

Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Russia: New Directions

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Abstract

Since the end of the Cold War, the world entered the era of economic interdependence and cooperation. In contemporary times, no country in the world can exist in isolation. After a long period of hostile relations and negative foreign policy postures towards each other, Pakistan and Russia have acknowledged the need for pragmatic yet friendly relations with different states, globally in general and regionally in particular. They have realised that bilateral cooperation is extremely necessary to achieve their national security and foreign policy objectives. Russia, realising its global power status and its renewed drive to regain its past glorified position in international affairs, has made big changes in its foreign policy. It has adopted a new holistic foreign policy orientation towards South Asia while abandoning the country-specific policy that it had in the past. Pakistan on the other hand, after many tests and trials, have come to realise that it cannot depend on a single country in particular (to achieve its national security and foreign policy objectives) and have to expand its list of countries on whom it can depend on for support and have good relations with. Over the last decade, Pakistan and Russia bilateral relationship have commenced on the path of improvement, with both countries entering into multiple deals of cooperation in the domains of military, politics and economics. It is high time that Pakistan and Russia realise and accept the realities of international relations, learn from their past and further build upon the positive developments to solidify their bilateral relations for mutual benefits and for the good of the entire region.

Keywords: Pakistan, Russia, Foreign Policy, Bilateral Relations, Strategy.

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Introduction

After the end of WWII, Pakistan emerged on the world map in an international system distinguished by the Cold War and bipolarity. Since independence, Pakistan's foreign policy was characterised by its national security objectives which were challenged by its arch-rival, India.

Cognisant of this 'objective reality,' Pakistan became an inborn-insecure state, striving to strengthen its defence. Security of the country became the utmost priority for the Pakistani strategists and policymakers. By and large, foreign policy decisions were dominated, viewed and analysed through the narrow lens of security. Due to a hostile neighbourhood, the perpetual sense of insecurity of Pakistan is aptly explained by Kenneth N Waltz: "The web of social and political life is spun out of inclinations and incentives, deterrent threats and punishments. Eliminate the latter two and the ordering of the society depends entirely on the former - a utopian thought impractical this side of Eden."¹

Building upon this argument, it can be argued that Pakistan's foreign policy decision-makers, being rational actors, were aware of Pakistan's threat perceptions. They started to evaluate the available 'incentives' and build 'inclinations' that best suited Pakistan's foreign policy and national security objectives.

Pakistan, unable to transcend power politics of the time, adopted defensive realism as the cornerstone of its foreign policy formulation framework. The adoption of such policy thinking is evident and can be best explained through the existing core assumptions of the realist paradigm which consist of Groupism, Egoism and Power Centrism, as elaborated by William Wohlforth in his chapter in the book titled, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors and Cases*. It explains about how the world works (on the basis of incentives and threats), the scope conditions (of anarchical international system), assumptions about the overall system of states, the internal attributes of states (democracy, theocracy, dictatorship etc) and human nature (idiosyncratic behaviour of leadership and policymakers), combined with perceptions about an aggressive neighbourhood, violent historical baggage and the growing capabilities and intentions of arch-rivals

¹ Kenneth N Waltz, *The Theory of International Politics* (Waveland Press Inc., 1979)

such as India. These national security imperatives, combined with Pakistan's quest for self-interest (given its sense of insecurity in the presence of a larger neighbour), drove Pakistan's foreign policy.

Pakistan's worldview was and is based on cooperation, peace and friendliness towards every state of the world, which is evident from the country's adoption of non-alignment during the first few years (1947-1953) of its existence.² However, the era of neutrality of Pakistan's foreign policy orientation was short-lived and Pakistan entered the 'era of alliances.' Owing to several challenges, Pakistan was confronting due to social, political and economic problems, the country was desperately trying to overcome multiple security threats. These threats were primarily emanating from India and Afghanistan.

