

Pakistan-Russia Relations: Shared Regional Interests and Connectivity

Пакистано-российские отношения: общие региональные интересы и взаимосвязанность

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АННОТАЦИЯ

Постсоветская разрядка в отношениях между Пакистаном и Россией трансформировалась в сердечные отношения антанты, кульминацией которых стали дружественные отношения в области безопасности, торговли и экономики. Интересы Пакистана и России в Афганистане и центральноазиатском региональном контексте в период после вывода войск США и НАТО решительно совпадают с точки зрения безопасности и взаимодействия. Изменения в глобальной и региональной ориентации мотивируют и призывают к сотрудничеству на двусторонней основе и на многосторонних форумах. Борьба с терроризмом и незаконным оборотом наркотиков из Афганистана и интеграция между Центральной и Южной Азией через стабильный Афганистан являются общей целью. Мирный Афганистан является необхо-

ABSTRACT

The post Soviet Pakistan-Russia détente has been transformed into entente cordial culminating in amiable security, trade and economic relations. Interests of Pakistan and Russia decisively converge in Afghanistan and Central Asian regional context in the post-US/NATO withdrawal period in terms of security and connectivity. Changes in global and regional orientations motivate and appeal for cooperative relations bilaterally and at multi-lateral forums. Countering terrorism and drug trafficking from Afghanistan and integration between Central and South Asia via stable Afghanistan is a shared objective. Peaceful Afghanistan is a pre-requisite to realize Central and South Asian integration complementing Eurasian integration. Bringing stability and development to Afghanistan is thus a shared responsibility of Pakistan and Russia along with Central Asian Republics, China and

димым условием для реализации интеграции Центральной и Южной Азии, дополняющей евразийскую интеграцию. Таким образом, обеспечение стабильности и развития Афганистана является общей ответственностью Пакистана и России, а также центральноазиатских республик, Китая и Ирана как соседей страны. Китайско-российское стратегическое сотрудничество в региональном контексте также укрепляет пакистано-российское сотрудничество. Евразийство прочно вошло в сферу международных отношений России в целях развития Большого Евразийского партнерства (БПЭ) в эпоху после войны на Украине. Старый план России по выходу к Южной Азии и Индийскому океану через Центральную Азию и Пакистан возрождается в изменившейся региональной геополитической и геоэкономической конфигурации. Пакистан является естественным партнером в рамках ГЭП, который свяжет Россию и Центральную Азию с Южной Азией и Индийским океаном. Новая пограничная политика Пакистана направлена на развитие "границы взаимодействия" в сердце Евразии в отличие от старой пограничной политики, которая была направлена на развитие "границы разделения". Пакистан желает служить связующим звеном между Центральной и Южной Азией. Сухопутный транспортно-логистический коридор Север-Юг может быть построен от Екатеринбурга до Гвадара и Карачи, чтобы эффективно связать евразийские трансконтинентальные торговые и логистические коридоры восток-запад с трансокеанскими.

Ключевые слова: Центральная Азия, региональный контекст, безопасность, Южная

Iran as neighbors of the country. Sino-Russian strategic cooperation in regional context also solidifies Pakistan-Russia collaboration. Eurasianism is strongly back in Russia's foreign relations to develop Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) in post-Ukraine war era. Russia's old plan to access South Asia and Indian Ocean via Central Asia and Pakistan is revitalized in altered regional geopolitical and geo-economic configuration. Pakistan is a natural partner in GEP to link Russia and Central Asia to South Asia and Indian Ocean. Pakistan's new Frontier Policy aims to develop 'frontier of connectivity' towards Eurasia's heartland in contrast to old Frontier policy that aimed to develop 'frontier of separation'. Pakistan desires to serve as a link between Central and South Asia. An overland North-South transport and logistics corridor can be developed from Yekaterinburg to Gwadar and Karachi to link the east-west Eurasian transcontinental trade and logistic corridors with transoceanic corridors efficiently.

Keywords: Central Asia, Regional Context, Security, South Asia, North-South Corridor, Connectivity.

