

Russian South Asia Policy: From Estrangement to Pragmatism

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to analyse the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian policy responses towards the South Asia particularly India and Pakistan contextualising how the systemic pressures stimulated from balance of power and intervened by domestic factors specifically ideology and leaders' images played important role in policy formulation and execution. Majority explanations of Soviet-Russian South Asian policy do not offer analysis of inside-out interactions. Incorporation of domestic factors in analysis would provide better explanation of Soviet-Russian policy and the key developments in South Asia. Soft-positivist methodology with qualitative and quantitative methods are employed to analyse data from primary and secondary sources. The paper categorises four distinct phases of Russian South Asia policy responses; Estrangement (1947-1953), Engagement (1954-1971), Indo-Centrality (1971-1991), Pragmatism (1991-2022) stimulated by systemic and intervened by domestic factors. Balancing and competition with the United States (US) and China primarily motivates Soviet Union to shape policy but ideology, leaders' perceptions and images also influenced.

Keywords: Soviet Union, Russia, South Asia, Estrangement, Engagement, Indo-Centrality, Pragmatism, Cold War, Pakistan, India, United States, China.

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Introduction

This paper develops an argument that apart from the structural factors, domestic factors also influenced conception and execution of Russian South Asia policy. Systemic pressures in terms of balance of power and competition with great powers specifically the United States (US) and China stimulated major shifts outside-in processes to shape Soviet-Russian policy towards the region during the cold war and afterwards. Simultaneously, domestic factors preferably ideological predispositions, leaders' perceptions and images about India and Pakistan influenced inside-out processes of policy conception. In the cognitive process, images are considered the final product of perceptions played important role in shaping the behaviour.¹ Perceptions of the leadership about the specific countries or the regions contribute to develop the images. In this paper contextualisation of systemic pressures emanating from Soviet competition with the US and China, coupled with ideological outlooks, perceptions and images of four Soviet leaders including Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev and two post-Soviet leaders Yeltsin and Putin would be analysed to explain the Soviet-Russian behaviour towards the region. Historically, global balance of power served as fundamental source of Russian conduct within South Asia.² Russian interaction with the sub continent can be traced back to Tsarist's time, when the region was source of attraction for only economic reason.³ Since 1600s three distinct polities (a) Imperial Ramanov dynasty, (b) Single party dictatorship in Soviet Union and (c) Democratic-autocracy in Russian Federation outlines three phases of competition⁴ of the great powers. Russian empire under Tsars, South Asia

¹ “Perception and Image Theory of International Relations,” ANKASAM | Ankara KrizveSiyasetAraştırmalarıMerkezi, 24 June 2017,
<https://www.ankasam.org/perception-and-image-theory-of-international-relations/?lang=en>

² Jyotsna Bakshi, “Russian Policy towards South Asia,”
https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/olj/sa/sa_99baj04.html#txt24

³ Ajay Kamalakaran, “ When India was a “Land of Diamonds,” Russian Tsars Eagerly Tried to Build Ties with Aurangzeb,” *Scroll.in*
<https://scroll.in/magazine/1024590/when-india-was-a-land-of-diamonds-russian-tsars-eagerly-tried-to-build-ties-with-aurangzeb>

⁴ Three distinct periods of competition; (1) between Great Britain and Russian Empire during nineteenth and early twentieth century, (2) Soviet Union, United State and China during the Cold War (3) Russia, United States and China after the Cold War, remains one of the key systemic element of Soviet and Post-Soviet behaviour towards the Southern part of the Asia.

was part of periphery region for competition with Great Britain culminated with Anglo-Russian Treaty.⁵ Early phase of Soviet rule South Asia has been among ignored region, unless the leadership change and it became crucial for Soviet containment initiated by the US and US-China Rapprochement. Post-Cold War Russian Federation has been facing two prone-challenges dealing with the US and China in South Asia. Post-Cold War improved relations with China poses lesser challenge to Russia as compare to the US.

Scholars have explained the Soviet and Post-Soviet interactions with India and Pakistan with distinct perspectives. Selective periodic and bilateral analysis (with India and Pakistan) emphasising only the structural or systemic factors, does not offer how Soviet and Post-Soviet leader's ideas and images played key role in policy formulation? Why Joseph Stalin remains indifferent and estranged towards the newly emerged India and Pakistan? What motivates Khrushchev to initiate pro-India engagement? Why Brezhnev remains neutral in Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 and then opted Indo-centrality having treaty with India, how Gorbachev's new thinking influenced Soviet conduct, why Yeltsin's liberalisation impacted Kremlin's ties with South Asia and what Putin is seeking from India and Pakistan?

