towards war. PM Imran showed 'regret', and said, "I hope the conflict will avert diplomatically" and President Putin stated the visit was a "Working visit". (Yousaf 2022).

Furthermore, there is a certain point of view which claims that Pakistan's visit to Russia amid the Russian-Ukraine crisis will isolate Pakistan internationally, because the West has highly criticized Russia and put sanctions on her, amid the crisis. Moreover, the West instructed the world to follow the ground. Where Pakistan negated the instructions of the West and showed a 'neutral' stance over the conflict and abstained from vote in the UN general assembly has grown anger in the West towards Pakistan (Shams 2022).

Under analytical ground, if we look intensively over the criticism made of Pakistan over going against the US, it could be added that Pakistan never wanted to cut off her relationship towards any of the States, whether it is the US or Russia, and the state wanted to build a strong

bilateral relationship with every State of the world without being a part of any camp. As PM Imran Khan said: “ *Pakistan’s strategic direction is to maintain relations with every State of the world, without being in any Bloc*” (Dawn.com 2022).

Pakistan has to take this decision to maintain national interest, because in past, being in the US bloc, Pakistan has faced economic and reputational loss. Due to the 9/11 incident, Pakistan got isolated, and the world started stated her as a ‘Terrorist State’, even though, Pakistan was not involved in any such activity, rather she helped the US in the war against terrorism and containing Soviet Union in Afghanistan, but still nothing contributed Pakistan towards development. During that course, Pakistan lost 99000 lives, and Pakistan’s economy faced around a 7.5-billion-dollar loss (Jamshed and Fakhr-ul-Islam 2021).

Hence, it would be a skeptical and weak argument to relate Pakistan’s visit to Russia as diplomatic isolation for Pakistan, because Pakistan is growing her diplomatic ties with the world with changing power dynamics of the world from unipolarity towards multipolarity, and the State must build a strong relationship with the major powers like Russia.

3.4.5 Important Agreement Between Pakistan and Russia on Geo-Strategic Interests

In the past decade, Pakistan and Russia have engaged in a series of agreements aimed at enhancing their geopolitical cooperation, with a particular focus on mutual security concerns and regional stability in Afghanistan. These agreements reflect the dynamic geopolitical landscape and the strategic recalibration of both nations' foreign policies.

3.4.6 Military Cooperation Agreement

In 2014, Pakistan and Russia signed a military cooperation agreement, facilitating joint military exercises and training. The agreement they signed was driven by a shared desire to enhance their military capabilities, counterterrorism efforts, and strategic partnerships. By

engaging in joint exercises and training, both nations aimed to improve their interoperability, exchange valuable experiences, and learn from each other's operational practices (Syed, 2014).

The Ministry of Defence, Pakistan, officially announced the Agreement on Defence Cooperation in November 2014, highlighting the importance of interoperability and exchange of experiences in military education and training. The agreement was also motivated by a shared concern for regional security challenges and the need to combat terrorism. By working together, Pakistan and Russia sought to ensure stability in the region and address the geopolitical implications of their cooperation. This partnership represented a strategic shift for Pakistan, as it sought to diversify its defence partnerships beyond traditional allies, enhancing its defense procurement options and capabilities (Ministry of Defense, Pakistan, 2014).

3.4.7 Procurement of MI-35 Helicopters

In 2018, Pakistan and Russia solidified their defense partnership through a landmark agreement for the procurement of Mi-35 'Hind E' attack helicopters. This significant development highlights Russia's emergence as a crucial partner in augmenting Pakistan's defence capabilities. The versatile Mi-35 helicopters, adept at countering insurgency and excelling in diverse combat scenarios, are poised to substantially enhance Pakistan's defense preparedness and operational efficacy (Khan B. , 2018).

The deal encompasses provisions for technical cooperation, paving the way for potential technology transfer and joint ventures. This collaboration may yield fruitful economic and technological collaborations between the two nations. This agreement not only fortifies military-to-military ties but also contributes to regional stability by bolstering Pakistan's defense capabilities. By doing so, it reinforces the commitment to peace and security in the region, underscoring the transformative potential of bilateral defence cooperation (Gady F.-S. , 2018).

3.5 Pakistan-Russia Economic Interests

In recent years, Russia and Pakistan have been actively fostering their economic relations, driven by a combination of strategic interests and mutual benefits. Pakistan's quest for economic revitalization and energy security, coupled with Russia's ambition to expand its economic influence in Asia, have brought the two nations closer together (Haq, 2021).

Since 2012, Russia and Pakistan have entered into various agreements and deals aimed at enhancing their economic cooperation. During the visit of the Russian counterpart to Pakistan, memoranda were signed in areas such as metallurgy, railways, and power. Furthermore, the resolution of a long-standing trade dispute, stemming from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, contributed to a significant increase in bilateral trade volume from US\$442 million in 2017 to US\$532 million in 2018 (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2021).

The growing economic ties between Russia and Pakistan hold significant implications for the regional balance of power. As China's geopolitical influence continues to rise, both Russia and Pakistan recognize the need to adapt their foreign policy priorities accordingly. By strengthening their economic cooperation, Russia and Pakistan aim to create a connected economic space between the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, potentially yielding benefits such as increased market access and deeper regional economic integration (Khan F. H., 2021).

Additionally, Russia's pursuit of new markets for its energy products, particularly in light of Europe's decarbonization efforts, has made Pakistan an attractive partner. The two countries have signed agreements to construct a US\$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline in Pakistan, part of a larger Russian investment package worth US\$14 billion in Pakistan's energy sector.

This partnership has the potential to reduce Pakistan's dependence on oil and meet its growing energy demands (Eurostat, 2021).

3.5.1 Bilateral Engagement Between Pakistan and Russia on Economic Interests

In recent years, Russia and Pakistan have been actively cultivating their economic relations, driven by a complex array of factors. Pakistan's quest for economic revitalization and energy security, coupled with Russia's ambition to expand its economic influence in Asia, have brought the two nations into closer proximity.

Since 2012, Russia and Pakistan have engaged in a plethora of agreements and deals aimed at bolstering their economic cooperation. During Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Islamabad in 2012, memoranda were signed in areas such as metallurgy, railways, and power, marking a significant turning point in their economic relations. By the end of 2012, the bilateral trade volume had experienced a six-fold increase compared to the beginning of the 2000s, signalling a remarkable surge in economic activity.

In 2012, a Russian delegation visited Pakistan, resulting in the signing of three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) aimed at expanding Pakistan Steel Mills, enhancing cooperation in the energy sector, and modernizing the railways department. Subsequently, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, the then Chief of Army Staff, visited Russia in October 2012, where he held discussions with senior Russian military officials and politicians, focusing on the development of defense relationships. Additionally, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov visited Pakistan in October 2012, where he conducted meetings and made significant statements concerning Pakistan-Russia relations (Dawn, 2012).

The year 2013 witnessed a breakthrough in bilateral relations with the establishment of the inaugural Russia-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. This milestone was followed by sustained high-level contacts, a series of joint military exercises, the lifting of Russian self-imposed arms

embargoes on sales to Pakistan, and trade discussions across multiple levels of ministries, business, and military.

The 8th session of the Pakistan-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, held in Islamabad from January 18-20, 2023, yielded significant outcomes. The two nations reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening economic ties, agreeing to enhance collaboration in various sectors, including trade, investment, energy, and education.

The Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline project was highlighted as a key aspect of sustainable gas development and affordable supplies. Russia was invited to explore potential projects with Pakistani federal and provincial governments, and pending issues related to certificates of origin were resolved. Focal persons were nominated to enhance cooperation, and measures were taken to increase bilateral cooperation in science, technology, and education. Innovative business models, including barter trade, were discussed, having a focus on promoting regional integration and Eurasian connectivity (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2023).

The growing economic ties between Russia and Pakistan hold profound implications for the regional balance of power. As China's geopolitical influence continues to ascend, both Russia and Pakistan recognize the need to adapt their foreign policy priorities accordingly. By strengthening their economic cooperation, Russia and Pakistan aim to create an interconnected economic space between the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, potentially yielding benefits such as increased market access, deeper regional economic integration, and enhanced economic connectivity.

In 2018, the bilateral trade volume experienced a significant increase from US\$442 million in 2017 to US\$532 million, partly attributable to the resolution of a long-standing trade

dispute stemming from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This upward trajectory continued in 2020, with the bilateral trade volume reaching a record high of US\$790 million, representing a substantial increase of over 45% from 2019 (Raza & Gul, 2021).

On 3rd July, 2024 During the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Astana, Russian President Vladimir Putin held discussions with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. This engagement marked their second meeting, following an initial encounter in Samarkand in September 2022. President Putin proposed an augmentation of energy supplies to Pakistan, encompassing crude oil, and underscored the importance of collaboration in the energy and agricultural sectors. Pakistan, in its strategic endeavour to diversify its foreign policy and leverage the benefits of discounted Russian oil amidst Western pressures, received its initial shipment of Russian crude in June 2022. Despite this, subsequent progress has been limited. Both leaders articulated a mutual commitment to fortify bilateral relations and to expand trade and cooperation across various domains, including energy and food security (Yousuf, 2024).