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Introduction

Countries change and redirect foreign policies with changes in global and regional orientations. Pakistan and Russia started the process of trust building through persistent political and diplomatic engagements in post-Cold war era, during the 1990s. The post-Soviet Pakistan-Russia détente then transformed into entente cordial culminating in joint military exercises, trade and economic and security cooperation particularly after 2001. Both countries have commonality of views and approach on regional issues of security and connectivity in post-US/NATO Central Asia. Pakistan-Russia interests decisively converge in Central Asian regional context in particular and in Eurasian setting in general. Foreign policies evolve in a strategic regional context which exists and evolves in a global environment. Central Asia's regional context does not exist in a vacuum, rather it exists and evolves with in a larger Eurasian context which in turn exists and evolves in a global context. The global setting is rapidly changing; the world is more divided and unpredictable today. Likewise, the Central Asian regional geo-political circumstances have altered drastically in post US/NATO military drawl. The

regional geo-economic topography has also been changed due to integration and connectivity plans of Russia, China and European Union. Russia in the north and Pakistan in the South to a fundamentally changed Central Asian regional context have assumed added significance for each other. Russia's changed approach to South Asia influenced by a change in its policy goals and changes in global and regional orientations resulted in a shift to develop strategic and economic cooperation with Pakistan. Pakistan also made efforts to diversify its foreign relations and forge closer cooperation with Russia to manage uncertainty of great powers competition.

Pakistan, almost a decade ago, reversed the 200 years old Frontier Policy an imperial legacy which perceived Russia across the Amu Darya as an adversary¹. The change in Frontier policy played important role in enhancing mutual trust and intelligence cooperation. Kamal Alam claims that a significant development took place in 2018 when the spy chiefs of Russia, China and Iran met in Islamabad to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and Central Asia in the then anticipated US/NATO withdrawal². A new relationship with Russia is the New Frontier Policy in the Central Asian context supplemented

¹ Murtaza Ali Shah, "Pakistan Army has reversed Great Game: report", The News, (8 September 2018), https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/365389-pak-army-has-reversed-great-game-report?fbclid=IwAR3LH_YYa9F3rjWiAZcfzC7M564wmlsNIIndFKUqzmFsmE5p_nEk_OueJ44, accessed January 16, 2025

² Kamal Alam, "Pakistan's Army Reverses the Great Game: The Oxus meets the Indus", RUSI, (September 07, 2018), retrieved from <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/rusi-newsbrief/pakistans-army-reverses-great-game-oxus-meets-indus>

by Pakistan-China close strategic partnership and China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC)³. The old one was designed to develop 'frontiers of separation' while the new one aims to develop 'frontiers of connectivity' towards Eurasian heartland and beyond for Pakistan. Pakistan's New Frontier Policy is a State-Policy shaped by national interests and shared goals with Russia and Central Asia. The state-policies guided by national interests, pragmatism and shared goals do not change with a change of government. This might be one of the reasons that Pakistan's diplomacy is challenged by a strategic-friction between the old and the new frontier-policies. The challenge of changing orbit is complex because an order is being replaced by another. It has regional and trans-regional strategic and economic implications and therefore the transition is destabilizing politically as well as economically for Pakistan.

The post American Central Asia presents new opportunities as well as challenges to Pakistan, Russia, China and Central Asian Republics (CARs). Pakistan's interests are naturally converging with Russia along with China and Central Asian Republics in Afghanistan, Central Asia, South Asia and West Asia. Russia as an energy superpower has always shown interest to meet Pakistan's energy and wheat needs. Pakistan's diplomatic, strategic and intelligence cooperation with Russia and Central Asian Republics is now almost two decades old and is significant in time and space dimensions. It was mainly a regional consensus and understanding between Russia, Pakistan, CARs, China and Iran that avoided a much-anticipated civil war

in Afghanistan. Otherwise, the option seemed to escalate conflict in entire Central Asian region after devastating the Middle East. The option of escalating conflict in greater Central Asia still remains because of the presence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan eliminating which is a shared goal and responsibility.

Central Asian regional geopolitical configuration has undergone significant change once again after the US/NATO withdrawal. The regional geo-economic landscape has been evolving with trans-regional integration and connectivity plans of major powers particularly of Russia, China and European Union. The changed regional geopolitical and geo-economic configuration in Central Asia including Afghanistan compels both Pakistan and Russia to develop closer strategic cooperation for the sake of regional stability and connectivity. Both the countries share common understanding of the threat posed by instability in Afghanistan. Joint military counterterrorism exercises, seven in a series, between Pakistan and Russia enhance their operational capabilities and symbolize joint commitment to address the issues of terrorism collectively with shared resolve. Drug-trafficking, presence of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan and its fragile economy amid institutional decay demand a collective regional approach to address the Afghan imbroglio. Pakistan and Russia share perspective on a regionally inclusive settlement of Afghanistan's imbroglio for sustainable peace as the 'layover' phenomenon has come to an end in the wake of US military withdrawal from the region. Roles of regional countries have increased

³Saeeda et al., "The Frontier Policy", The Dialogue, 16 (1), (January-March 2021), retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/45611762/The_Frontier_Policy, accessed January 16, 2025.

with the end of layover caused by direct intervention of extra-regional major power. Sino-Russian strategic collaboration also enforces and solidifies Pak-Russia cooperation. Russia had old plans to access South Asia and Indian Ocean which has been enforced by war with Ukraine and Western sanctions. Shared interests of peace and development in Central Asia and Afghanistan ultimately lead towards Central and South Asia integration and connectivity to link Russia via Central Asia to South Asia, Indian Ocean and beyond in post Ukraine war.