This paper would apply soft-positivism methodology with qualitative and quantitative methods to explain the Soviet-Russian policy towards South Asia. Primary data in terms of first person newspaper articles, government policy documents and record, original archival documents from different archives as well as declassified documents and speeches; secondary data includes government publication, peer-reviewed research articles, newspaper analysis, books, reports would be analysed. The study has divided the Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian South Asia policy into four distinct phases that reflected the clear shifts in the conduct and instruments of policy. First, *Estrangement* (1947-1953), during this phase Soviet South Asian outlook had developed by the communist orthodoxy conceived by Stalin lasted until he remained alive. Second, *Engagement* (1954-1971) in this phase Stalin's estrangement had transformed into engagement under Khrushchev who brought new vision supported by 'neutral' images of the third world including India. In this phase, Soviets had shown their tilt towards India. However, Brezhnev brokered peace being impartial during the 1965 war between Pakistan and India; he later on adopted an Indo-

⁵ Ira Klein, "The Anglo-Russian Convention and the Problem of Central Asia, 1907-1914," *Journal of British Studies* 11, no. 1 (1971): 126-47.

centric security policy in South Asia. Third phase, *Indo-Centrality* (1971-1991) in this phase Khrushchev's engagement taken to the Indo-centric policy under Brezhnev, and Gorbachev's new thinking even tilted towards India until the USSR, soften gestures towards Pakistan. Finally, Pragmatism (1991-2022) evolved under Yeltsin, Medvedev and Putin. Yeltsin's *Atlanticism* caused least interest towards South Asia, Medvedev's approach of foreign policy as an economic instrument opened the space for improved relations with both India and Pakistan, and the pragmatics of President Putin suggests that no ideological precondition or zero sum condition left for selective relations in South Asia.

Theoretical Framework

Vivid explanation of the policies, actions and conduct of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian foreign policy towards South Asia requires broader theoretical framework to provide systemic and domestic explanation. The Neoclassical Realism (NCR) would provide appropriate framework, which combines the elements of both structural and classical realism. The NCR is a theory belongs to realist tradition of International Relations, argues that domestic variables and conditions of states must be taken into consideration while analysing the drivers of state behaviour; accounting just national interest and systemic factors are insufficient. Structural realist, Waltz and Mearsheimer ignores the individual and domestic agency in shaping states' behaviour, argues only international structure compels the countries to behave in certain way. Three images, individual level, the nation-state level and the systemic or international level, primarily conceived by Kenneth Waltz (1959), in his book *Man, the State and War* that tends to identifies reasons of war. Waltz argues "the third image describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results."⁶ He assigns the role of predictability to the third image while recognising the importance of first and second images.

⁶ Kenneth N Waltz, *Man, the State and War* (Columbia University Press: anniversary edition, 2018),
<http://library.lol/main/CDD1B74F9F41598FAC033122AB3F72C4>

However, classical realist including H.J. Morgenthau and E.H. Carr overlooks the structural constraints assign primacy to the human agency to analyse the international politics. Neoclassical realist scholars put together the value of systemic and domestic variables in the analysis of state behaviour. Fareed Zakaria in his article, “Realism and Domestic Politics” published in 1992, identified theoretical shortcomings of realism and discussed domestic variables.⁷ He also pointed out in his work, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*, published in 1998, classifies the paradoxes of international life in case of ignoring domestic factors. Fareed argues “domestic politics explanations can be most useful in explaining events, trends and policies that are too specific to be addressed by a grand theory of international politics.”⁸ Formally Neoclassical realism, the nomenclature coined by Gideon Rose in his article, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy” published in 1998. Gideon argues “to understand the way states interpret and respond to their external environment, one must analyse how systemic pressures are translated through unit level intervening variables such as decision-makers’ perceptions and domestic state structure.”⁹ For Gideon, leaders perceptions might be influenced by both international and domestic politics, which laid the foundations for incorporating decision-makers’ perceptions as intervening variable, through which systemic pressures must be filtered. Gideon identifies the inability of structural realism for the explanation of the Soviet collapse, which was caused by the domestic factors rather than systemic one. Both scholars combine classical realism and structural realism, adds domestic factors for explanation of state behaviour, foreign policy decisions with outcomes. Neoclassical variant of realist tradition scrutinises false predictions of structural realism, accounting “perceptions” as an important variable in shaping the domestic politics and impact on the systemic shifts.

This paper will analyse employing independent and intervening variables. Systemic or international level as independent variables

⁷ Fareed Zakaria,” Review of *Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay*, by Jack Snyder in *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 177-98,
<https://doi.org/10.2307/2539162>.

⁸ Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America’s World Role*, 1st ed. (New Jersey, United States, Princeton University Press, 1998), 259.