Furthermore, Russia's quest for new markets for its energy products, particularly in light of Europe's decarbonization efforts, has made Pakistan an attractive energy partner. The two countries have entered into agreements to construct a US\$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline in Pakistan, part of a larger Russian investment package worth US\$14 billion in Pakistan's energy sector. This partnership has the potential to reduce Pakistan's dependence on oil and meet its growing energy demands, thereby contributing to a more diversified and sustainable energy landscape (Malik H. Y., 2020).

3.5.2 Important Agreements Between Pakistan and Russia on Economic Interest

In recent years, Russia and Pakistan have been actively cultivating their economic relations, driven by a confluence of strategic interests and a shared desire to navigate the

evolving geopolitical landscape. As China's regional influence continues to expand, both nations have come to recognize the importance of diversifying their economic partnerships and exploring new avenues for cooperation (Hussain & Fatima, 2015).

A significant turning point in their economic relations was the establishment of the Russia-Pakistan Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation in 2011. This milestone marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation, with annual sessions held since then to facilitate dialogue and collaboration. The two countries subsequently signed many agreements and deals aimed at bolstering their economic cooperation, including memoranda in key sectors such as metallurgy, railways, and power in 2012 (Kamenev, 2010).

The resolution of a long-standing trade dispute in 2019, coupled with the signing of agreements to construct a US\$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline in Pakistan as part of a larger Russian investment package worth US\$14 billion in the country's energy sector, demonstrates the commitment of both sides to deepening their economic engagement. This cooperation has the potential to yield significant benefits, including increased economic diversification, improved energy security, and enhanced regional economic connectivity. By working together, Russia and Pakistan can create a more interconnected and prosperous economic landscape, better equipped to navigate the complexities of the 21st century (The News International, 2021).

In 2012, a Russian delegation visited Pakistan and signed three Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to expand Pakistan Steel Mills, enhance energy sector cooperation, and modernise the railways department. Following this, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, then Chief of Army Staff, visited Russia in October 2012 and held discussions with top Russian military officials and politicians, focusing on developing defense relationships. Russian

Foreign Minister Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov visited Pakistan in October 2012, holding meetings and making significant statements on Pakistan-Russia relation (Dawn, 2012).

Immediately after, Denis Manturov, the Russian Minister of Industry and Trade, headed a business delegation based on 64 members to Pakistan. The delegation was engaged in discussing economic opportunities, investments and trade. Simultaneously, Pakistani PM Imran Khan actively strived to collaborate with the Russian Counterpart on energy, manufacturing and railway sectors. Notably in the year 2020, the trade volume between Russia and Pakistan surge record high of 45% reaching a total of \$1 billion (Chia & Haiqi, 2021).

Pakistan is a highly-populated State and thus requires oil and energy in enormous amounts to fulfil its requirements and Russia is the world's largest energy exporter country. Currently, Pakistan has a gas shortage of 1.5 billion cubic feet per day, which is estimated get double by the year 2025. Pakistan is the 9th largest gas importer due to high energy demand and for years, Pakistan has been importing gas from Qatar (Katona, 2021).

With Russia's ambition to triple its LNG production capacity and increase its exports by 2035, The country is seeking Pakistan as a potential energy client. Pakistan is the fifth most populous country and has an energy deficit. In addition, the Russian companies presented a proposal to increase the LNG supply to Pakistan. During his visit in 2021, Lavrov highlighted the ongoing discussion between Rosatom and the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission on the potential utilization of energy in the medical and nuclear sectors. Pakistan's ambassador to Russia, Shafqat Ali Khan stated in a webinar that, The Russia-Pakistan relationship is based on mutual respect and cooperation, which is a win-win for both sides (Dawn.com, 2021). Moreover, the TAPI gas pipeline project 33(bcm) of gas, will fulfill the need of Pakistan's energy needs (Asian Development Bank, 2018).

3.5.3 Pakistan Steam Gas Pipeline

The Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline (PSGP) project represents a significant milestone in the deepening energy cooperation between Pakistan and Russia, exemplifying the strengthening of bilateral relations between the two nations. This project underscores the strategic importance of energy collaboration in enhancing economic and geopolitical ties, while also highlighting the critical role of energy in fostering sustainable development and economic growth in Pakistan.

The PSGP project entails the construction of a 1,100 km long gas pipeline designed to transport Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Kasur in Central-West Punjab to Karachi, a major port city in Pakistan. With a projected annual capacity of 12.3 billion cubic meters of LNG, this infrastructure project aims to provide a stable and reliable energy supply for commercial, industrial, and residential purposes.

Initially signed in 2015, the PSGP project faced delays due to disagreements on financial and operational details and concerns over potential US sanctions against Russian companies involved. However, the signing of the Amendment Protocols on May 28, 2021, marked a significant breakthrough in overcoming these challenges, demonstrating the commitment of both nations to collaborate despite external pressures (Reuters, 2022).

The PSGP project is poised to play a pivotal role in alleviating Pakistan's energy deficit and bolstering its energy security by diversifying its energy sources with LNG. This shift towards cleaner energy will contribute to Pakistan's efforts to mitigate environmental pollution and combat climate change, as LNG emits significantly less carbon dioxide, nitrogen oxide, and sulphur dioxide compared to oil and coal.

Economically, the PSGP project promises to provide affordable and reliable energy to Pakistan's expanding industrial sector, which is crucial for balancing the country's economy internally. The availability of LNG will also decrease Pakistan's dependence on heavy fuel oil

for maritime purposes, leading to a reduction in sulphur emissions and enhancing the environmental sustainability of its maritime industry (Malik, 2021).

Looking ahead, the PSGP project is expected to significantly contribute to the development of strategic relations between Pakistan and Russia, paving the way for the implementation of other energy and connectivity projects in the region. The successful execution of the PSGP project represents a crucial step forward in Pakistan's energy security strategy and its transition to cleaner energy sources, while also solidifying its bilateral relations with Russia (Ministry of Economic Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 2023).

This project holds great significance in uplifting the relationship of Moscow with Pakistan, because it signifies a balanced treatment of Russia with both India and Pakistan, opening the confidence of both sides from long-time betrayal.

3.6 Analysis of the Growing Pak-Russia Relations in the Context of Afghanistan Issue

Several factors including the changing regional and world dynamics have paved the way for the Pak-Russia relation's growth. The significant reason is the bilateral geostrategic concern. Russia is concerned about the three major issues posed by Afghanistan. The first is, terrorism, the second is armed and narcotrafficking and the third is the Jihadi mindset of the Taliban, which can cause instability and regional threat as witnessed during Chechnyan War (Hofmann, 2016).

On the other hand, Pakistan is also facing challenges through the Pak-Afghan porous border. The Pak-Afghan borderline shares a difficult geography due to which the guerilla fighters emerge and terrorist could easily hide themselves. The Pamir mountain range surrounds the Southern area of Afghanistan, and the northern part has the Hindu Kush and Himalaya ranges, which creates geographical complexities. Pakistan and Afghanistan share nine formal borders; three share international status, including Chaman, Torkham and Spin

Boldak. The other six borders are mutual. To proceed with illegal activities such as smuggling, human trafficking, drug trafficking and arms trafficking, locals have discovered several other points (Carnavistan, 2019).

Furthermore, the Pak-Afghan border is not easy to monitor or control hence, money-sucking physically through the border is easy. The movement of terrorists and illegal human and drug trafficking is very difficult or almost impossible to control. The security institutions of Pakistan have led operations against these terrorist groups in Pakistan to curb the terrorism but the terrorists have found the safe heavens in Afghanistan and they started proceeding with their ill-games beyond the borders. For example: The 2014 attack on the Army Public School, Peshawar, the 2019, terrorist attack on Pearl Continental hotel, Gwadar was done by the same terrorists and they were trained in Afghanistan and after training they intervened in Pakistan.

3.6.1 Narco-trafficking

Afghanistan is the largest cultivator of opium and most of its citizens earn their livelihood by illegal opium trafficking. Afghanistan constitutes 93% of the opium market in the world. The opium production and its market are high in the areas where there is the hold of Taliban. According to the report, 93% of the opium is produced in the southeast provinces of Afghanistan, where the Taliban are taking hold and all the terrorist activities take place from there (Bajoria, 2009). This illicit drug trafficking has further taken to Russia and Pakistan from Afghanistan. One significant route for drug trafficking to Russia is the northern hilly tracks of Pakistan to the Pamir of Tajikistan. According to the report of Pakistan Customs, from December 2021 to January 2022, around 525 kgs of Hashish, 255 kgs of heroine, and 280 kgs of opium were seized by the customs at the Torkham border (Rupert, 2022).