This research work, besides presenting a brief overview of overall bilateral relations, attempts to answer three main questions: first what are the areas of mutual interest between Pakistan and Russia bilaterally and in the changed regional context? How the changed global and regional circumstances impact Pak-Russia bilateral relations? How connectivity between Pakistan and Russia has been evolving in an altered regional configuration? Methodology adopted is qualitative in nature. The content and discourse analysis methods are employed to examine, interpret and reinterpret the documents/texts as well as the context. The approach is exploratory as well as explanatory aiming to explore the under studied aspects of Pakistan-Russia relations in regional context and explains the causes and consequences of evolving regional geopolitical and geo-economic landscape

for bilateral relations in terms of security and connectivity.

Theoretical Framework

Theories explain and predict a concept or a phenomenon. The theories of International Relations including realism, hedging and liberalism impact and guide the behaviors of Pakistan and Russia regarding their bilateral relations. This bilateral relationship is guided by realism at times as in the anarchic world, states try to maximize their power and interests through alliances to create and maintain balance when threatened by hegemony.⁴ Russia as a major power seems pursuing an offensive realism in the global arena while Pakistan seems pursuing defensive realism within the regional sub-system to maximize power for its security. Hedging is to synthesize the balancing and band wagoning concepts of international relations. Relatively weak countries also hedge at times in conducting relations with major powers to diversify their foreign relations, to mitigate risks, to maximize economic benefits and to avoid overdependence on a single power in order to manage uncertainty of abandonment. Hedging occurs when smaller states simultaneously cooperate with two major powers.⁵ Liberalism emphasizes on states' political and economic cooperation through institutions and economic connectivity⁶. Both the countries Pakistan

⁴ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Russia's Changing Policy Towards South Asia: Options for Pakistan", Central Asia No. 79 (Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 2016), 9

⁵ Yuzhu Wang, "Hedging Strategy: Concept, Behavior, and Implications for China-ASEAN Relations", East Asian Affairs, vol. 1 No. 2, (2021), retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1142/S2737557921500121>, accessed January 18, 2025

⁶ Jeffrey W. Meiser, "Introducing Liberalism in International Relations Theory", E-International Relations, (Feb. 18, 2018), retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/18/introducing-liberalism-in-international-relations-theory/>, accessed January 21, 2025

and Russia are developing bilateral and multilateral cooperation through regional and international institutions including the SCO. The theory of regional integration based on the principles of 'open regionalism' also guides the bilateral relations in terms of connectivity and integration between Russia, Central Asia and South Asia. Open regionalism refers to bilateral, tri-lateral or multilateral project and sector specific regional integration arrangements, having no restrictions on non-regional states to join a particular regional integration arrangement or access to markets of regional states. Similarly, there are no supra-national institutions involved under the concept of open regionalism to surrender state sovereignty in some areas⁷.

Bilateral Trade and Economic Relations

Over the past decade, Russia and Pakistan have demonstrated strong political will for long term engagement through comprehensive bilateral relations in all spheres of life. Both the countries have thus taken initiatives to enhance trade and economic cooperation though the economic dimension of bilateral relations does not correspond to their potential. Pakistan's pursuit of economic re-

demption and energy supplies, plus the Russian aspiration to expand its economic footprints in Asia brings the two countries together. In 2010, Pakistan and Russia established Inter-Governmental Commission on trade and economic relations while Strategic Dialogue forum was established in 2013. In January 2018, State Bank of Pakistan and Central Bank of Russia signed MoU on banking cooperation paving ways for banks of both the countries to develop financial frameworks and credit lines to support trade. Both the countries resolved four decades old trade dispute in 2019.⁸ Shortly after that the Russian Minister of Industry and trade Denis Manturov led a large business delegation of 64-members on official four-day visit to Islamabad. Russia provided 200,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccine to Pakistan during Covid.⁹ During the year 2020-21 the bilateral trade surged to \$790 million with almost 50 percent increase from 2019-20.¹⁰