⁹ Gideon Rose Reviewed work(s): The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism et al., “Review: Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (1998): 144-72.

emphasises the structure of international political system, numbers of great powers, and distribution of economic and military power among the states and nature of political and economic interdependence, and the patterns of alliances. Domestic or nation-state level as dependent variables regards type of government, democratic and authoritarian and between state apparatus and groups in society, the bureaucratic makeup of the apparatus; it also accounts the features of the policy-making processes, societal factors including socio-economic structures, lobbying, public opinion and influence of political culture and ideology. Individual level as intervening variables could be the ideology, beliefs system, personal priorities, and psychological processes, political socialisation, learning from history and management styles. Decision makers' perceptual accuracy of systemic imperatives, evaluation of threats and opportunities, rationality to systemic imperatives and mastery over resource mobilisation, could be the important factors to study Russian South Asian policy. Applying neoclassical approach to this study, motivations, interests, and transformation from estrangement to pragmatism will provide sufficient explanation.

Estrangement — 1947-1953

Partition of subcontinent in 1947 was paralleled or epiphenomena of the successive intensification of the East-West conflict.¹⁰ Weakening of European powers after the Second World War specifically Britain in subcontinent, liberation movements intensified the process of end of colonialism that culminated with the independence of India and Pakistan. Soviet Union had established formally diplomatic relations with both of the newly states not in hurry, not too late. Systemic factors and Stalin's images about the post-colonial governments were the fundamental sources of conceiving the Soviet conduct towards the South Asia. "Berlin Blockade"¹¹ in 1949, "Korean War (1950-1953)"¹² and alliance with China¹³ for the

¹⁰ Andreas Hilger, "The Soviet Union and India: The Years of Late Stalinism," Parallel History Project on Cooperation on Cooperative Security (PHP), 2016, https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_india/intro_staline91.html?navinfo=56154.

¹¹ Nato.int, "The Berlin Blockade," NATO, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/declassified_136188.htm.

¹² Joel R Campbell, "The Wrong War: The Soviets and the Korean War, 1945-1953," *International Social Science Review* 88 (2014): 30.

¹³ "The Sino-Soviet Alliance, 70 Years Later | Wilson Center," <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/sino-soviet-alliance-70-years-later>.

common resentment of “Western Imperialism”¹⁴ indicates the emergence of the Cold War. On the other hand, Second World War was devastating for the Soviet Union; during the postwar period Stalin’s inward focus for economic recovery and political consolidation,¹⁵ strengthening socialism in one country,¹⁶ centralised decision-making process¹⁷ and Stalin’s narrow image caused Estrangement in Soviet foreign policy towards the region. Unlike the Lenin, Stalin never attempted for communist revolution in South Asian countries. However, South Asia remained one of the least priorities among the early revolutionaries including Lenin. Lenin had conceived a plan to instigate and support communist revolution in the British India¹⁸ but it was abandoned on the advice of Communist Party of India (CPI) leader M.N Roy.¹⁹

Soviets were not against the partition of the subcontinent and post-partition Soviet leader Stalin’s perceptions of the new countries developed with the nature of interactions by the leadership of both countries and subsequent perceived developments and their inclination toward the US. Stalin’s image of India and Pakistan developed as “post-colonial governments as tools of Western imperialism”²⁰ served as one of the key factors in constituting Soviet foreign policy toward the South Asia. Stalin ignored Nehru’s signals of neutrality and unwillingness to part of ideology-based Soviet-US confrontation and interpreted Indian foreign policy

¹⁴ Vojtech Mastny, “The Soviet Union’s Partnership with India,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 3 (July 2010): 50–90, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00006

¹⁵ M. Harrison, “The Soviet Union after 1945: Economic Recovery and Political Repression,” *Past & Present* 210, no. Supplement 6 (1 January 2011): 103–20, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtq042>.

¹⁶ Erik Van Ree, “Socialism in One Country: A Reassessment,” *Studies in East European Thought* 50, no. 2 (1998): 77–117.

¹⁷ Yoram Gorlizki, “Stalin’s Cabinet: The Politburo and Decision Making in the Post-War Years,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 53, no. 2 (2001): 291–312.

¹⁸ “How Lenin Tried to Foment Communist Revolution in India,” *Rashtram School of Public Leadership* (blog), December 27, 2021, <https://rashtram.org/communist-revolution/>.

¹⁹ John P. Haithcox, “The Roy-Lenin Debate on Colonial Policy: A New Interpretation,” *The Journal of Asian Studies* 23, no. 1 (1963): 93–101, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2050635>.

²⁰ Vojtech Mastny, “The Soviet Union’s Partnership with India,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 3 (July 2010): 50–90, https://doi.org/10.1162/JCWS_a_00006.

through a Cold War lens.²¹ However, Nehru had shown eagerness to have independent relations with Soviet Union as well.²² Nehru's first visit to the US in 1949 and followed by Liaqat Ali Khan's ignorance USSR's invitation for trip to US in 1950 caused the perceptions about the both new dominions as 'imperial puppet' in South Asia. For Stalin's Cold War ideological lens of post-colonial governments as tools of Western imperialism²³ was primary cause of a grim outlook towards the region.