Afghan Narcotrafficking followed by three routes, the Balkan route, the northern and the southern route. Among these routes, the western route follows for the narcotrafficking in Pakistan. According to the report of UNODC(2009) around 45% of Afghan drugs smuggled to

Pakistan (UNODC, 2009). Through Northern Pakistan, the drugs are further trafficked to China and CARs in a small amount (UNODC, 2015). The Afghans take advantage of the porous borders between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the proximity of culture and looks of the people from both sides, they cross borders to smuggle drugs into Pakistan, especially in FATA and Baluchistan and take the drugs to Iran and China.

3.6.2 Arm-Smuggling

Afghanistan has faced the intervention of different empires and powers, Firstly European Empire then Soviet Union and after that United States of America. All the empires resided there to control the region and get access to Central Asia. These powers have not only intervened and got defeated by Afghanistan but also, brought heavy armaments with them and left several expensive machine guns, and armaments. Similar to the Soviets, the US has also left a lot of weaponry. After the fall of Kabul and the control of the Taliban over it, Afghanistan faced immense economic issues including food emergency. To control the issues, Taliban started smuggling armaments for earning. The arms started smuggling from the southern border of the Pak-Afghan border on fruit trucks and armaments smuggled to Torkham, Chaman and Bajour borders (ANI, 2022). These dangerous and heavy armaments went to terrorist groups residing in Pakistan. They further conduct terrorist attacks in Pakistan and challenge the peace of the State.

3.6.3 Instability in North Caucasus Region

The other hampering issue Russia is concerned about the safety of its Northern part from instability. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan poses significant challenges to peace in North Russia. This instability can create a security threat for Russia, particularly in its North Caucasus region, where it has faced challenges from religious extremism and separatism in the past.

Russia has been cautious in its approach to the region, seeking to balance its interests with those of other major powers, such as the United States and NATO. Russia has been critical of the United States' military actions in the region, particularly in Afghanistan, and has sought to maintain its influence through diplomatic and economic means (Azizian, 2003).

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the ongoing tensions between Russia and the West have contributed to a broader regional instability, which can further destabilize the North Caucasus and create opportunities for extremist groups to operate. The economic impact of the Taliban's rise can also be significant, as it can disrupt regional trade and economic activities, which can negatively impact Russia's economic interests in the region. This can lead to increased economic instability and potential losses for Russian businesses (Weisbrode, 2002).

To tackle these issues, Russia has been adopting a balancing approach in the South Asian region and trying to increase its influence, while avoiding a confrontation with great powers to avoid economic and security threats. In this regard, Russia is increasing its geostrategic relations with Pakistan. Since both the States are facing similar issues and hence due the mutual interests, both are working together to avoid animosities in the future.

3.6.5 Theoretical Support

Hence, the argument by the theory of “Complex interdependence” applies here which says:

Issues in international relations are interconnected. States frequently interconnect under diverse problems and collectively find solutions. The practice of issue linkages enables States to discover interests in various areas, fostering cooperation even amid conflict (Keohane & Nye, 2011).

Since the security issues of Pakistan and Russia is interconnected they are mutually working to cater for the issues and find solutions via working under regional and international organizations and through bilateral settings.

In a nutshell, this chapter delves around the factors that have paved the way in giving a new direction to Pak-Russia relations. It has also analysed their bilateral

interests in the region and internationally, especially in context to the Afghanistan issue.

3.6.4 Pak-Russia Collaboration in Afghanistan Peace Process

Pakistan and Russia have been working together for over a decade, driven by their shared interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This cooperation has been strengthened by their joint efforts in the Afghan peace process, with both countries emphasizing a negotiated settlement for Afghanistan, addressing concerns of regional states. Pakistan and Russia control the northern and southern corridors to Afghanistan, respectively, which has led to a strengthening of regional ties and a symbol of peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and Central Asia (Khatoon, Khan, & Haq, 2023).

Pakistan and Russia have been actively involved in the Afghan peace process, particularly through their close collaboration with the Taliban. This has led to concerns about Pakistan's influence over the process and its potential to spoil intra-Afghan reconciliation. Pakistan's strategic depth in Afghanistan has been a key factor in its decision-making, with the country seeking to maintain its influence in the region. Russia, on the other hand, controls the northern corridor to Afghanistan and Central Asia, providing a significant outlet for trade and commerce. The close cooperation between Pakistan and Russia has also encouraged Central Asian Republics to engage more closely with Pakistan (Khan & Khan, 2022).

According to the insight given by the political scientist Dr Sohail Ahmed regarding the interests of Pakistan and Russia:

The long-term strategic interest of Pakistan in Afghanistan is to counter terrorist groups like ISIS and limit Indian influence. Similarly, Russia's interest is to prevent extremist group and their spillover effect in Central Asia through Afghanistan. Moreover, Russia also wanted to maintain its influence in all those formerly part of the Soviet Union. Both of them need to leave behind their traditional partners. The shift of alliance between them is gradual and Pakistan has greater resistance in this regard than Russia. Both Russia and Pakistan share a similar interest and want diversification in the regional partnership to fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan (Ahmed S, personal communication, July 4, 2024).

He further exemplified his stance over Russia's geostrategic interest in Afghanistan and Pakistan, as witnessed in the Russian-Ukraine war, Russia wanted to counter the influence of the United States to hold its influence in the region. Russia shares a similar motive in South Asia.

The Russia- and Pakistan- China axes have solidified their collaboration, which is seen as a symbol of peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and Central Asia. This cooperation has been driven by their shared interests in the region and their desire to maintain regional peace and stability. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has created a power vacuum, which has led to increased competition among regional players for influence in the region (Zill-e-Huma, 2014)

3.7 Operation Azam-e-Istehkam and Pak-Russia Relations

Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, also known as Resolve for Stability, represents a significant stride in Pakistan's ongoing efforts to combat terrorism and extremism within its borders. Initiated in response to escalating security concerns, the operation underscores Pakistan's dedication to enhancing internal stability and addressing persistent threats posed by militant groups (Jamal, 2024).

The rationale behind launching Operation Azm-e-Istehkam lies in its comprehensive approach to revitalizing the implementation of Pakistan's revised National Action Plan (NAP) against terrorism. This initiative is crucial at a time when Pakistan seeks to build upon the gains from previous military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Rah-e-Nijat while avoiding the large-scale displacements that characterized those efforts (Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of Pakistan, 2024).

3.7.1 Role of China

China's involvement in Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, Pakistan's recent counterterrorism initiative, is integral to safeguarding its strategic interests and substantial economic investments in Pakistan, particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With substantial investments in infrastructure and economic projects, China places high priority on ensuring the security of its investments and the safety of Chinese nationals engaged in these ventures. Operation Azm-e-Istehkam, aimed at bolstering internal security and combating terrorism, directly impacts the stability essential for Chinese operations within Pakistan. China consistently extends diplomatic support to Pakistan, underscoring its commitment to bilateral cooperation aimed at cultivating a stable environment conducive to economic development, which is critical for the success of CPEC (ALJazeera, 2024).

Furthermore, China's strategic interests in South Asia, including concerns over terrorism originating from Afghanistan and affecting Pakistan, are closely intertwined with Pakistan's security operations. The success of Azm-e-Istehkam in curtailing militant activities not only strengthens Pakistan's internal security but also promotes regional stability, aligning with China's broader geopolitical objectives in the region. This alignment is evident in China's diplomatic engagements with Pakistani leadership on security matters, reinforcing their partnership in promoting regional peace (Sareen, 2024).

While specific details of military and intelligence collaboration between China and Pakistan regarding Azm-e-Istehkam remain confidential, it is understood that China supports Pakistan's security initiatives through various means, including intelligence sharing and potentially technical assistance. This cooperative approach underscores a deep bilateral relationship focused on mutual security interests and advancing regional stability, crucial for both countries' geopolitical strategies in South Asia.

3.7.2 Opportunities for Trilateral Partnership Among China, Pakistan and Russia

Russia's involvement in Azm-i-Istehkam could offer complementary benefits. Both countries share concerns about terrorism emanating from Afghanistan, including issues like drug trafficking, extremism, and regional instability. Potential areas of collaboration could include joint military exercises, intelligence cooperation, and the provision of military equipment. Such cooperation could strengthen bilateral ties and contribute to regional security efforts.

The concept of a trilateral partnership involving Pakistan, China, and Russia to combat regional terrorism has been discussed within frameworks like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This partnership could leverage Pakistan's strategic location, China's economic and technological resources, and Russia's military expertise and regional influence to effectively address security challenges stemming from Afghanistan. However, successful implementation would hinge on factors such as mutual trust, coordination mechanisms, and alignment of strategic goals. Addressing challenges such as differing priorities and historical rivalries would be crucial for realizing the potential of such cooperation to enhance regional security and stability.

3.7.3 Challenges

Pakistan's recent request for small arms and modern equipment from the US as part of Azm-i-Istehkam poses a challenge for trilateral partnership dynamics. In the words of Pakistan's envoy to the US, Masood Khan, "We need sophisticated small arms and communication equipment to oppose and dismantle terrorist networks as part of Operation Azm-i-Istehkam." (Iqbal, 2024).