The first Indo-Pak war had already taken place in 1948.³ There was a pending dispute between the two countries over the division of assets, distribution of river waters and the accession of princely states. After Pakistan's independence, Afghanistan also started demonstrating hostility and even tried to block Pakistan's entry into the UN.⁴ It attempted to flare up the Pakhtoonistan Movement in the western provinces of Pakistan and refused to recognise the Durand Line as the official border between the two states.⁵

Economically and militarily, Pakistan was not in a strong position to counter these threats without a helping hand. Pakistan was invited both by the America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) to join their respective blocs for their support in the Cold War alignments.⁶ Due to

² "Muhammad Khan, "Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Changing Regional and Global Settings," *Journal of Contemporary Studies* IV, no. 1 (Summer 2015): 15-16. https://ndu.edu.pk/fcs/publications/fcs_journal/JCS_2015_summer/2._Foreign_Policy_of_Pakistan.pdf

³ Peter Kiss, "The First Indo-Pakistani War: 1947-48," Research Gate, 2013, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/235932742_THE_FIRST_INDO-PAKISTANI_WAR_1947-48

⁴ "Pakistan and Afghanistan," Institute for the Study of War, <http://www.understandingwar.org/pakistan-and-afghanistan>

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Taimur Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the US," *Strategic Studies* 38, no. 2 (Summer 2018), http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/6-SS_Muhammad_Taimur_Fahad_Khan_No-2_2018.pdf.

overwhelming threats to Pakistan's national security, its decision-makers were left with the following mentioned foreign policy options:

- i. To remain neutral
- ii. To rely on other Muslim states
- iii. To join the Soviet Bloc
- iv. To join the US Bloc

Pakistan opted for the fourth option, owing to the security dilemma it was confronted with. Why did Pakistan go for the fourth option instead of any of the other options? The answer to this is Pakistan wanted to 'balance the threat' perpetually posed to its national security from eastern and western borders. This thinking of the Pakistani foreign policymakers explicitly proceeds from the assumption of Groupism as mentioned earlier. This assumption believes that "the stronger group identity, be it of a group, country or region (such as 'nationalism' in the case of Pakistan) the harder it is to subjugate the group and the harder the conquest is for the aggressor. This leads to better securitisation of a state."⁷ Pakistan had acquired independence after a prolonged and hard struggle from colonial rule followed by the violence that began to take place during the cross migration and partition. The element of patriotism was very strong in Pakistan and it wanted to acquire the power to make the 'conquest' very hard for any aggressor. Pakistan opted to join the Western Bloc because Pakistan was ideologically more akin to the US than to the Soviet Union (its Marxist principals and background which is atheistic went against Pakistan's Islamic principles),⁸ the elite of Pakistan was under western influence and it hoped to acquire substantial economic aid, defence aid and military technology (as technology may make a conquest hard) by joining the western system.

Pakistan-USSR bilateral relations remained weak since the former's independence in 1947. These relations took a nosedive in the early 1950s when Pakistan decided to join the Western bloc by signing its first defence pact with the US on May 9, 1954.⁹ The situation got worse after Pakistan

⁷ Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (New York: Oxford, 3rd Edition, 2016) 34.

⁸ Werner Levi, "Pakistan, Soviet Union and China," *Pacific Affairs* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1962): 211-222.

⁹ Muhammad Ayub, "The Pakistan-American Alliance," *Foreign Affairs*, January 1964, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1964-01-01/pakistan-american-alliance>.

joined the South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in January 1955.¹⁰ SEATO was created primarily to counter Communism, which meant countering the Soviet Union since it was the flag bearer of the communist struggle in the world. The Soviet Union took strong offence of this foreign policy decision by Pakistan. By joining SEATO, Pakistan had made its position clear regarding where it stood in this Cold War and this was the beginning of a long rivalry between Pakistan and USSR.

Nature of Pakistan-Russia Relations since 2000

The last decade of the 20th century was the beginning of the age of globalisation. Many scholars trace the history of globalisation long before Europe's age of discovery that began in the late 15th century.¹¹ However, the progress of globalisation (in the real sense) began during the 1990s when the international flow of capital, ideas and culture increased extensively. The advances made in transport technologies and telecommunications infrastructure further accelerated the pace of globalisation across the globe. While these dramatic changes were taking place in the world and the Soviet sickle and hammer flag was lowered for the last time over the Kremlin and Russian tricolour flag was hoisted.¹² After the Soviet Union's collapse, for Pakistan and Russia, avoiding interaction was not a logical strategy in the era of economic liberalisation and interdependence.