Pakistan and Russia signed the shareholders' agreement on July 15, 2021, which outlined the terms to construct the 1100 km long North-South natural gas pipeline worth \$3.4 billion in Pakistan renamed as Pak-Stream Gas Pipeline System (PSGP). This project is part of a Russian investment

⁷ Lolette Kritzingner –van Niekrek, Regional Integration: Concepts, Advantages, Disadvantages and Lessons of Experience, (Mozambique: Southern Africa Regional Poverty Network, 2005), http://www.sarpn.org/documents/d0001249/P1416-RI-concepts_May2005.pdf, accessed January 23, 2025

⁸ Zafar Bhutta, "Pakistan settles Soviet-era trade dispute with Russia", The Express Tribune, (7 November 2019), <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2095099/2-pakistan-settles-decades-old-trade-dispute-russia>, accessed January 18, 2025

⁹ Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's remarks and answers to media questions at a joint news conference with Foreign Minister of Pakistan Makhdoom Shah Mahmood Qureshi, Islamabad, (7 April 2021), The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, https://archive.mid.ru/en/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/-/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ3OvzcA/content/id/4666612, accessed January 23, 2025.

¹⁰ Ibid

package worth \$18.7 billion in Pakistan's energy sector promised by Russia in 2019.¹¹ Pakistan and Russia signed the first ever MoU on barter trade in October 2024 covering agricultural products, agro-industry, metallurgy, textiles, sport goods, surgical equipments and pharmaceuticals for Pakistan's expanded share in Russia's market. The annual bilateral trade has exceeded \$1 billion for the first time in history during 2024.¹² The overland North-South trade corridor will enhance the bilateral trade between the two countries to efficiently utilize the recently signed (October, 2024) barter trade agreement between Pakistan and Russia. Simplification of custom and trade procedures will facilitate smooth and faster transactions. Both the countries can establish joint ventures in key sectors including agriculture, energy and technology. Pakistan with tremendous energy demands can be a new client of Russia while Russia seems eager to invest in the energy sector and provide LNG as Russian companies have filed proposals to supply more LNG to Pakistan.¹³ Russia-Central Asia-South Asia integration, as discussed below, will definitely enhance trade and economic cooperation and people to people contacts. Educational and cultural

exchanges including faculty and scholar exchange programs and joint research projects can build foundation for enhanced mutual understanding and people to people contacts.

Defense and Strategic Cooperation

Pakistan and Russia have smoothly enhanced bilateral defense relations, arms trade and military trainings through joint military exercises since the signing of strategic cooperation agreement in 2014. Russia as one of the leading exporter of arms in the world heavily depends on arms export while Pakistan as the seventh largest importer of arms can be an important market for Russia.¹⁴ Pakistan and Russia established Strategic Dialogue Forum in 2013 and next year Russia lifted self imposed embargo on arms supply to Pakistan in 2014. The Russian defense Minister visited Pakistan in 2014, the first such visit after 1969, and signed agreements on expansion of defense and military cooperation along with agreement on sale of Mi-35 helicopters to Pakistan.¹⁵ Both the countries established Joint Military Consultative commission in 2018 while the defense and strategic relations are governed by the 2014 agreement.

¹¹ B Claudia Chia and Zheng Haiqi, "Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: Energy Partnership and the China Factor", (Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, 6 October 2021), retrieved from <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/russia-pakistan-economic-relations-energy-partnership-and-the-china-factor/> accessed January 16, 2025

¹² *Business Recorder*, (October 29, 2024), retrieved from <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40329447/pakistan-russia-trade-sees-50pc-hike-last-year-matviyenko>, accessed January 16, 2025

¹³ Claudia Chia and Zheng Haiqi, op.cited

¹⁴ M. Sarmad Zia. "Pak-Russia Defense Relations." *The Nation*, (Islamabad, March 27, 2017), retrieved from <https://www.nation.com.pk/27-Mar-2017/pak-russia-defense-relations> , accessed January 18, 2025

¹⁵ Khurram Abbas, "Russia's Revival: Opportunities and Limitation for Pakistan." IPRI. (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, February 4, 2017), retrieved from <http://www.ipripak.org/russias-revival-opportunities-and-limitations-for-pakistan/> , accessed September 11, 2017.