Although Soviet system was not source of attraction for early Pakistani leadership due to closed society in terms of restrictions on freedom, atheist ideology and sponsorship of subversion in other countries; even Pakistani PM Liaqat made calls for economic assistance from the developed world but Soviet were non respondent,²⁴ Pakistan's former Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar argues that "Pakistan needs economic and military cooperation, but Soviet Union was not an option."²⁵ He also argues that founding father of Pakistan Jinnah envisaged a Muslim, liberal and democratic and modern nation-state naturally predisposed him in favour of close relations with democratic countries.²⁶ Sattar made another important point that "Pakistan administrative elite, nurtured in British strategic view, suspected that the Soviet state cherished the Tsarist aim to carving out a land access to the warm waters of Arabian Sea, and therefore, posed a danger to Pakistan security."²⁷ Soviets remained apathetic toward the region, and evolved the perceptions of post-partition conflict of India and Pakistan with suspicions as part of Anglo-American strategies. Soviet representative, Jacob A Malik in UN Security Council on January 17, 1952 in his speech explained "the purpose of plans in connection with Kashmir is to secure

²¹ Andreas Hilger, "The Soviet Union and India: The Years of Late Stalinism," Parallel History Project on Cooperation on Cooperative Security (PHP), 2016, https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_india/intro_staline91.html?navinfo=56154.

²² Lubna Saeed, "Indo-Soviet Relations : A Study of Nehru's Diplomacy," (PhD diss., Aligarh Muslim University, 2003), 308.

²³ Mastny, "The Soviet Union's Partnership with India."

²⁴ Abdul Sattar, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2019*, 3rd ed. (Karachi, Pakistan, Oxford University Press, 2013), 378.

²⁵ Sattar, "*Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2019 Fifth Edition,*" <https://oup.com.pk/best-sellers/pakistan-s-foreign-policy-1947-2019-fifth-edition.html>.

²⁶ Sattar.13.

²⁷ Sattar.38.

the introduction of Anglo-American troops into the territory of Kashmir and convert into an Anglo-American colony and military and strategic base.”²⁸ Soviet leadership at that time adopted very neutral stance over Kashmir, recognising right of self-determination, as recognised by the United Nations charter.

Indian government experienced Soviet inhospitality, although Nehru had shown his eagerness for independent relations with Soviet Union²⁹ Stalin’s response was cold and not much welcoming. As a reflection, interview of Indian Ambassador to the Soviet Union K. P. S. Menon with Stalin clearly indicates the perception and outlook of India for Stalin, Menon reports in a memo sent to his government about prospects of Indo-Soviet relations. During the meeting when Menon thanked Stalin by saying that, he had received every courtesy and consideration from the Foreign Office. “I was impressed by the prevailing friendliness towards India” Stalin’s response was derogatory “even shepherds in Russia were hospitable, and we are no worse than shepherds.” The same memo traces the interest of Stalin in military aviation sales to India “apologising for the question; he asked whether India had a sufficiently large army. I (Menon) said that our army was meant essentially for defence and not for adventures abroad. ‘But is your army capable of defending India?’” asked Stalin. I said that we had a compact, well-trained and well-disciplined army, but that our air force and navy were still in their infancy. “It is difficult to defend a country effectively without a powerful air force, said Stalin.”³⁰ In Stalin’s life, no breakthrough was evolved towards the region because mythical Stalin was unchanging.³¹ Under Stalin rule there was no high level visit was matured from either side. SIPRI database shows since 1947 to 1960s Russian arms experts to India and other countries was almost zero. Even overall trade with the region remains low.

²⁸ J Indian Ambassador to the Soviet Union K. P. S. Menon Interview with Stalin,” February 18, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, K.P.S. Menon, *The Flying Troika* (1963: London, Oxford University Press). <http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/134393> .

²⁹ Andreas Hilger, “The Soviet Union and India: The Years of Late Stalinism,” Parallel History Project on Cooperation on Cooperative Security (PHP), 2016, https://www.php.isn.ethz.ch/lory1.ethz.ch/collections/coll_india/intro_staline91.html?navinfo=56154

³⁰ “Indian Ambassador to the Soviet Union K. P. S. Menon Interview with Stalin” (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, K.P.S. Menon, *The Flying Troika* (1963: London, Oxford University Press), 18 February 1953).

³¹ Jonathan Haslam, “The Making of Foreign Policy under Stalin” in the Empire and Society: New Approaches to Russian History, (Japan, Slavic Research Center1994), 14.