Pakistan's relations with Russia during the 1990s mostly remained cold, owing to former's recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan and political instability in Pakistan. During the first decade of the 21st century, bilateral relations started to warm up between Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan detached itself from the Taliban government and opted to join the international coalition in the war against terrorism. Relations between the two countries displayed further signs of improvement as high-level state visits started to take place. Alexander Losyukov, Russian Deputy Minister

¹⁰ Lubna Saif, "Pakistan and SEATO," *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture* 28, no. 2 (2007),

http://www.nihcr.edu.pk/latest_english_journal/pakistan_and_seato.pdf

¹¹ Andre Frank, *ReOrient: Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

¹² Office of the Historian, Department of State, United States of America, *Milestones: 1989-1992, The Collapse of the Soviet Union*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1989-1992/collapse-soviet-union>

for Foreign Affairs, arrived in Pakistan on a state visit in April 2001.¹³ This visit was reciprocated by Pakistan when, in 2002, General (Retd) Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan, paid a visit to Moscow. This was the first visit by any Pakistani head of state or government since Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's visit 30 years earlier.¹⁴ The focus of these high-level visits and meetings was the enhancement of bilateral cooperation between the two states in economic, cultural, development and technology sectors as well as the commencement of joint efforts for the improvement of regional peace and stability.

In 2007, bilateral relations reactivated after Russia's Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, arrived in Pakistan on a 3-days official visit, where he met with the Pakistani president and prime minister and had in-depth discussions.¹⁵ In response to improving ties with Pakistan, Russia endorsed Pakistan's bid to become an observer state at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Visits by General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), to Moscow in 2009 and President Asif Ali Zardari in 2011 proved to be milestones in Pak-Russia relations. The two countries also signed various MoUs in the sectors of investment, agriculture, energy, air services, as well as intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism.¹⁶

Despite the welcoming signals from both sides, Pakistan and Russia moved rather slowly and cautiously towards each other until June 2014 when Russia lifted up the arms embargo it levied on Pakistan since the Soviet era.¹⁷ This was followed by the signing of a bilateral defence cooperation agreement between the two countries in November 2014.¹⁸ In November 2016, Pakistan granted Russia the access to warm waters through

¹³ "Islamabad, Moscow Seek Better Ties," *Dawn*, April 21, 2001.

¹⁴ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia-Pakistan Relations," Carnegie Moscow Centre, 2001, <http://carnegie.ru/2011/02/18/russia-pakistan-relations-pub-42695>

¹⁵ Tahir Azad, "Pakistan-Russia Strategic Partnership: New Horizons for Cooperation," Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Issue Brief, December 26, 2016, <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Final-Issue-brief-Tahir-Azad-dated-26-12-2016.pdf>

¹⁶ Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints," *IPRI Journal* XIII, no. 2 (summer 2013): 71.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Baqir Syed, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement," *Dawn*, November 21, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1145875>

Gwadar port, in return, Russia signed off on Pakistan's full membership of the SCO in 2017.¹⁹

The increasing interaction and cooperation between Pakistan and Russia also resulted in military cooperation as well. Russia agreed to sell 4 Mi-35M attack helicopters to Pakistan in 2015.²⁰ In addition, Pakistan and Russia also finalised a deal for the import of Klimov RD-93 engines in 2015. These engines were used for the JF-17 aircraft that Pakistan jointly manufactured with China.²¹ Russia has commended Pakistan's efforts in its fight against terrorism and has offered counter-terrorism equipment to Pakistan along with cooperation in combating terrorism and radicalism.

Furthermore, the two states successfully completed two naval exercises, "Arabian Monsoon – 2014 and 2015."²² Moreover, the special forces of Pakistan and Russia also took part in counter-terrorism military drills termed as "DRUZBA" (Friendship) in 2016 and 2017 respectively.²³

In the economic domain, Russia signed a deal to build a gas pipeline in Pakistan (680 miles long, from Lahore to Karachi) worth US\$2.5 billion.²⁴ Additionally, Russia provided aid to Pakistan in the following projects since 2011:²⁵

¹⁹ "It is a Historic Day: Pakistan becomes Full Member of SCO at Astana Summit," *Dawn*, June 9, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1338471>

²⁰ Franz Gady, "Pakistan Receives 4 Advanced Attack Helicopters from Russia," *Diplomat*, August 29, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/pakistan-receives-4-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/>

²¹ Arif Rafiq, "Pakistan: Russia's New Best Friend?," *National Interest*, September 27, 2015, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/pakistan-russias-new-best-friend-13945?page=5>.