Pakistan received four Mi-35 helicopters in 2017 under a deal of \$153 million.¹⁶ Both Both the countries are regularly undertaking joint military exercises. The frequency of high-level military exchanges has increased during the last 10 years. In 2018, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement" to train Pakistani military officers in Russian military institutions for the first time.¹⁷ The agreement was signed when USA terminated Pakistan's participation in its International Military Training Program in 1018.¹⁸ Counter terrorism joint military exercises in the name of Druzhba (friendship) have been conducted since 2016 and seven in a series completed in defiance of Delhi's objection. The Russian Navy's largest anti-submarine destroyer known as Severmorsk, participated in a multinational joint Naval 'Aman' (peace) exercises in Karachi during 2017.¹⁹ An Indian source argues that Russia's changed approach towards Pakistan is only market seeking for arms sale.²⁰ It is a fact that Pakistan finds a new arms supplier in the form of Russia while Russia finds a new market and an ally close to China in the form of Pakistan for its economic gains and security concerns. However, the context of bilateral security

and defense relations demonstrate that the security cooperation between Pakistan and Russia is much broader and deep than the arms trade.

Shared Regional Interests and Connectivity

Peaceful Afghanistan to serve as a link between Central and South Asia seems the foremost common interest. Russia considers the security and stability of Central Asia vital for its own security and therefore considers maintaining stability in Central Asia its own responsibility. Russia is sensitive to terrorist groups nurturing in Afghanistan and drug-trafficking from there. Pakistan's western border is resonating with the fear of militants' trespassing and creating mayhem in the two provinces bordering Afghanistan. Pakistan and Russia had concluded, since long, that America's war, its military involvement in Afghanistan has reached to its limits, and US/NATO will withdraw from Afghanistan. Russia, anticipating the strategic vacuum in post-US withdrawal Afghanistan and the decisive positioning of Pakistan and China in the Afghanistan conflict as neighbors, decided to align with China and Pakistan for managing security in the

¹⁶ Franz-Stefan Gaddy, "Pakistan Begins Receiving Advanced Attack Helicopters from Russia", The Diplomat, (April 12, 2018), retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/pakistan-begins-receiving-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/> accessed January 18, 2025

¹⁷ Feroz Hassan Khan, "Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations: An Emerging Entente Cordiale, Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs, (Air University Press, January 15, 2021), retrieved from <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/Display/Article/2473361/russiapakistan-strategic-relations-an-emerging-entente-cordiale/> accessed January 18, 2025

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Usman Ali and Tauseef Javed, "Pakistan-Russia Emerging Cooperation: Opportunities and Challenges", Margalla Paper, Issue-1, (2024), retrieved from <https://margallapapers.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/download/245/164/433>, accessed January 18, 2025

²⁰ Sanjay Pulipaka, "Russia's New Approach to Pakistan: All About Arms Sales," The Diplomat, (September 28, 2016), <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/russias-new-approach-to-pakistan-all-about-arms-sales/>, accessed January 22, 2025

region. Sustainable peace and economic development in Central Asia and Afghanistan and connectivity between Central and South Asia via stable Afghanistan are common interests.

Shared interests in post-US Afghanistan are: to counter terrorist organizations present in Afghanistan including Islamic State of Khorsan Province (ISKP), Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), East Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) etc., to address Afghanistan imbroglio through a regionally coordinated approach, to effectively address the issue of drug trafficking and to include Afghanistan in regional economic process and weave Afghanistan in regional net of connectivity.²¹ One of the primary aims of Pakistan-Russia collaboration is to deal with several international terrorist groups present in Afghanistan. Moscow has already given credibility to Pakistan's counter terrorism efforts and has declared Pakistan a close counter terrorism partner.²² According to an Indian analyst at the Defense and Security Analysis Institute in Delhi, "Russia and China have found Pakistan to be a significant partner in stabilizing the region".²³ Russia along with China shares Pakistan's concerns over stabilizing the Pak-Afghan border and the return of

Afghan refugees.²⁴ Russia has declared Pakistan as a priority partner in South Asia during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in September 2022.