While seeking support from multiple powers, including the US, Pakistan must navigate potential complexities and sensitivities among its international partners. Balancing these

relationships will require careful diplomacy to ensure that cooperation with one partner does not strain relations with others.

To effectively combat terrorism and enhance regional security, Pakistan can pursue a balanced approach by engaging all relevant stakeholders. This includes continuing to strengthen ties with China and Russia through initiatives like the SCO, where cooperation on counter-terrorism is prioritised. Pakistan can also work closely with the US and other Western allies to leverage their expertise and resources in combating global terrorism networks.

By fostering inclusive partnerships and maintaining transparent communication, Pakistan can navigate the complexities of international relations while advancing its national security interests. This approach not only enhances Pakistan's capacity to address terrorism effectively but also contributes to broader efforts for regional stability and cooperation among global powers.

CHAPTER FOUR

PAK-RUSSIA GROWING RELATIONS: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENTS

The evolving geopolitical landscape has brought Pakistan and Russia closer together, marked by substantial diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation. This chapter delves into the diverse opportunities and challenges associated with the growing Pak-Russia relations, highlighting the potential for multilateral engagements. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for grasping the broader implications for regional stability, particularly in the context of Afghanistan and Central Asia.

4.1 Opportunities for Multilateral Engagements

In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, the relationship between Pakistan and Russia has undergone significant evolution, marked by a growing emphasis on multilateral cooperation. This shift is rooted in a mutual recognition of shared geostrategic interests and regional security concerns, particularly in the context of the shifting dynamics in South and Central Asia. Both nations have actively sought to strengthen their bilateral ties through participation in various regional and international forums, underscoring their commitment to addressing common challenges and fostering a stable and prosperous regional environment (Vorobyev, 2021).

4.2 Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has evolved into a pivotal platform for fostering political, economic, and security cooperation among its member states. Founded in 2001, the SCO comprised China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. Adding India and Pakistan as full members in 2017 marked a significant milestone in the organization's development. The SCO's primary objectives include promoting regional

stability, combating terrorism, and enhancing economic collaboration (Shanghai Cooperation Organization, 2017).

Within the SCO framework, numerous opportunities arise for strengthening Pakistan-Russia relations across various domains. This cooperation is rooted in a mutual recognition of shared geostrategic interests and regional security concerns, particularly in the context of the shifting dynamics in South and Central Asia. Both nations have actively sought to enhance their bilateral ties through participation in various regional and international forums, underscoring their commitment to addressing common challenges and fostering a stable and prosperous regional environment (Khetran, 2019).

4.2.1 Strategic, Economic and Security Dimensions

Pakistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) opens up many economic opportunities. Pakistan can deepen its participation in major projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) through the SCO. These initiatives aim to boost regional connectivity and trade (Rauf, 2019).

CPEC, which is a critical part of the BRI, connects China to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan. This corridor is expected to give a substantial boost to Pakistan's economy. Additionally, the Gwadar port in Pakistan provides the shortest sea route for landlocked Central Asian countries to access global markets, making it a strategic hub for regional trade. Pakistan's unique geographical position at the crossroads of South Asia and Central Asia further enhances its role as a vital hub for regional connectivity and trade, promising significant economic benefits (Hilali, 2019).

Pakistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) holds the potential to significantly bolster its strategic relationships with China and other member states. By joining the SCO, Pakistan gains access to a valuable platform for sharing its experiences

and coordinating with other nations to tackle security challenges, thereby enhancing regional security. In particular, Pakistan's involvement in the SCO can improve its ability to participate in the emerging world order focused on regional connectivity. For instance, through the SCO, Pakistan can engage in initiatives that promote economic integration and collective security efforts. This is crucial given that Pakistan has faced numerous diplomatic challenges on the global stage (Morgulov, 2023).

Moreover, Pakistan's SCO membership offers a strategic counterbalance to any attempts at diplomatic isolation. Since the SCO platform provides a balance between Pakistan and its regional rival India. When India wanted to become a member of SCO with the support of Russia, China bid for Pakistan's membership to form a balance. A significant example of the balancing is, when India raised concern about Pakistan on the Pulwama attack, both China and Russia gave a neutral statement and considered it as a personal issue of India and Pakistan. It enables Pakistan to strengthen its ties not only with neighbouring countries but also with European nations, facilitating broader international cooperation. According to a 2023 report by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Pakistan's inclusion in the SCO has led to a 15% increase in bilateral trade with other member states and has enhanced its diplomatic engagements globally (Amin A. B., 2023).

4.3 BRICS and Multilateral Opportunities for Pakistan-Russia Relations

The BRICS group, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, represents a significant global coalition that aims to enhance economic growth, foster political collaboration, and address global challenges through collective efforts. While Pakistan is not a member of BRICS, the group's activities and initiatives offer numerous opportunities for strengthening Pakistan-Russia relations within a multilateral context.

However, In November 2023, Pakistan officially applied for BRICS membership to benefit from multilateral cooperation. There is a high chance that Pakistan will get membership in 2024, when Russia will hold the chair, on the other hand, the hurdle from the Indian side is also certain. However, according to experts, Pakistan can get membership in 2024 and will benefit from emerging economies (Hussain A. , 2023).

4.3.1 Economic Cooperation and Trade Opportunities

The economic framework established by BRICS provides a robust platform for member countries to explore trade and investment opportunities. Russia, as a key member of BRICS, can leverage this framework to facilitate economic cooperation with Pakistan. By integrating into BRICS-led economic projects, Pakistan can enhance its trade ties with Russia and other BRICS nations. Joint ventures in infrastructure development, energy projects, and technology transfer can be particularly beneficial for Pakistan's economic growth.

Engaging with BRICS can help Pakistan diversify its economic partnerships and reduce dependency on traditional Western economies. For instance, Pakistan's collaboration with China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can be seen as part of a broader strategy to align with BRICS economies. By engaging with other BRICS nations, Pakistan can attract investment in infrastructure, technology, and industry, thus bolstering its economic growth(Ishaque, Gul, & Asgher, 2020).

Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed made history as the first Pakistani to address the International BRICS Forum in Vladivostok, organized by Russia's United Russia Party. In his speech, he advocated for Pakistan's inclusion in BRICS and emphasized the need for democratizing international relations, demilitarizing global interactions, and reducing the financial dominance of the US dollar.

He highlighted the significant role of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in shaping a new international framework based on the UN Charter and

peaceful coexistence. The forum, attended by representatives from 29 countries, emphasized BRICS' influence, representing nearly half the world's population and a significant portion of global GDP (Shehzad, 2024).

Hence, BRICS de-dollarisation can benefit Pakistan in several ways, especially in its dependency on dollar reserves and monetary policy. As Pakistan is a constant lender of IMF, de-dollarization can improve Pakistan's economic chances and open up a wider horizon of opportunities.

4.3.2 Political and Strategic Engagements

Politically, BRICS provides a platform for Pakistan to engage with major global powers outside the traditional Western bloc. This is particularly important in the context of regional security and geopolitical dynamics. Pakistan's strategic partnership with Russia has seen a significant uptick in recent years, marked by increased military cooperation and diplomatic exchanges. Participation in BRICS-related forums can further cement these ties and provide Pakistan with a platform to voice its concerns and interests on a global stage. This will not only grow Pak-Russia relation under a wider horizon but also provide a balance within the regional ground. As India is a member of BRICS, Pakistan should urge to strive for its membership. This will not only decrease Pakistan's dependency on the West but will also offer balance (Zia, 2018).

4.3.3 Regional Security and Strategic Cooperation

BRICS places a significant emphasis on addressing global and regional security issues. Through security dialogues and collaborative frameworks, member countries work together to combat terrorism, enhance cybersecurity, and promote peace and stability. Pakistan and Russia can collaborate within BRICS security initiatives to address common security threats, particularly in the context of counterterrorism and regional stability. Joint training programs,

intelligence sharing, and coordinated counterterrorism efforts can strengthen their security partnership (Hasnat, 2020).

The BRICS platform can also be leveraged to support the Afghanistan peace process, a critical concern for Pakistan and Russia. By engaging BRICS members in dialogue and advocacy efforts, Pakistan and Russia can mobilize broader international support for a sustainable peace settlement in Afghanistan. This multilateral approach can enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of their peace-building initiatives, contributing to regional security (Hasnat, 2020).

4.3.4 Energy Cooperation and Infrastructure Development

Energy cooperation is a key area where Pakistan and Russia can benefit from BRICS-led initiatives. Russia's vast energy resources and Pakistan's growing energy needs create a natural synergy for collaboration. By participating in BRICS energy projects, Pakistan can secure access to affordable and reliable energy sources, including oil, gas, and renewable energy. Joint ventures in energy infrastructure, such as pipelines and power plants, can enhance energy security and promote sustainable development in Pakistan

Infrastructure development is a cornerstone of BRICS cooperation, with significant investments to improve connectivity and trade routes. Pakistan's strategic location as a gateway between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East positions it as a critical partner in regional connectivity projects. Through BRICS infrastructure initiatives, Pakistan and Russia can collaborate on developing transportation networks, logistics hubs, and trade corridors that facilitate regional and global trade (BRICS Energy Research Cooperation Platform, 2019).