Engagement — 1954-1971

An era of Soviet Union's engagement with South Asian countries had begun with the demise of Stalin and Khrushchev's *De-Stalinisation*. Khrushchev made drastic changes in Soviet South Asia policy, treatment with all the non-communist, third world as enemies of the Soviet Union, could not serve the national interest, estrangement policy replaced with the engagement. However, Stalin regime was susceptible about the developments in Kashmir region, adjunct to the Soviet boarders. Khrushchev envisages "nothing wrong to encourage the socialist policies of some progressive third world leaders, like Nehru."³² Two developments set the future South Asian direction in early 1950s, first the Stalin's death caused change of leadership and secondly alliance formation by US led anti-communist including Pakistan in Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) 1954 and Baghdad Pact or Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) 1955. It was classical moment for the synergy of structural and domestic factors which mutually provided Soviet Union new impetus to look the region with the changed vision.

The new leader Khrushchev reversed Stalinisation by removing personality cult at the party level, which affected not only domestic but also foreign policy. Khrushchev's doctrinal modifications in Soviet foreign policy after the death of Stalin in March 1953 resulted in strengthened Indo-Soviet ties.³³ Khrushchev's "neutralist image of India"³⁴ and Pakistan's alignment with the US against USSR motivated him to evolve pro-India policy. Since the partition until the death of Stalin, Soviet recognises the Kashmiri right of self-determination, as one of the key principle acknowledged by the United Nation charter. However, Soviet position altogether changed during the Khrushchev period. Khrushchev during his visit to the region, during his trip to Srinagar he made clear pro India position on Kashmir. Apart from political posturing, Khrushchev also

³² Pramod K. Mishra, "The Soviet Union in South Asia," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs* 3, no. 1/2 (1990): 18–31.

³³ Sumit Ganguly, ed., *Engaging the World: Indian Foreign Policy since 1947* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199458325.001.0001>.

³⁴ Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*, 1. publ, Ford/Southampton Studies in North/South Security Relations (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

initiated economic interaction with the region. Khrushchev in his first ever visit to India, inked an agreement to support a steel plant Bhilai in Madhya Pradesh, which considered as first of Soviet assistance outside the Communist Bloc, that shows complete change of Stalin's relative economic isolationism.³⁵ Three major developments stimulated the Indo-Soviet arms trade, firstly Pakistan's purchase of F-104 from the US under its military assistance of Mutual Aid Treaty, which was being perceived as a new air threat to India. Secondly, after Sino-Indian border conflict, non-responsiveness for military assistance by the US, UK and France compels the Indian military elites to seek the assistance from Soviet Union. However, India remained recipient of British and French arms until the Sino-Indian border conflict in 1962.³⁶ Thirdly, Sino-Soviet deterioration caused by the doctrinal divergence over the interpretation and practical implementations of Marxism-Leninism and Cold War politics, Soviet Union first emerged as major suppliers of the arms to Indian in 1962 with the conclusion of the MIGs deal. A sharp decline in Sino arms import had reported in 1961 and declined to zero in 1969. Nevertheless, it's vivid that military cooperation between India and Soviet Union was established after Sino-Indian border clashes. The first consignment of Soviet two II-14 transport aircraft to India had delivered in 1955, sale of same aircraft 24 II-14 affected in 1960. Mi-4 Helicopter, eight an-12transport aircraft were acquired and in 1962, 16 Mi-4s and 8 An-12s.³⁷ MiG-21 deal becomes early symbol of Indo-Soviet military ties. The U-2 incident raised eyebrows of the Soviet leaders in 1960s. When Soviet Air Defence Forces shot down the US spy plane U-2, that was flew from Pakistani air base, Badaber. Khrushchev threatened Pakistani leadership for severe consequences and given three-day ultimatum to vacate the base from the US. President Ayub Khan cancelled the agreement on the advice of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto.³⁸

³⁵ Dhruva Jaishankar and Shruti Godbole, "Aid Wars: U.S.-Soviet Competition in India," *Brookings* (blog), 1 March 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2018/03/01/aid-wars-u-s-soviet-competition-in-india/>.

³⁶ P. R. Chari, "Indo-Soviet Military Cooperation: A Review," *Asian Survey* 19, no. 3 (1979): 230–44, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2643691>.

³⁷ Chari.

³⁸ Ali Ashraf Khan, "Short History of U.S. Cold War Listening Post at Peshawar, Pakistan," Indian Strategic Studies, <https://www.strategicstudyindia.com/2015/10/short-history-of-us-cold-warlistening.html>.