Convergence of interests is a powerful idea while Pakistan-Russia security, trade, economic and connectivity interests decisively converge in Central Asian and South Asian geopolitical and geo-economic landscape. Russia's changed policy towards South Asia signified close cooperation with Pakistan and pursues a policy of balancing Pakistan and India to play a role in Pakistan-India détente by having military, strategic and economic cooperation with both the countries simultaneously.²⁵ This can be beneficial however if Russia agrees to mediate between Pakistan and India to pave way for Central and South Asian integration, Russia would require consent from both the countries. During 2017, Russia held military exercises with Pakistan and India while in 2018 military contingents from both Pakistan and India participated in joint military exercises under the SCO platform which was a positive development in view of Pakistan-India tension. Though Pakistan does not match India's military, political and economic influence, Pakistan has unique significance vis-à-vis the

²¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Pakistan-Russia Collaboration: Implications for Afghanistan and Central Asia", Central Asia No. 84 (Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 2019), 11

²² Samuel Ramani, "What Driving Russia-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan", The Diplomat, (May 09, 2017), retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/whats-driving-russia-pakistan-cooperation-on-afghanistan/> accessed January 16, 2025

²³ P. Stobdan, Russia's New Game Plan (New Delhi: Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, 2015), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/193779/IB_pstobdan_180915.pdf

²⁴ Sundas Khizar and Rana Ijaz, "Pakistan's Engagement with China and Russia," Pakistan Social Sciences Review 5, no. 4 (2021), <https://pssr.org.pk/issues/v5/4/pakistan-s-engagement-with-china-and-russia-impacts-on-the-regional-order.pdf>

²⁵ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Russia's Changing Policy Towards South Asia: Options for Pakistan", Central Asia No. 79 (Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, 2016), 12

Eurasia's heartland in terms of Eurasian, Central and South Asian integration. Any overland connectivity from Russia and Central Asia to India has to pass through Pakistan. Russia supported Pakistan's membership in SCO which is an important forum for Pakistan and Russia to align priorities and develop a coordinated regional approach for security and connectivity in Eurasia's heartland with all other members states.

The contemporary era underlines interstate relations on the basis of geo-economics for socio-economic development as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Eurasian Economic Union, BRICS, SCO and BRI replaced the security centered organizations like SEATO and CENTO. Russia's pivot to east/Asia has been centered on Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) where Central Asian Republics and Pakistan have to play important roles. Russia invited Pakistan and India to the inaugural session of Eurasian Economic Union held in January 2015.²⁶ Central Asia's significance to Russia can also be judged by the fact that Russia initiated war with Ukraine when the US/NATO had already left Central Asia militarily. Importance of Central Asia for Russia will grow in the coming decades and likewise the need for stability in the region. Pakistan under its 'Vision Central Asia Poli-

cy' has focused to access strategically and economically important region while also aims to provide an outlet to the region by reviving the historical links. Pakistan-China strategic cooperation reinforces Pakistan-Russia collaboration while Sino-Russian condominium in Central Asia serves the interests of regional countries in terms of security and connectivity.²⁷ Sino-Russian cooperative management in Central Asia has gained added space in the wake of US military withdrawal from the region.²⁸ It can be safely argued that the concept of forming and developing a quadrilateral cooperation between Pakistan, Russia, Central Asia and China can be decisive in the security and connectivity of Eurasia's heartland. Joy Mitra has already declared the Russia, China, Pakistan triumvirate as a reality in 2015.²⁹ However I would add Central Asia also to this triumvirate as a converging space in terms of connectivity. Security, economic development and connectivity are considered shared goals to shape Russia-Central Asia-South Asia integration through trade and logistic corridors supplementing Silk Road Economic Belt and CPEC forging Greater Eurasian Partnership.

Russia's pivot to Asia has been re-enforced by Ukraine war and Western sanctions. Russia's plan to unify and integrate Eurasian space under

²⁶ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Russia and China in the Shifting Geopolitics of Central Asia and Implications for Pakistan", Region 12 (2) July 2023, (Slavica: Indiana University, June 2024), 203

²⁷ Michael Clark, "The Neglected Eurasian Dimension of the 'Indo-Pacific': China, Russia and Central Asia in the Era of BRI," in "The Indo-Pacific: From Concept to Contest," special issue Security Challenges 16, no. 3 (2020): 32-38, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/26924337>, accessed January 21, 2025

²⁸ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Russia and China in the Shifting Geopolitics of Central Asia and Implications for Pakistan" op. cited, 205

²⁹ Joy Mitra, "Russia, China and Pakistan: An Emerging New Axis?" The Diplomat, (August 18, 2015), retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/russia-china-and-pakistan-an-emerging-new-axis/>, accessed 13/9/017



North-South Corridor to South Asia and Indian Ocean

Рис.1. Азиатская трасса 7: сухопутный путь «Север-Юг»