4.3.5 Cultural and Educational Exchanges

Cultural and educational exchanges are essential components of BRICS cooperation. By participating in BRICS cultural initiatives, Pakistan and Russia can enhance people-to-people contacts, foster mutual understanding, and strengthen cultural ties. Academic

exchanges, joint research projects, and cultural festivals can promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation in education, arts, and sciences. These initiatives contribute to building a positive and enduring relationship between the two countries.

Collaborative research projects and academic partnerships can further enhance Pakistan-Russia relations within the BRICS framework. Universities and research institutions from both countries can engage in joint studies on topics of mutual interest, such as regional security, economic development, and technological innovation. These academic collaborations can generate valuable insights and solutions to shared challenges, fostering innovation and knowledge exchange (BRICS, 2020).

While Pakistan is not a member of BRICS, the group's multilateral initiatives offer significant opportunities for enhancing Pakistan-Russia relations. Through economic cooperation, security collaboration, energy projects, and cultural exchanges, both countries can leverage the BRICS framework to address shared challenges and pursue mutual interests. The evolving dynamics within BRICS underscore its potential as a platform for fostering Pakistan-Russia collaboration, contributing to regional and global stability.

4.4 From Quad to AUKUS: Multilateral Opportunities for Pakistan and Russia

The geopolitical landscape in the Asia-Pacific region is undergoing significant transformations, particularly with the emergence of new multilateral alliances such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) pact. These alliances, while primarily aimed at countering the rise of China, have broader implications for regional security dynamics and present unique multilateral opportunities for countries like Pakistan and Russia (Ranjan, 2015).

4.4.1 The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)

The Quad, comprising the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, is a strategic dialogue focused on ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. The alliance

emphasizes shared democratic values and aims to enhance cooperation on security, economic, and technological issues. The formation and activities of the Quad reflect a response to China's increasing assertiveness in the region, with a particular focus on maritime security, infrastructure development, and counterterrorism.

The transition from the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) to the Australia-United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) security partnership has significant implications for regional security and stability, particularly for Pakistan and Russia (Zarrar & Gichki, 2022).

4.4.2 Balancing South Asian Dynamics

The inclusion of India in both the Quad and AUKUS frameworks has raised concerns in Pakistan about the potential for increased containment and encirclement. As a member of these multilateral initiatives, India's influence and strategic positioning in the region could be further strengthened, potentially exacerbating the long-standing tensions between India and Pakistan. In this context, Pakistan has an opportunity to leverage its relationships with Russia and China to balance the regional dynamics. A potential trilateral partnership between Pakistan, Russia, and China could serve as a counterweight to the Quad and AUKUS, ensuring that the South Asian region remains stable and that Pakistan's security interests are protected (Chandra V. , 2018).

4.4.3 Opportunities for Multilateral Cooperation

The transition from the Quad to AUKUS also presents opportunities for Pakistan and Russia to explore new avenues of multilateral cooperation. By engaging with both China and the United States through different frameworks, Pakistan can position itself as a strategic partner, capable of navigating complex geopolitical landscapes. For instance, Pakistan and Russia could collaborate on regional security initiatives, such as joint counter-terrorism efforts or the stabilization of Afghanistan. This could not only enhance their bilateral ties but also contribute to the overall stability of the region (Stuenkel, 2016).

4.4.4 Leveraging Relationships to Contain China and Russia

The formation of AUKUS, which is widely seen as a response to China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, also has implications for Russia's regional and global standing. Pakistan, with its longstanding relationship with China and its recent rapprochement with Russia, can play a role in leveraging these relationships to mitigate the potential containment efforts by the United States and its allies. By engaging with both China and Russia, Pakistan can seek to balance the regional power dynamics and ensure that its own strategic interests are not overshadowed by the larger geopolitical rivalries. This could involve advocating for a more inclusive and equitable regional security architecture that considers the concerns of all stakeholders (Stuenkel, 2016).

The transition from the Quad to AUKUS presents both challenges and opportunities for Pakistan and Russia. While the increased focus on the Indo-Pacific region and the potential for further containment of China and Russia are concerns, the situation also offers opportunities for these countries to explore new avenues of multilateral cooperation and leverage their relationships to balance the regional dynamics. By adopting a proactive and strategic approach, Pakistan and Russia can navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape and work towards enhancing regional security and stability, while also protecting their national interests.

4.5 The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU): Opportunities for Pakistan-Russia Cooperation

The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is a significant regional economic integration project that aims to foster economic cooperation, facilitate the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labour, and harmonize economic policies among its member states. Comprising Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, the EAEU offers a platform for deeper economic integration and collaboration in various sectors. Although Pakistan is not a member of the EAEU, there are numerous opportunities for Pakistan and

Russia to collaborate within this framework to enhance their bilateral relations and economic ties.

The EAEU was officially established on January 1, 2015, building on the foundation laid by the Eurasian Customs Union and the Eurasian Economic Space. The union aims to create a single market for goods, services, capital, and labour, similar to the European Union. Its primary objectives include economic development, improving the competitiveness of member states, and creating favourable conditions for business activities (Eurasian Economic Union, 2015).

4.5.1 Economic Opportunities for Pakistan and Russia

The EAEU presents a significant opportunity for Pakistan to expand its trade relations with Russia and other EAEU member states. By establishing preferential trade agreements or free trade zones, Pakistan can gain access to a large and diverse market, enhancing its export potential. Key sectors for trade collaboration include textiles, pharmaceuticals, agricultural products, and information technology.

Infrastructure development is a critical area where Pakistan and Russia can collaborate within the EAEU framework. Joint investments in transportation networks, logistics hubs, and industrial zones can facilitate trade and economic connectivity. Russia's expertise in infrastructure development, combined with Pakistan's strategic location, can lead to mutually beneficial projects that enhance regional trade routes and supply chains (The Pakistan Business Council, 2022).

4.5.2 Energy Cooperation

Energy cooperation is a cornerstone of Pakistan-Russia economic relations. The EAEU provides a platform for joint energy projects, including oil and gas pipelines, LNG terminals, and renewable energy initiatives. Russia's vast energy resources and technological expertise can help Pakistan address its energy needs and improve energy security. Collaborative projects

in the energy sector can also contribute to regional energy stability and sustainability (Dawn , 2017).

In addition to traditional energy sources, Pakistan and Russia can explore opportunities in renewable energy within the EAEU framework. Joint ventures in solar, wind, and hydroelectric power projects can help diversify Pakistan's energy mix and reduce its reliance on fossil fuels. Russia's experience in renewable energy technologies can support Pakistan's efforts to develop sustainable and environmentally friendly energy solutions.

4.5.3 Connectivity and Logistics

The North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) is a key project that aims to enhance connectivity between Russia, Iran, and India, with potential extensions to other countries, including Pakistan. Integrating Pakistan into the NSTC can significantly improve trade connectivity with EAEU member states. Joint investments in port infrastructure, railways, and road networks can facilitate the movement of goods and reduce transportation costs, benefiting both Pakistan and Russia (Pechishcheva & Korneev, 2020).

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), led by China, complements the EAEU's goals of enhancing regional connectivity. Pakistan's involvement in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship BRI project, provides an opportunity for synergy with EAEU initiatives. By aligning CPEC with EAEU infrastructure projects, Pakistan and Russia can create seamless trade routes that connect South Asia, Central Asia, and Europe, fostering economic integration and regional cooperation.

4.5.4 Technological and Industrial Collaboration

Technological collaboration is another area where Pakistan and Russia can benefit from the EAEU framework. Joint research and development (R&D) initiatives in fields such as information technology, biotechnology, and engineering can drive innovation and economic

growth. Collaborative projects between universities, research institutions, and private enterprises can lead to the development of new technologies and solutions to shared challenges.

The EAEU's focus on industrial cooperation offers opportunities for Pakistan to enhance its manufacturing capabilities. Joint ventures in industries such as automotive, aerospace, and machinery can boost industrial output and create job opportunities. Russia's industrial expertise and Pakistan's skilled labour force can complement each other, leading to the development of competitive industries that can serve regional and global markets (Rauf, 2019).

4.6 The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO): Opportunities for Pakistan-Russia Cooperation

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a regional intergovernmental military alliance established to ensure the collective defence and security of its member states. Comprised of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan, the CSTO plays a crucial role in maintaining stability in the post-Soviet space. Although Pakistan is not a member of the CSTO, there are significant opportunities for Pakistan and Russia to collaborate within this framework to enhance their bilateral security cooperation and address common security challenges (Rabbi, Kalhoro, & Ahmed, 2021).

The CSTO was established on May 15, 1992, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and became a formal organization on October 7, 2002. Its primary objectives include collective defence, combating terrorism, addressing transnational threats, and ensuring regional stability. The CSTO operates on the principle that an attack on one member state is considered an attack on all, similar to NATO's Article 5 (Collective Security Treaty Organization, n.d.).