Upon Soviet concerns, Pakistan vacated Badaber base from the US paved the way for bit improved relations between Pakistan and USSR. In April 1965, President Ayub Khan became the first Pakistani leader who visited the USSR and held talks with Brezhnev and Kosygin. In the meetings at Moscow Pakistani official requested for arms provision, and in a separate meeting Kosygin was agreed to consider Pakistani request for military equipment. These developments led to a “neutral” position in 1965 Indo-Pakistan war as Soviets successfully brokered Tashkent peace agreement. Establishment of Pakistan Steel Mill with the financial and technical assistance of the Soviet Union was testimony of improved relations. Pakistan Steel and Tiajproexport of the USSR signed an agreement in 1969 for the preparation of a feasibility report for the establishing a steel mill at Karachi, subsequently in January 1971, Pakistan and USSR signed an agreement for techno-financial assistance for the construction of steel mill.³⁹

Indo Centrality — 1971-1991

Indo-Centrality evolved with factors involved at the perceptual changes and in response to the factors at international level in South Asia. Khrushchev’s engagement led to the Indo-Centric policy under Leonid Brezhnev compelled by Sino-US rapprochement facilitated by Pakistan. Experts believe that Brezhnev’s vision about the Asian security and Sino-US rapprochement were two rudimentary variables, which led to the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation 1971. Brezhnev’s images of “India neutrality and trusted partner” coupled with the systemic variation leads to Indo-Centrality. The treaty becomes first bilateral instrument, which could be interpreted as *Indo-centric* in its security and political orientation. Under this treaty, Soviets provided military and diplomatic support to India during Indo-Pak 1971 war, which led to the disintegration of East Pakistan and intends to established Indian supremacy in the region. Security clause of the treaty specifically indicates in case of any threat to either party, will invoke jointly effective measures. Article IX of the treaty says, “Each High Contracting Party undertakes to abstain from providing any assistance to any third party that engages in armed conflict with the other Party. In the event of either Party being subjected to and attach or a threat thereof, the High Contracting Parties shall immediately

³⁹ Pakistan Steel, “Our History,” http://www.paksteel.com.pk/organ_our_history.html.

enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and the security of their countries.”⁴⁰ The treaty was in action during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan war, Soviet kept aside all the intentions of neutrality and non-partisanship earned from Tashkent meeting of January 1966.

However, the USSR publically upheld territorial integrity but covertly supported to the insurgents causing Pakistan’s unity.⁴¹ Under the treaty, Soviet Union transported sophisticated military equipment, mainly advanced version of SAM to New Delhi and Bombay. “A Russian consignment of other 250 tanks, forty 120mm rockets, and large number radio sets and other equipment were dispatched as negotiations were initiated for the supply of supersonic, medium bombers, medium reconnaissance aircraft and MIG-23 fighters.”⁴²

Supplies of such sophisticated weaponry by the Soviet Union shifted military balance in favour of India. Apart of the military supplies, Soviets also provided diplomatic cover to India for its military operations with in East Pakistan. At the United Nations (UN) level, Soviet adopted a position that a ceasefire was inconceivable without a political settlement in East Pakistan. Soviet provided diplomatic support to India in the UN, vetoed twice on December 4-5, 1971.⁴³ Soviet role in disintegration of Pakistan was much visible. Overall Soviet objectives for South Asia by the 1970s were listed as maintaining a stable, Moscow-leaning regime in the bordering country of Afghanistan; decreasing American and Chinese influence in the region; to develop workable diplomatic ties, and if possible, friendly relations with all countries of the region; to expand relations with India and using its close relationship with Delhi to press its positions in the non-aligned movement and other international fora; and to promote the national liberation movement in progressive states of the region.⁴⁴ With such

⁴⁰ “Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-Operation,” <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/5139/Treaty+of>

⁴¹ Zubeida Mustafa, “The USSR and the Indo-Pakistan War, 1971” in the *Readings in Pakistan Foreign Policy, 1971-1998*, 4th ed., (Karachi, Pakistan, Oxford University Press, 2006), 407.

⁴² Ali.

⁴³ Ali.

⁴⁴ Linda Racioppi, Soviet Policy towards South Asia since 1970 (New York, United States, Cambridge University Press, 1994), 249.

various foreign policy instruments in terms of crisis diplomacy, communist party links, economic and military instruments that includes arms transfer, licensing of arms production, and training of military personals, direct military intervention and force projection⁴⁵ were at play in South Asia.

In pursuance of Brezhnev doctrine, Soviet invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to back communist regime; provoked decade long guerrilla war; evolved Pakistan-US nexus for the provision of weapons and training to fighters in Afghan War against the Soviet forces, which had negatively taken by the Soviet Union. With the end of Brezhnev era, Gorbachev assumed power in 1985, launched *Perestroika* (restructuring in Russia) and *Glasnost* (openness) affected not only domestic economy and politics but also foreign policy. His relinquishment of doctrinaire Marxism-Leninism and his foreign policy reassessment had the effect of undercutting temporarily the basis of the Soviet Union's special relationship with India. When Gorbachev assumed the charge, Pak-Soviet relations according to Soviet Ambassador to Pakistan acknowledged "virtually come to zero point."⁴⁶ Gorbachev reportedly threatens President Zia Ul Haq with dire consequences if Pakistan continuously provides support to Afghan Mujahedeen. However, prior to his visit to India in 1986 Gorbachev made a reassessment in its relations with South Asian nations including Afghanistan. Later years, Gorbachev attempted to soften his gestures towards Pakistan but continues to grow trade with India.⁴⁷ Disintegration of the Soviet Union terminated the ideological orthodoxy in successor regimes.