Figure 1. Asian Highway 7: Overland North-South Corridor

the Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP) from Eastern Europe to East and South Asia has been absorbed by the countries in the region.³⁰ Russia's cooperation with China, Central Asia, Pakistan, Iran and India to develop trade and logistic corridors is focused under the GEP. Greater Eurasian Partnership seems to be based on the principles of open regionalism however Russia's Eurasian Economic Union is based on the principles of close regionalism as a custom union with supranational institutions. It will be relatively easier to develop Greater Eurasian Partnership on the principles of open regionalism i.e. project/activity specific bilateral, tri-lateral and multilateral regional integration arrangements having no supranational institutions as

China and European Union have been doing in Central Asia. However, it seems almost impossible to develop GEP on the principles of close regionalism having restrictions on non-member states and to surrender sovereignty in some cases to the supranational institutions. Therefore, it is advisable to focus on bilateral and multilateral projects and activity specific regional integration arrangements on the principles of open regionalism to forge Greater Eurasian Partnership.

The Asian Highway 7 (Figure 1) from Yekaterinburg via Astana, Bishkek, Tashkent, Kabul, Peshawar plus Kandahar, Gwadar and Karachi can be developed into an overland North-South trade and logistic corridor. Belarus also joined this

³⁰ Материалы Nikolai Sergeyevich Trubetzkoy, The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russia's identity. ed. Anatoly Liberman (Michigan: Slavic Publications, 1991[1925]): 220



Рис.2. Евразийские коридоры «Восток-Запад»

Figure 2. East-West Eurasian Corridors

corridor which can also be termed as Belarus-India Ocean overland trade and logistic corridor. It is supplemented by Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation's (CAREC) corridors 5 and 6 in addition to CPEC across Pakistan. It will efficiently link the East-West trans-continental (Eurasian) trade and logistic corridors from China via Central Asia, Caucasasia and Russia to Europe (Figure 2) with trans-oceanic corridors in a north-south direction. This overland North-South corridor from Russia to South Asia would serve as economic artery inter-linking northern, middle and southern Eurasian corridors to develop integration, trade, communication and cooperation. The Central Asian Republics have also adopted a regional economic approach for increased transit trade via Afghanistan

and Pakistan. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan after removing Taliban from terrorist list have increased transit trade via Afghanistan. Russia, China, CARS, Iran and even India have taken steps to improve relations with Taliban.³¹

P. Stobdan of India has stated that Russia since long planned to access the great Ocean via Pakistan.³² Russia's plan of access to South Asia and Indian Ocean can be realized in the altered regional geopolitical circumstances. The Soviet era's trade and logistic infrastructure in Central Asia up to Amu Darya, China's connectivity infrastructure developed under Silk Road Economic Belt, proposed trans-Afghan railway line, Khyber-Pass Economic Corridor and CPEC, energy pipelines and power cables are the main components of

³¹ Harsh V. Pant and Shivam Shikhawar, "Back to Kabul", Observer Research Foundation, (January 18, 2025), retrieved from <https://www.orfonline.org/research/back-to-kabul> accessed January 21, 2025

³² P. Stobdan, *Russia's New Game Plan* (New Delhi: Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, 2015), https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/193779/IB_pstobdan_180915.pdf, accessed January 17, 2025

this overland North-South transport and logistics corridor. The World Bank approved Khyber-Pass Economic Corridor worth \$408 million to develop 4 lane highway linking Peshawar with Torkham (Pak-Afghan border) along with Special Economic Zones. This will be linked to Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) corridors 5 and 6 via Kabul in addition to the Economic Cooperation Organization's highways 1 to 7 ultimately shaping Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia Corridor.³³ China has shown interest in the development of trans-Afghan railway line while Russia supports the Trans-Afghan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline. Russia has already shown interest in the development of TAPI. Thus Pakistan can serve as a buckle in Sino-Russian convergence on Eurasian integration.

Russian analysts have long ago declared Pakistan as a zipper and trans-regional gateway state to link Russia with South Asia, West Asia and Indian Ocean through CPEC and Gwadar port.³⁴ Syed Fazle Haidar says that Russia's access to South Asia and Indian Ocean under the Greater Eurasian Partnership passes through CPEC. He argues that Russia's agreement with Interim Afghan government under the Taliban to supply discounted oil and grains, its understanding to export oil to

Pakistan on deferred payments in Chinese currency and Russia's plan to extend its Soviet era gas pipeline infrastructure in Central Asia to Pakistan are indications and preparations on part of Russia to join CPEC.³⁵ This is increasingly becoming a reality in the changed regional geopolitical landscape of Eurasian integration. The potential of CPEC to contribute significantly to the Eurasia's heartland connectivity and broader regional developments to influence international geo-economics provide important motivation for Russia's increasing cooperation with Pakistan.