4.6.1 Security and Defence Opportunities for Pakistan and Russia

Both Pakistan and Russia face significant security challenges from terrorism and extremism. The CSTO provides a platform for Russia to share its expertise and experiences in counterterrorism with Pakistan. Joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, and coordinated counterterrorism operations can enhance the capabilities of both countries to address these threats effectively (Ahmed, 2021).

While Pakistan is not a CSTO member, it can participate as an observer or partner in CSTO military exercises. These exercises focus on improving interoperability, joint command and control, and tactical coordination among participating forces. Pakistan's involvement in such exercises can provide valuable insights into CSTO's operational strategies and enhance its own counterterrorism capabilities (Khan, 2022).

The CSTO actively works to combat transnational threats such as drug trafficking, which poses significant challenges to regional security. Pakistan and Russia can collaborate within the CSTO framework to strengthen border security and counter-narcotics efforts. Joint initiatives, such as surveillance operations, intelligence sharing, and capacity-building programs, can help curb the flow of illicit drugs and related criminal activities (Rashid, 2021).

Russia's experience in border security and counter-narcotics operations can be beneficial for Pakistan. Training programs and capacity-building initiatives conducted by CSTO member states can enhance the skills and capabilities of Pakistani security forces. This collaboration can lead to more effective border management and a reduction in transnational crime (Hussain & Mahmood, 2019).

The CSTO framework facilitates military-technical cooperation among its member states, including the development and trade of defence equipment. Pakistan and Russia can

explore opportunities for defence industry collaboration within this framework. Joint ventures in defence production, technology transfer, and the development of advanced military systems can enhance Pakistan's defence capabilities and support Russia's defence industry (Ahmed, 2021).

Collaborative research and development (R&D) initiatives in defence technology can drive innovation and improve the operational capabilities of both countries. Pakistan and Russia can engage in joint R&D projects to develop new military technologies, such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), cyber defence systems, and advanced weaponry. This cooperation can strengthen their defence industries and contribute to regional security (Rashid, 2021).

4.6.2 Regional Stability and Peacekeeping

The CSTO has a mandate to conduct peacekeeping operations in member states and other regions as needed. Pakistan, with its extensive experience in UN peacekeeping missions, can collaborate with Russia and other CSTO members to contribute to regional stability. Joint peacekeeping missions can enhance the operational effectiveness of both countries and promote peace and security in conflict-affected areas (Malik, 2020).

In addition to peacekeeping, the CSTO also focuses on providing humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) during natural and man-made disasters. Collaborative efforts in HADR operations can strengthen the resilience of both Pakistan and Russia to respond to emergencies. Joint training, resource sharing, and coordinated response mechanisms can enhance their ability to provide timely and effective assistance to affected populations (Khan, 2020).

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) offers significant opportunities for Pakistan and Russia to enhance their security cooperation and address common challenges. By leveraging the CSTO framework, both countries can collaborate on counterterrorism, border security, peacekeeping, and defence industry initiatives. These efforts can contribute to regional stability, improve their security capabilities, and strengthen the strategic partnership.

4.7 The International North-South Transport Corridor: Opportunities for Pakistan-Russia Cooperation

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is an ambitious multimodal transportation network designed to facilitate the movement of goods between India, Iran, Russia, and beyond. This corridor aims to reduce travel time and transportation costs, offering a shorter and more efficient alternative to traditional routes through the Suez Canal. For Pakistan and Russia, the NSTC presents numerous opportunities to enhance their bilateral economic ties, improve regional connectivity, and contribute to broader economic integration in Eurasia.

The NSTC was conceptualized in 2000 by Russia, Iran, and India, with the primary goal of enhancing trade connectivity between Europe and South Asia. The corridor spans approximately 7,200 kilometres and incorporates sea, rail, and road routes, significantly reducing the distance and transit time for goods moving between these regions. The NSTC aims to streamline logistics, promote regional trade, and foster economic cooperation among participating countries (Burna-Asefi, 2024).

Key Components of NSTC

The NSTC comprises three primary routes:

1. **Western Route:** Connects Russia to Iran through Azerbaijan.

2. **Central Route:** Links Russia with Iran via the Caspian Sea.
3. **Eastern Route:** Extends from Russia to India through Central Asia and Iran.

These routes collectively form a comprehensive network that facilitates the efficient movement of goods and enhances regional connectivity.

4.7.1 Economic Opportunities for Pakistan and Russia

For Pakistan, integrating into the NSTC offers access to new markets in Central Asia, Russia, and Europe. By becoming a key transit hub, Pakistan can increase its export potential and diversify its trade partnerships. Key export sectors that can benefit include textiles, agricultural products, and manufactured goods. For Russia, the NSTC provides a direct and efficient route to South Asian markets, enhancing its trade reach and economic influence in the region (Hussain & Mahmood, 2019).

The NSTC significantly reduces transportation costs and transit time compared to traditional sea routes. By leveraging the corridor, both Pakistan and Russia can lower logistics expenses, making their exports more competitive. This cost efficiency can stimulate trade volumes and foster economic growth in both countries (Khan, 2020).

4.7.2 Infrastructure Development

Collaborative investments in infrastructure are crucial for the successful integration of Pakistan into the NSTC. Joint ventures in developing ports, railways, and road networks can enhance the corridor's efficiency and capacity. Russia's expertise in infrastructure development, combined with Pakistan's strategic location, can lead to the creation of robust transportation networks that facilitate seamless trade (Malik, 2020).

Pakistan's Gwadar Port, a key component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), can be integrated into the NSTC, providing a strategic maritime link. Joint

investments in port modernization and expansion can enhance Gwadar's capacity to handle increased trade volumes, making it a vital node in the NSTC network. This integration can also attract foreign investment and boost Pakistan's economic development (Khan, 2022).

In 2023, President of Russia, Vladimir Putin offered Pakistan to join INSTC during the State of the Union Address, which has been accepted by Pakistan. As, Pakistan's Ambassador to Russia, Muhammad Khalid Jamali said: "Pakistan has, in principle, agreed to join the North-South International Transport Corridor and has initiated the necessary procedures" (Haider, 2024).

4.7.3 Energy Cooperation

Energy cooperation is a critical area where the NSTC can facilitate collaboration between Pakistan and Russia. Joint pipeline projects, such as the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline, can benefit from the improved logistics and reduced transportation costs offered by the NSTC. These projects can enhance energy security, diversify energy sources, and promote regional energy trade (Ahmed, 2021).

In addition to traditional energy sources, the NSTC can support renewable energy initiatives. Joint ventures in solar, wind, and hydroelectric power projects can leverage the corridor's infrastructure to facilitate the distribution and trade of renewable energy. Collaborative efforts in this area can contribute to sustainable development and reduce the carbon footprint of both countries (Rashid, 2021).

The NSTC offers opportunities to improve supply chain efficiency for both Pakistan and Russia. Enhanced logistics infrastructure, streamlined customs procedures, and efficient transportation networks can reduce lead times and improve the reliability of supply chains.

This efficiency can attract multinational companies and boost both countries' roles as key players in regional and global trade (Khan, 2020).

Collaborative efforts in technology and innovation can further enhance the Nasta's efficiency. Investments in digital platforms, automation, and smart logistics solutions can optimize supply chain management and improve the overall performance of the corridor. By leveraging technology, Pakistan and Russia can create a modern and efficient transportation network that meets the demands of contemporary trade (Rashid, 2021).

The North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC) presents significant opportunities for Pakistan and Russia to enhance their economic cooperation and regional connectivity. By integrating Pakistan into the NSTC, both countries can expand their trade relations, invest in infrastructure, collaborate on energy projects, and improve logistics and supply chain management. These initiatives can contribute to regional economic integration, stability, and prosperity, strengthening the strategic partnership between Pakistan and Russia.

4.8 Challenges in Multilateral Relations between Pakistan and Russia

Despite cooperation, the multilateral relations between Russia and Pakistan is facing several changes including: Geopolitical rivalries, regional security dynamics, economic constraints and Political and diplomatic challenges. All these factors are constantly hindering cooperation between the two states.

4.8.1 US Reaction Over Pak-Russia Growing Relationship

Pakistan remained under the US bloc for a long time, where she served actively with the US as a strategic partner. But, since 2018, the relationship between the US and Pakistan has hit new low. When PM Imran Khan was about to visit Russia, the US did not appreciate this step and warned Pakistan to terminate its visit. Nonetheless, Pakistan has seen diminishing its

overall importance for the West as a result of being placed on the frontline of their war with Russia by either Europe or America. Moreover, COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, who was recently on a tour of Belgium, was unable to make an appointment with Joseph Borrell, the EU's top official on foreign affairs, security, and policy, or be invited to the Munich Security Conference or the EU group on the Indo-Pacific, as pointed out by European sources.

Hence, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi refers to a policy shift or shift towards an independent foreign policy, which is fueled more by a reduced relationship between the West and Pakistan. The US would monitor its former ally, which is relatively from the increased navy-to-navy engagement or a Western mining company returning to Pakistan as a copper mining partner. Nevertheless, the benefit of the partnership remains minimal.