²² Petr Topychkanov, "India Feels Threatened by Growing Russia-Pakistan Military Ties – Expert," *Russia Beyond the Headlines*, October 13, 2016, http://rbth.com/opinion/2016/10/13/india-feels-threatened-by-growing-russia-pakistan-military-ties-expert_638423

²³ Taimur Khan, "Pakistan-Russia Military Drills – A New Equation to Counter Terrorism," *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, Issue Brief, October 4, 2017, http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Final_IB_Taimoor_dated_04-10-2017.pdf

²⁴ "Russia to Build Gas Pipeline \$2.5 billion Project in Pakistan," *Pakistan Construction and Quarry*, <http://www.pcq.com.pk/russia-to-build-gas-pipeline-2-5-billion-project-in-pakistan/>

²⁵ "Helping Hand: Russia Pledges \$1 billion for Steel and Electricity," *Express Tribune*, November 9, 2011, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/289087/russia-announces-500m-grant-for-pakistan-steel-mills/>

- i. Expansion of Karachi Steel Mill.
- ii. Up-gradation of Pakistan's Heavy Mechanical Complex Taxila.
- iii. Up-gradation and expansion of electric power plants in Guddu and Muzaffargarh.
- iv. Development of coal project in Thar.

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the graph of Pakistan-Russia relations has been on an upward trajectory. The contemporary regional environment and the geopolitical situation appear to be extremely encouraging for Pakistan-Russia relations to flourish. There are multiple sectors where both states can cooperate such as defence, geo-economic, regional politico-strategic, science and technology, education and counter-terrorism will prove to be mutually beneficial. Russia has shown interest in investing in Pakistan's energy, agricultural, infrastructure and development sectors. It is imperative that both countries capitalise on the current momentum of improving relations to solidify their relationship.

Significance of Improved Pakistan-Russia Relations

Pakistan and Russia are fortunate countries that are gifted with several attained and natural advantages such as abundant natural resources, strong cultures, manpower, robust militaries, significant markets and strategic locations just to name a few. It is natural for them to realise each other's potential and how they can help one another in attaining their national security and foreign policy objectives. The best discourse for Pakistan and Russia is to put the Cold War legacy behind them (where both states found themselves to be on the opposite sides of the table) and realise the significance of their improved and consolidated relations.

Enhanced relations between Pakistan and Russia would generate strategic, economic and political dividends for both countries. They acknowledge each other's regional strategic significance, especially with respect to the final and durable settlement of the Afghanistan conundrum. Particularly, the menace of drug trafficking that is emanating from Afghanistan and moving all the way to Russia through the Central Asian states (CARs), Pakistan can prove to be extremely helpful in dealing with this problem as well. Islamabad and Moscow can collaborate with each other (while including other stakeholders such as Iran and China) in reaching a peaceful 'political' settlement of the Afghanistan issue. This

strategy will not only help in achieving stability within Pakistan and Afghanistan but will also bring stability to the entire region as a whole.

Russia is a leading member of the SCO and Pakistan is now a full member. The SCO platform can play a constructive role in enhancing bilateral as well as the multilateral relationship between Pakistan and other member states. It can enable Pakistan to cooperate with member states in a number of important sectors, such as disaster management, disease mitigation, biotechnology, climate change adaptation, aviation and space and drug trafficking.²⁶ Russia can play a significant role in easing tensions between Pakistan and India by using the SCO's platform to increase cooperation between them and encourage the two neighbours to return to the negotiating table for peaceful resolution of their disputes.

Terrorism is yet another issue that demands serious attention. Terrorism and extremism have become a global menace with its negative impact on regional and national polity since 9/11. Today, violent terrorism and extremism are threatening the national security and stability of Pakistan and Russia. Both states have suffered immensely at the hands of terrorism and they can cooperate with each other in combating this threat. Pakistan and Russia can formulate joint mechanisms for intelligence sharing and joint operations. They can build an "anti-terrorism superpower alliance" as suggested by Andrew Korybko while commenting on DRUZBA 2017 Joint military drills: "Taken together and, in the context of contemporary threats and challenges, the joint military collaboration between Russia and Pakistan can lead to the two countries becoming anti-terrorist superpowers and greatly enhancing Eurasian security."²⁷

Pakistan and Russia have counter-terrorism experiences and they can greatly benefit by extending their expertise to each other in this regard. This move would have a profound impact on the regional anti-terrorism surge and compliment the international counter-terrorism efforts as well.