Conclusion

It is obvious that Pakistan-Russia relations have seen unprecedented warmth and growth during the last two decades particularly since 2001, demonstrating high level of mutual trust. Both the countries are cooperating beyond the slogans. There are trade and economic complementarities in areas of agriculture, agro-industry, defense technology and energy in the context of bilateral relations. Similarly, the security and connectivity interests of both the countries decisively converge in the altered Central Asian regional context. According to Charles Hermann, countries change foreign policy when global

³³ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Trans-Regional Connectivity in Eurasia's Heartland and the Role of Uzbekistan", *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (2022) Winter, 5

³⁴ Vladimir Morozov and Andrew Korybko, "Pakistan's Role in Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership," *Russian International Affairs Council*, (June, 2020), <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/pakistan-s-role-in-russia-s-greater-eurasian-partnership/>, accessed January 17, 2025

³⁵ Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership Passes through the CPEC," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19 (161) (2022), <https://jamestown.org/program/russias-greater-eurasian-partnership-passes-through-the-cpec/>, accessed January 17, 2025.

³⁶ Charles Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy". *International Studies Quarterly*, 34(1). (USA: Georgetown University, 1990), retrieved from https://edisisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/7764298/mod_resource/content/2/Hermann-Changing%20Course%20When%20Governments%20Choose%20to%20Redirect.pdf, accessed January 19, 2025.

orientation changes forcing actors (countries) to re-direct orientation towards world affairs.³⁶ Same can be applied to change in regional orientation. Foreign policies change with a change in regional strategic environment as foreign policies are regional as well as global. The global and regional (Central Asian) orientations have fundamentally changed in the wake of Russia-Ukraine war, US/NATO military withdrawal from Central Asia, CARs' consolidated nation and statehood, China's economic rise and end of war in Afghanistan motivating Russia and Pakistan for closer cooperation. Eurasianism is strongly back in the foreign policy of Russia in contrast to the Atlanticism of early 1990s. Russia's Greater European Program has been resolutely replaced by its Greater Eurasian Partnership in post-Ukraine war period. Russia is looking for new trade, energy and arms markets as well as for strategic and economic partners in Asia. Pakistan has been diversifying foreign trade, economic and defense relations particularly to utilize its important geographical location as multi-regional country on the basis of geo-economics.

The presence of terrorist groups in Afghanistan is a common concern for Russia and Pakistan along with Central Asian Republics, Iran and China. Pakistan and Russia are unanimous to counter terrorism with joint efforts and to address the Afghan imbroglio through a coordinated regional approach. Sino-Russian collaboration solidifies Pakistan-Russia cooperation in terms of security and connectivity in Eurasia's heartland. Only a secure and stable Afghanistan guarantee's Central and

South Asia economic connectivity and integration which in turn promises realization of Russia's old plans of access to South Asia and beyond. In this era of Eurasian integration, Russia-Central Asia-South Asia trade and logistic corridor complements the Northern, Central and Southern Eurasian corridors initiated by China, the CPEC, the rail and road corridors of ECO and CAREC efficiently.

Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership plan makes Pakistan a natural partner. Pakistan would welcome to be a linking bridge between Russia-Central Asia and South Asia. The Asian highway 7 starting from Yekaterinburg in Russia via Astana, Tashkent, Kabul, Kandahar, Quetta and Gwadar/Karachi will take the form of overland North-South trade and logistic corridor from Belarus to Indian Ocean. It will also efficiently link the east-west trans-continental Eurasian trade and logistic corridors to the trans-oceanic corridors in a north-south direction enhancing trans-regional trade and economic activity. CARs desire to develop multi-dimensional routes for foreign trade to overcome their geographical challenge. CARs have shown renewed interests to engage Afghanistan in regional economic and connectivity processes to open up in southerly direction and revive the historical links with South Asia. The evolving relationship for enhanced trans-regional connectivity has the potential to turn into a quadrilateral coalition partnership amid Russia, Pakistan, Central Asia and China.

³⁶ Charles Hermann, "Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy". *International Studies Quarterly*, 34(1). (USA: Georgetown University, 1990), retrieved from https://edisciplinas.usp.br/pluginfile.php/7764298/mod_resource/content/2/Hermann-Changing%20Course%20When%20Governments%20Choose%20to%20Redirect.pdf, accessed January 19, 2025.

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ИНСТИТУТ МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

АССОЦИАЦИЯ ПРЕПОДАВАТЕЛЕЙ КИТАЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА ПФО

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