Pakistan, on the other hand, desiring to cooperate and partner more promptly with China and Russia but is bound to its western ally, because of its necessities. In reliance to the western donations and International Monetary Funds(IMF), Pakistan resist to partner openly with Russia. Hence Pakistan's poor economic conditions prevent her from being closer to Russia or its lead organizations (Siddiqi 2022).

Moreover, right after Khan visit to Moscow, his political turnover in Pakistan got swift. PM Imran Khan accused US over the matter of throwing his government via vote of no confidence. According to him, the US given surety that, if I would be removed from the government, Pakistan would be favoured with the perks and could be excluded from FATF grey list and ease in getting loan from the IMF. According to him: *"We have been used like a hired gun in our relationship with the US, I blame my government more than the US* (A. Hussain 2022). Although the accusation has been later negated by the intelligence agencies of Pakistan and US. But there are certain things, which cannot be forgotten regarding US that, the US presidents have been using CIA for a long time in throwing governments in developing

States to achieve their motives, as mentioned in the book: “The Legacy of Ashes” (Weiner 2006). However, although the Statements of Khan against US considered as a ‘wrong speculations’ but the facts and ongoing events prove them right. For instance, Pakistan fulfilled all the recommendations given by FATF under PM Imran Khan era but the removal from the FATF watchdog happened after his government threw.

Moreover, Russia has criticized US interference in Pakistan and quoted it as a “Shameless interference”. According to the spokesperson of Russian Foreign Ministry: Maria Zakharova, despite pressure by West, Pakistani Prime Minister still visited Russia. According to Zakharova:

Following the disclosure of Imran Khan's working visit to Moscow on February 23-24 this year, there was an immediate onset of pressure from Americans and their Western associates on the Prime Minister, they urged an ultimatum to cancel the trip (NDTV.com 2022).

Overall, the US never wanted Pakistan to get closer to Russia, since they both shared rivalry from Cold War era and till then, Pakistan has been serving as a strong ally to US. But, with the time and environment, the turn towards relationships changes. Pakistan has to look into different countries to fulfil its needs and stand in the future multipolar world, where China is her cordial friend, and with that, Pakistan wants to strengthen its relationship with Russia. The reason is, unlike US, Russia offers trade and projects to Pakistan., which will Help in strengthening its relationship. The US always provided rewards in terms of aid, which never backed the Pakistani economy for the long term. Moreover, whenever, US wanted, she paused the financial aid and ask for ‘Do More, which was putting sovereignty of Pakistan on stake. Hence, to stand in the world, Pakistan has to look other actors in the world.

4.8.2 Indian Factor

The "Indian factor" plays a significant role in shaping the multilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia. Historical ties and strategic partnerships are crucial components of this

influence. Russia and India have a long history of defense cooperation dating back to the Soviet era, with India being a major purchaser of Russian military equipment, including aircraft, tanks, submarines, and missile systems. This deep-rooted defense relationship often causes concern for Pakistan, as it perceives this as a threat to its security. Additionally, India and Russia share a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership" that encompasses various areas such as defense, nuclear energy, space exploration, and trade, which limits the scope of Russia's engagement with Pakistan as Moscow balances its relationships in South Asia (Raghavan, 2016).

Geopolitical dynamics further complicate Pakistan-Russia relations. The longstanding rivalry between India and Pakistan is a significant factor influencing regional security and geopolitics. Any move by Russia to deepen ties with Pakistan is closely monitored by India, potentially leading to diplomatic pressures on Russia to limit its cooperation with Pakistan. Consequently, Russia must carefully navigate its relations with both India and Pakistan to avoid alienating either country, resulting in cautious engagement with Pakistan, especially in areas that might be perceived as sensitive by India (Khan M. S., 2020).

Economic and energy interests also play a pivotal role. India is one of Russia's significant trade partners, with robust economic exchanges in sectors such as energy, pharmaceuticals, IT, and agriculture. The strong economic ties with India can overshadow Russia's relatively modest trade relations with Pakistan. Furthermore, Russia and India have substantial cooperation in the energy sector, including oil, natural gas, and nuclear energy, exemplified by projects like the Arctic LNG and the expansion of nuclear power plants in India. This extensive cooperation can limit Russia's capacity or willingness to pursue similar large-scale energy projects with Pakistan (Malik H. Y., 2019).

Multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS further highlight India's influence. Both India and Pakistan are members of the SCO, which also includes Russia and China. The dynamics within the SCO can be complex, with India and Pakistan often having divergent views on security and economic issues. Russia's role in the SCO requires it to act as a mediator and balance the interests of both countries, sometimes diluting the potential for stronger Russia-Pakistan cooperation. Additionally, India is a key member of BRICS, an important multilateral platform for Russia. While Pakistan is not a member, India's significant influence within BRICS can impact Russia's policies and priorities within the group, potentially limiting opportunities for Pakistan. India's influence in BRICS also hinders Pakistan's membership in BRICS (Aneja, 2021).

Diplomatic pressures exerted by India also play a significant role. India actively lobbies to maintain its strategic interests and influence in its relations with Russia, including diplomatic efforts to ensure that Russia does not take steps that might significantly enhance Pakistan's strategic or military capabilities. In various international forums, India can leverage its diplomatic relations with Russia to shape discussions and outcomes in ways that are aligned with its interests, sometimes to the detriment of Pakistan's positions (Fair C. C., 2018).

Military and security concerns are another critical aspect of the Indian factor. India's acquisition of advanced military technology and equipment from Russia, such as the S-400 missile defense system, enhances its defense capabilities and creates an imbalance in the military equation in South Asia. Pakistan views this with concern and seeks to counterbalance it through its defense procurements, including from Russia. Moreover, Russia and India cooperate on counterterrorism efforts, sharing intelligence and conducting joint exercises. This collaboration can sometimes align with India's stance on Pakistan-related terrorism issues, creating additional diplomatic challenges for Pakistan (Grare, 2020).

In summary, the Indian factor significantly influences Pakistan-Russia relations by shaping Russia's strategic calculations and limiting the scope of its engagement with Pakistan. To navigate this complex landscape, Pakistan and Russia need to identify mutually beneficial areas of cooperation that can withstand the geopolitical pressures emanating from India's strategic interests.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

Since 2012, Pakistan and Russia have entered a new geopolitical phase influenced by internal, regional, and international factors. This section explores the key findings of this evolving relationship and its implications.

Russia and Pakistan's relationship are built on mutual interests and cooperative efforts, particularly in geostrategic and trade unlike the relationship with the United States, which can often feel like a "carrot and stick" approach offering financial aid and threatening sanctions to enforce compliance. Russia's engagement with Pakistan is more about partnership and respect. Russia offers investment without the pressure of coercion, focusing instead on collaboration that benefits both countries. This spirit of mutual respect and shared goals forms the bedrock of the growing economic and strategic ties between Russia and Pakistan.

Political and Geostrategic Interests

According to the political scientist Dr Sohail Ahmed, Pakistan's long-term strategic interest in Afghanistan is to counter terrorist groups like ISIS and limit Indian influence. Similarly, Russia's interest is to prevent extremist groups and their spill-over effect in Central Asia through Afghanistan. Additionally, Russia aims to maintain its influence in regions formerly part of the Soviet Union.

Dr. Ahmed stated:

Both Russia and Pakistan need to leave behind their traditional partners. The shift of alliance between them is gradual, and Pakistan has greater resistance in this regard than Russia. Both countries share a similar interest and want diversification in regional partnerships to fill the power vacuum in Afghanistan (Ahmed S, personal communication, July 4, 2024).

Comparative Analysis of Geopolitical Strategies

Dr. Ahmed further elaborated on Russia's geostrategic interests in Afghanistan and Pakistan, particularly in the context of the Russian-Ukraine war. He explained Russia wants to counter the influence of the United States to hold its influence in the region. This dynamic is evident in Russia's broader strategy to maintain its regional power (Ahmed S, personal communication, July 4, 2024).

These insights highlight the convergence of Pakistan and Russia's strategic objectives, underpinning their evolving partnership. The shared goal of countering extremism and reducing U.S. influence in the region demonstrates a significant shift in regional alliances.

The complex interdependence theory supports this perspective, as both Russia and Pakistan face interconnected problems and seek collective solutions, fostering cooperation even amid conflicts.

Security Concerns

In context to the security issues posed by Afghanistan, Russia and Pakistan are facing similar problems. Russia faces significant security challenges due to instability in Afghanistan, impacting Central Asia and the Caucasus. Major issues include terrorism, drug trafficking, and religious extremism. Afghanistan, through the Pamir range, is a major conduit for drug trafficking, with approximately 93% of the world's high-grade opium produced there. Almost 30% of these drugs are consumed in Russia.

Pakistan also struggles with narcotrafficking and terrorism due to its porous border with Afghanistan, affecting its international image. Both Russia and Pakistan are working towards peacebuilding in Afghanistan post-US withdrawal, particularly under the SCO platform.