Pragmatism — 1991-2022

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union eroded the communist great power, Cold War, arms race and ideological confrontation between the two great powers. The international power structure transformed from

⁴⁵ Racioppi.

⁴⁶ Ali T. Sheikh, "The New Political Thinking: Gorbachev's Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 11 (1988): 1170–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644507>.

⁴⁷ Ali T. Sheikh, "The New Political Thinking: Gorbachev's Policy toward Afghanistan and Pakistan," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 11 (1988): 1170–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2644507>

bipolar to unipolar led by capitalist democratic US and allies. First President of Russian Federation, Yeltsin, was interested to have cooperative relations with the West. *Atlanticism* in Russian foreign policy orientation after the Soviet disintegration was dominant and caused lack of warmth of its engagements with the Third World including South Asia. However, President Yeltsin had resumed its ties with India upon his visit to Delhi in 1993, signed a bilateral friendship agreement had replaced Indo-Soviet 1971 treaty.⁴⁸ Treaty, but primary focus was the Europe. Pragmatism evolved in Russian foreign policy since President Vladimir Putin came into power, for him, *Pragmatism* meant a) fully ending Russian isolation and making Russia a full member of the international community, b) ensuring internal stability as well as security from existential threats, and c) pursuing economic modernisation.⁴⁹

In South Asian context, Putin's pragmatics suggested that no ideological or political precondition left for selective relations particularly with India and Pakistan. Russia reengaged the region tactically, signed the *Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership* in October 2000. *Pragmatism* is reflected in declaration indicates, "The strategic partnership between the sides not directed against any other state or group of states, and does not seek to create a military-political alliance."⁵⁰ Apart from the bilateral framework, Russian multilateral engagement with India brought a new arena of relations. Russia welcomes India not only at global level but also in regional structures, Russia, India and China (RIC) the Asian Triangle, which later become BRICS, but simultaneously Russia supported inclusion of both Pakistan and India into a regional organisation Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Upon the US reentry into the region after 9/11 and 'War against Terror' Russia supported the US in developing the Northern Distribution Network supply line to Afghanistan⁵¹ proved to be a new stimulus for sustaining the bilateral relations in the region. Since 2000,

⁴⁸ "Yeltsin Reaches Accords in India," *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1993, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1993-01-29-mn-2039-story.html>.

⁴⁹ Bryan T. Baker, "Placing Putin's Pragmatism in Perspective," *Small Wars Journal*, accessed 18 June 2022, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrn1/art/placing-putins-pragmatismperspective>.

⁵⁰ "Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Russian Federation," 2000

⁵¹ Kenneth Katzman and Clayton Thomas, "Afghanistan: Post-Taliban Governance, Security, and U.S. Policy," Congressional Research Service, December 13, 2017

high-level interactions continues between the two countries, President Musharraf in 2003, President Asif Ali Zardari in 2011 and Prime Minister, Imran Khan 2022 that shows Pakistan's eagerness of improved relations with Russia.

Russian economic vulnerability compels it to accept junior role in its strategic partnership with China. In any such matrix, the US re-entry as an external superpower into the South Asian geopolitics raised eyebrow of the Russia paved the way for the diversification of its outlook towards the South Asian region. Apart from continued strategic partnership with India, Russian pragmatics suggest diversification of relations with Pakistan, not checked by the India. Overall, Russian interests toward South Asia have increased. Experts termed Putin's initial moves towards Islamabad as "non-transparent and unpredictable," However, under Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) Russia's policy toward Islamabad was more transparent.⁵² Medvedev's approach of foreign policy as an economic instrument⁵³ opened the space for improved relations with both India and Pakistan. Indian engagement with the US initially never affected its relations with Russian Federation, but the US -India New Defence Framework, 2006 was well taken by Russian leadership, however, India and Russia signed another document *Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership* (2010). Medvedev's *Foreign Policy Concept* of 2008 declared Pakistan as one of the key regional powers.

Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 led to changes in the Russia's policy in South Asia. President Putin's scheduled visit to Pakistan to participate in Dushanbe Four summit in 2012 was cancelled and shortly after that this platform ceased to exist. On the one hand, Pakistan was dropped from the Russia's foreign policy concepts of 2013 and 2016, on the other hand, Pakistan and Russia engaged into first ever agreement on military cooperation singed in 2014 upon visit of Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoygu to Islamabad. Russia has supplied four Mi-35M

⁵² Petr Topychkanov, "Where Does Pakistan Fit in Russia's South Asia Strategy?," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, January 16, 2017, <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2017/01/16/ where-does-pakistan-fit-in-russia-s-south-asia-strategy-pub-67696>

⁵³ 'Russian Foreign Policy under Dmitry Medvedev's Presidency (2008-2012),' *CESRAN International* (blog), accessed 13 June 2022, <https://cesran.org/russian-foreign-policy-under-dmitry-medvedevs-presidency-2008-2012.html>.