²⁶ Khurram Abbas, "Russia's Revival: Opportunities and Limitations for Pakistan," Islamabad Policy Research Institute, February 4, 2016,

<http://www.ipripak.org/russias-revival-opportunities-and-limitations-for-pakistan/>

²⁷ Polina Tikhonova, "Pakistan-Russia Drills: Anti-terrorist Superpower Alliance," Value Walk, September 25, 2017, <http://www.valuewalk.com/2017/09/russia-pakistan-drills-superpower-alliance/>

In the energy sector, Russia is ranked as one of the largest producers of oil and gas in the world.²⁸ The Russian investment in Pakistan's energy sector would be welcomed by Pakistan. The latter can use the expertise of former's energy giants like Rosneft and Gazprom in meeting its energy needs. Russia has already made an offer for the export of 5000 MWe through Kyrgyzstan-Afghanistan route to Pakistan plus offers of cooperation in trans-national energy projects, including Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and CASA-1000 have also been extended to Pakistan by Russia.²⁹ In the wake of the Western embargoes, Russia is looking for alternate markets for its energy sources. Pakistan can provide a significant market for the Russian energy sources and it can also act as a route for the Russian energy to reach other energy seeking markets such as Iran, India and the other South Asian countries.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is yet another venue that can help in improving Pak-Russia relations which would be mutually beneficial. Pakistan had already extended an invitation to all the regional countries to become a part of the CPEC project and Russia is no exception. Pakistan's vital strategic location places it at the intersection of the east to west and north to south corridors. The CPEC increases the significance of Gwadar port for Russia even more. By becoming an active part of the CPEC, Russia could receive access to the Indian Ocean, which will prove to be extremely efficient and highly cost-effective. This would connect the Russian Federation and its neighbouring CARs to Gwadar port, which would not only benefit their economies and trade but would also add to Pakistan's economic growth and development and increase connectivity, interdependence and regional cohesion.

After the 2008 Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement, a major Indian shift towards the US and away from Russia has been noticed. The trade volume between Russia and India has decreased considerably (US\$7.71 billion in 2016, a 1.5 per cent decrease from 2015)³⁰ as compared to the Indo-US trade volume that is increasing (US\$114.8 billion in 2016).³¹ Due to this

²⁸ "International Energy Statistics," EIA Beta, 2016, <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/rankings/#?cy=2016>

²⁹ Abbas, "Russia's Revival."

³⁰ "Russia – India," TASS, May 29, 2017, <http://tass.com/sp/948165>

³¹ Office of the United States Trade Representative, *US-India Bilateral Trade and Investment*, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/india>

change, Russia needs to rethink its priorities in South Asia. Enhanced bilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia will not only provide a market for the Russian weapons and military technology (as Pakistan is also looking to diversify its conventional arsenal)³² and since Russia has imposed a ban on agricultural and textile goods from the European Union (EU), Pakistan can prove to be a competitive source of agricultural and textile goods to Russia as well.³³ The Russian ban on the several EU products has left US\$16 billion voids in the Russian food imports which Pakistan can fill with its exports of agricultural products. This enables Pakistan to conveniently posit itself as a substantial trade frontier for Russia.

Pakistan and Russia possess strong cultural heritages and historical legacies. Both countries will benefit significantly by regular cultural and educational exchanges which will help in boosting people-to-people contact and improved understanding of the nature of the politics and demographics of each other. This will further lead to confidence-building and enhanced cooperation between the two states.

In contemporary times, nuclear proliferation is yet another domain that demands the cooperation and collaboration of all the world states, especially the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS). Russia, being the second-largest and a responsible NWS in the world, can contribute a great deal in curbing the problem of nuclear proliferation in the world and encourage the use of peaceful use of nuclear energy. To this end, Russia can support Pakistan's Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) bid and advocate for a criteria-based approach for induction into this group. Russia can also help Pakistan in the peaceful use of nuclear energy by transferring latest nuclear equipment and technology to Pakistan in order for it to properly harness the potential of the country in producing clean and cheap nuclear energy. This would help Pakistan in fulfilling its energy needs and address many concerns of the international community regarding Pakistan's nuclear programme.