Pakistan has recently approved Operation “Azam-e-Istehkam” to combat terrorism and security threats posed by Afghanistan in Pakistan and the region.

China's potential involvement in Pakistan's Operation Azmi-Istehkam, focusing on intelligence sharing and security equipment, underscores its strategic interest in Pakistan's stability and regional influence through initiatives like CPEC.

Meanwhile, Russia is not currently part of Azmi-Istehkam, its prospective collaboration could involve joint exercises, intelligence cooperation, and military support if formalized, aiming to address mutual concerns about terrorism and instability in the region.

However, Pakistan's request for US small arms and equipment introduces challenges in maintaining equilibrium among its trilateral partnerships with China, potential collaboration with Russia, and US support, necessitating diplomatic finesse to avoid straining ties.

Pakistan's strategy involves leveraging partnerships with China and potentially Russia through platforms like the SCO to enhance its counter-terrorism capabilities while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics and emphasizing multilateral cooperation to effectively address regional security challenges.

The rise of China has led to a strategic convergence between Pakistan and Russia. Both nations, recognizing the growing influence of China, have aligned their foreign policies to leverage their relationships with Beijing. This alignment has created a trilateral framework where Pakistan, Russia, and China can collectively address regional security and economic issues.

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship project, has strengthened economic ties between Pakistan and Russia. Russia's interest in participating in CPEC projects highlights the economic interdependence

fostered by China's rise. This collaboration offers Pakistan access to Russian expertise and investment while providing Russia with new economic opportunities in South Asia.

Both Pakistan and Russia are exploring ways to integrate their economies more closely with China's enhancing regional connectivity and trade. This integration will reduce their economic dependency on Western markets and institutions.

Geopolitical and Economic Opportunities

Collaboration with Russia offers Pakistan multilateral opportunities, leveraging its strategic geography for regional and international benefit. Pakistan's dire need for gas could be addressed through the EAEU and NSC, given Russia's position as the second-largest gas exporter. The revival of Pakistan-Russia Gas Pipeline Project in 2021 will also help Pakistan in meeting its energy need and will strengthen their bilateral relations.

Pakistan has also urged to strengthen Pak-Russia bilateral relations. While meeting President Putin on 3rd July 2024, PM Shahbaz Sharif said, we wanted to increase trade with Russia and reach up to 1 Billion dollars. No geopolitical landscape can affect Pakistan's relations with Russia. Russia has also offered an increased energy supply to Pakistan at a discounted rate. The emphasis was on equal trade opportunity, whereas Pakistan stressed the barter system, which can balance an import and export ratio.

Pakistan seeks BRICS membership to reduce Western dependency but faces opposition from India, a permanent BRICS member. Experts believe BRICS cannot rival the West shortly, particularly in de-dollarization, but the bloc is gaining traction, which might help Pakistan navigate the IMF-led monetary system.

In a notable development, Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed became the first Pakistani to address the International BRICS Forum in Vladivostok, Russia. He advocated for Pakistan's inclusion in BRICS, emphasizing three crucial points: Promoting equality and adherence to the

rule of law, avoiding Cold War-like tensions and encouraging a multipolar financial system. Additionally, he criticized Western support for Israel, linking it to the Gaza conflict. This address underscored the significant influence of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in establishing a new international framework based on the UN Charter and peaceful coexistence. The forum highlighted BRICS' substantial global impact, representing nearly half the world's population and a significant portion of global GDP.

Strategic Alliances and Rivalries

The QUAD and AUKUS, US-led coalitions aimed at containing China, also pose a threat to Russia and, by extension, Pakistan. India's membership in US-led coalitions like QUAD and its strategic ambitions in the Indian Ocean present significant threats to both Pakistan and the CPEC project. India's naval capabilities and its geopolitical stance pose challenges to Pakistan's maritime security and its economic projects linked with China. Aligning with China and Russia provides a strategic counterbalance to these threats and enhances regional stability.

Economic Interdependence

While Russia maintains strong trade relations with India, it recognizes the significance of Pakistan's market. Pakistan, the 5th most populous country, sees a 9% annual increase in energy demand, ranking among the top 10 gas-importing countries. Western sanctions on Russia create an opportunity for Russia to engage with Pakistan, potentially fulfilling Pakistan's gas needs at subsidized rates through strategic bargaining.

Pakistan and Russia's evolving relationship is shaped by shared security challenges, economic interdependence, and geopolitical shifts. Both nations are working towards mutual goals within multilateral platforms, seeking to balance regional influences and capitalize on economic opportunities.

The challenge lies in balancing Russia's strong trade relations with India while expanding economic ties with Pakistan. Additionally, Pakistan's economic instability and ongoing need for financial assistance from the IMF, largely influenced by the US, complicate its ability to independently negotiate favourable deal.

Conclusion

The relationship between Pakistan and Russia has evolved significantly over the decades, shaped by historical alignments, shifting global dynamics, and mutual strategic imperatives. Historically characterized by Cold War rivalries and distant diplomatic ties, the early 21st century has witnessed a steady convergence driven by shared economic interests, security concerns, and geopolitical alignments.

Throughout the Cold War era, Pakistan and Russia maintained cautious and often adversarial relationships, with Pakistan aligning closely with the United States and Soviet Union forging strategic ties with India. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and subsequent geopolitical shifts prompted both nations to reassess their bilateral engagements. The 21st century marked a turning point, with efforts towards pragmatic cooperation gaining momentum.

The rise of China as a global economic powerhouse has played a pivotal role in reshaping Pakistan-Russia relations. Central to this realignment is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), notably the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has emerged as a cornerstone of regional economic integration. Pakistan's participation in CPEC projects, supported by Russia's strategic interests in enhancing connectivity and economic cooperation, underscores the transformative impact of China's economic influence in the region.

Strategically, Pakistan and Russia have increasingly aligned their foreign policies in response to perceived threats from US-led coalitions such as QUAD and AUKUS, aimed at

containing China and its allies. The inclusion of India in these coalitions, with its maritime ambitions in the Indian Ocean and geopolitical stance, poses significant challenges to Pakistan's security and economic projects under CPEC. Aligning with China provides a strategic counterbalance, ensuring regional stability and economic resilience amidst evolving global power dynamics.

In Afghanistan, both nations have intensified their collaboration through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) platform. With shared concerns over terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and stability in Central Asia, Pakistan and Russia have leveraged their SCO membership to foster regional security and stability initiatives. This collaborative approach underscores their commitment to addressing common threats through multilateral frameworks.

Defence collaboration between Pakistan and Russia has also strengthened in recent years, marked by defence deals, joint military exercises, and the exchange of defense technology. These initiatives have bolstered mutual defense capabilities and facilitated greater interoperability, enhancing both nations' capacity to address emerging security challenges.

Looking ahead, Pakistan and Russia face a complex landscape of opportunities and challenges. Balancing their relationships with China against national interests, ensuring economic sustainability amid global uncertainties, and effectively managing regional security dynamics will be paramount. However, the potential benefits of enhanced economic connectivity, strengthened security cooperation, and greater diplomatic alignment position Pakistan and Russia as pivotal actors in shaping the future geopolitical landscape of South Asia and beyond.

The evolving relationship between Pakistan and Russia signifies a strategic realignment underscored by mutual interests in economic prosperity, security collaboration, and diplomatic unity. From historical divergence to pragmatic convergence, both nations have embarked on a

path of strategic cooperation, leveraging their respective strengths to navigate a multipolar world order. By capitalizing on shared opportunities and addressing common challenges, Pakistan and Russia are poised to forge a resilient partnership that contributes to regional stability and global harmony.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion presented the following recommendations are suggested:

1. Establish regular high-level strategic dialogues between Pakistan and Russia to discuss mutual security concerns, regional stability, and economic collaboration. These dialogues should include military, economic, and political representatives to ensure a comprehensive approach to bilateral relations.
2. Build on the success of joint military exercises like the "Druzhba" series by increasing the frequency and scope of these exercises. This could include more complex drills involving air, land, and naval forces, and joint counterterrorism operations. Additionally, consider establishing military exchange programs and joint research and development projects to foster deeper military ties.
3. Pakistan should seek an independent foreign policy and foster balance in relation with Great and Major Powers.
4. Utilize multilateral platforms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) more effectively to address shared security and economic challenges. Promote joint initiatives within the SCO framework that focus on counterterrorism, anti-narcotics operations, and regional connectivity projects
5. Collaborate on regional infrastructure projects that can benefit both countries and enhance regional connectivity. Projects like the Pakistan-Russia Gas Pipeline should be seen as stepping stones to larger initiatives, such as regional transportation networks and energy grids.

6. Given the central role of Afghanistan in regional security, Pakistan and Russia should work closely to support a stable and peaceful Afghanistan. This can include coordinated diplomatic efforts, joint economic aid programs, and support for Afghan-led peace initiatives.
7. Broaden the scope of cooperation to include non-traditional security threats such as climate change, water security, and pandemics. Joint initiatives and research in these areas can not only address immediate concerns but also build long-term resilience.

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