³² "Pakistan No More Reliant on US for Military needs: Prime Minister Abbasi," *Dawn*, October 9, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1362690>

³³ "Russian Food and Agricultural Import Ban," Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, April 5, 2017, <https://agecon.unl.edu/cornhusker-economics/2017/russian-food-agricultural-import-ban>

New Directions for Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Russia

As mentioned earlier, due to the regional strategic environment and the contemporary international system, security became the prime concern of Pakistan's strategic planners and foreign policy decision-makers. Pakistan, from the onset, has been striving to "balance the threat" to its national security from hostile neighbours like India and Afghanistan. Given the presence of all the variables that drive the threat perception of any country vis-à-vis its adversary, such as the aggregate capabilities (overall military and economic potential), geography and perceived aggressive intentions of its potential or actual nemesis, Pakistan's foreign policy has always been influenced by the threats emanating from India.

Unfortunately, Pakistan's foreign policy has mostly been "reactive" rather than "proactive" due to the prevailing circumstances, external pressures and national capability. There is an urgent need for a gradual and sustainable shift in Pakistan's foreign policy, especially regarding Russia because Pakistan needs to expand its foreign relations and develop strong and durable relations with all the existing world powers. It will be beneficial for Pakistan's progress and stability as well as for the peace and prosperity of the entire region. With regards to its foreign policy orientation towards Russia, what Pakistan needs is not a complete overhaul of foreign policy but rather some significant adjustments while still following the course of "balancing the threat" under the overarching umbrella of defensive realism.

Pakistan needs to tread its path very carefully regarding its foreign policy towards Russia. Despite the positive and encouraging developments in Pakistan-Russia relations, it is imperative for Pakistan to look at the future, anticipate possible problems and equip itself in every possible way in order to protect its national security and foreign policy interests. It needs to be cognisant of the factors that can negatively impact its relations with Russia such as "third country" factor as that of the US and India. Russia's overtures towards Pakistan are non-transparent and unpredictable which is another reason for concern for Pakistan, as rightly pointed out by Petr Topychkanov:

Putin's return to Kremlin in 2012 led to changes in Russia's policy in South Asia. It seemed to become less clear and predictable. The first indication of this was a short notice cancellation of the Dushanbe Four summit in Islamabad in 2012 due to President Putin's inability to visit

Pakistan. Shortly after that this platform ceased to exist. Later on, Pakistan disappeared from Russia's foreign policy concepts of 2013 and 2016.³⁴

Furthermore, many of Moscow's moves in South Asia e.g., its military-technology cooperation with the SCO member states outside the organisation's security framework, consensus with Islamabad on the political resolution of the Afghanistan problem and support for Pakistan's approach towards Taliban (to bring them to negotiating table) plus the Russian assistance to Afghan National Forces (ANF) on different levels (along with India) creates ambiguity and confusion among external observers. Also, it gives the impression that these moves are in fact ad hoc, separate tactical actions rather than a strategy for the entire region. In addition, Russia has been prone to sporadic policy shifts due to external pressures which is another matter of concern for Pakistan before making any foreign policy decision vis-à-vis Russia. A case in point is the cancellation of S-300 air defence deal with Iran, in 2010, due to the US and Israeli pressure and the delay in concluding the Mi-35M attack helicopters deal with Pakistan due to the Indian influence.

Russia's tilt towards Pakistan came after its relations with the West got strained and India, an old strategic partner of Russia, started warming up to the US. Given that interests are supreme in international relations and there are no permanent friends or foes in international affairs, there is a logical explanation for Russia's sudden shift but this still offers Pakistan the reason to be careful in its move towards Russia.

Russia's foreign policy, in general, has been undergoing a phase of transformation as it aims to transition into a new paradigm to administer its international relations.³⁵ Pakistan needs to formulate its foreign policy vis-à-vis Russia by remaining cognisant of the prevailing circumstances:

- i. Growing Indo-US cooperation.
- ii. Historical Russo-India ties.
- iii. Developments in Afghanistan.

³⁴ Petr Topychkanov, "Where does Pakistan fit in Russia's South Asia Strategy," Carnegie Moscow Centre, January 16, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/2017/01/16/where-does-pakistan-fit-in-russia-s-south-asia-strategy-pub-67696>

³⁵ Personal Interview taken by Taimur Khan from Andrew Korybko, "Russia and Pakistan," Geopolitica.RU, September 14, 2017, <https://www.geopolitica.ru/en/article/russia-and-pakistan>

- iv. Politico-economic environment (internal politics of Pakistan and Russia and their economic standings).
- v. Regional dynamics.

Following its strategy of threat balancing, Pakistan needs to build up its own capabilities in order to be in a better position to develop its bilateral relationship with Russia. It can achieve that by adopting balancing strategies, such as internal and external balancing. It should strengthen its internal capacity by improving its economic standing (which is improving according to the World Bank)³⁶ and building up its military machine. This would give Pakistan the ability to rely on independent capabilities and freely formulate and conduct its foreign policy. For external balancing, Pakistan should aggregate its capabilities with other states in “alliances.” To this end, Islamabad can use its strong ties with China to broker a stronger and durable bilateral cooperation with Russia. China can use its own improving ties with Russia in encouraging it to become a part of the CPEC project and bolster trade relationship through the CARs.

Defensive realism prescribes that the conquest becomes hard and war-causing potential of the anarchical system attenuates when favourable conditions are created that makes conflict more costly and cooperation more desirable.³⁷ Therefore, in order to nurture bilateral relations with Russia, Pakistan’s foreign policy should focus less on full-scale military/defence related cooperation which is misleading and creates false perceptions and instead focus more on other significant fields of partnership such as economic cooperation, trade, education, technology, infrastructure and development. This will help in “creating favourable conditions” for both the countries where cooperation between Pakistan and Russia can take place without much hindrance.

For Pakistan, the aim should be to make Russia a long-term trading partner. In order to attract the Russian investment in its different energy-producing and import projects, infrastructure development, steel mill, water management and agriculture sector, it is pertinent for Pakistan to offer substantial incentives to the Russian companies and private investors.³⁸ The

³⁶ “The World Bank in Pakistan,” World Bank, ,
<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/pakistan/overview>

³⁷ Smith, Hadfield and Dunne, *Foreign Policy*, 35.

³⁸ Abbas, “Russia’s Revival.”

military part of cooperation should be maintained but it needs to be kept under the radar as the basic aim of defensive realism is securing oneself rather than threatening or harming others. Such foreign policy manoeuvres will not only help in the internal balancing of Pakistan but will also enhance the external balancing of the country and improve its standing internationally as well.

A trusted partnership with Russia demands Pakistan's foreign policy to articulate Russia an independent value, protect its ties with Russia against any third countries' influences while simultaneously remaining cognisant of the interests of its other regional and extra-regional partners such as China, Iran and the US.

Conclusion

The strides made by Pakistan in adapting its foreign policy in line with its geopolitical destiny as the state that will become the "Zipper of Eurasia" are impressive.³⁹ The next step for Pakistan is to capitalise on this opportunity and expand on its existing ties and further strengthen them with the aim of promoting relations with other regional countries, especially Russia. The impediments for an Islamabad-Moscow partnership are not many or of a serious nature but the reservations and ambiguities highlighted in the previous section need to be addressed in order to develop a durable and long-lasting partnership.

Relations are relatively stable between Islamabad and Moscow but there is still plenty of room available for the improvement and a great deal needs to be done if multi-polarity is to survive and sustain Eurasia's "Greater Heartland." Furthermore, there is an urgent need for Pakistan to prioritise the improvement of its bilateral relations with Russia. To this end, Pakistan can request China, its all-weather partner, to assist it in this regard. The application of such a strategy will work towards their combined grand strategic interests which will be complemented by the strengthening of ties between these two countries.

Pertaining to its foreign policy, Pakistan as a proud nuclear-armed country and having blessed with great strategic location and abundant

³⁹ Andrew Korybko, "Pakistanis the 'Zipper' of Pan-Eurasian Integration," Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, October 15, 2015, <https://en.riss.ru/analysis/18882/>

national potential must remain confident and not be coerced by any country into extending concessions towards anyone. It should also remain careful of the fact to not approach any country from a position of weakness; in fact, in an age of complex interdependence states develop relations on the bases of mutual dependence. It should realise its strength as a state, given the astronomic rise in its geostrategic profile due to its important role in the CPEC and inseparable and vital part of any future discourse taken towards the resolution of the Afghanistan problem.

In view of these factors, Pakistan is already an attractive partner for other states in general and Russia in particular. It is, therefore, Pakistan's responsibility to "balance" ties with its different partners. To this end, it must expand the number of its partners by seeking out new allies such as Russia, based on cooperation, trust and mutual respect which could help it in the successful achievement of its national security and foreign policy objectives.