Hind-E combat helicopters and supplying more Mi-35 helicopters (up to 20 aircrafts), Su-35 and Su-37 aircrafts, and even air-defence systems under consideration. Increased military-technology cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad beyond SCO, as it has its own framework for security cooperation. Russia also included Pakistan into Moscow Format, dialogue on Afghan peace, where India was also part of it. However, it would be worrisome for Pakistan if Russia continues to be the second largest arms supplier to India after the US. Russia has ignored Pakistan's concerns over supplying S-400 air defence system to India and provision of the range of the 600 BrahMos missiles. Militarily, it would be threatening for Pakistan and changed the military balance in South Asia, because India will be in advantageous position being able to control air space of Pakistan with S-400.

Ukraine crisis since 2014 and follow up western sanctions on Russia speed up the Russian “Turn to Asia” that was China centric due to political and economic interests. Ukraine crisis opened up the new avenues of cooperation with South Asian countries as well. Pakistan and Russia had signed an agreement in 2015 for the construction of the North-South Gas Pipeline in Pakistan. The project could not be initiated due to the U.S. sanctions on Russian companies assigned for the construction. Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan visited Moscow amid the pressures from the US and allies who has expressed the resentment over visit at time of Russian aggression on Ukraine. Pakistan had a MoU with Russia to purchase the wheat in 2020 while Imran Khan and Shehbaz Sharif's governments has shown interest to buy Russian oil in case if find discount. Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Danila Ganich in an interview to a television confirmed the “negotiations” are continued over the oil deal.⁵⁴ Coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif also facing pressure from within to buy cheap Russian oil to reduce the effects of international fuel price hike caused by the Russia-Ukraine war.

⁵⁴ Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Danila Ganich in an interview on *Aaj News* Channel, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NSAcdnMkSQA>

Conclusion

This paper concludes that apart from the systemic constraints, domestic factors played significant role in Soviet and Post-Soviet foreign policy formulation towards the South Asia particularly India and Pakistan. Interactions of outside-in systemic and inside-out domestic factors interchangeably influenced the state's behaviour to respond certain developments and foreign policy actions. Great power politics, competition for influence and arms trade were the central systemic constraints compels for the certain actions; however, ideology and leaders' images also contributed to evolve foreign policy towards South Asia. Each of Soviet leaders comes up with his own vision and defined nature the interaction with India and Pakistan. Stalin to Putin role of leadership remain central to decision making in across the Soviet-Russian history hence ideological dispositions and leaders' images contributed to develop Soviet outlook but post-colonial South Asia evolved over the period. After the Second World War South Asia was ignored under Stalin reflects Estrangement in policy towards the region. In 1950s, its coincidence, change of leadership and threats due to US manoeuvrings for anti-Soviet alignment in South Asia transformed Stalin's estrangement to pro-India engagement under Khrushchev. Remaining neutral in Indo-Pakistan war of 1965 Brezhnev replaced the policy engagement with Indo-Centric policy and Russia became party to Indo-Pakistan 1971 war and politically, militarily and diplomatically supported India. Gorbachev relinquished inflexible Marxism-Leninism orthodoxy in Soviet conduct. *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* caused foreign policy reassessment had the effect of undercutting temporarily the basis of the Soviet Union's special relationship with India and attempted to soften its relations with Pakistan. Post-Soviet stagnation in relations with India and ignorance towards the region under Yeltsin had eventually transformed by pragmatic approach adopted by President Putin. Since President Putin came into the power in 2000, one way or another, Moscow reevaluated its overall strategic interests for the region; Russian *Turn to Asia* is considered as China centric,⁵⁵ South Asia is ranked among the third in Russian strategy. Unless, it finds serious setbacks in its relations, Russian South Asia policy continues to be tilted towards

⁵⁵ Maria Kotova and Dezan Shira, "Russia's Turn to Asia," *Asia Business News*, March 1, 2021, <https://www.asiabriefing.com/news/2021/03/russias-turn-to-asia/>.

India, however Pakistan's distance with the US and alliance with China could provide significant space to broaden the bilateral and regional alliance dominated by China and Russia. Sino-Russia collaboration may be frustrating for India and comfortable for Pakistan. China as Russian partner in multipolar order is sheer competitor of India in the region. Putin's pragmatism toward the region is a product of broader Eurasian vision, which has the potential to accommodate both Pakistan and India. Such pragmatism has reflected in Russia support for inclusion of both countries into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), S-400 sales to both competitors India and China, lifting arms embargos on Pakistan. Western pressure from Eastern Europe and Russia Ukraine war will enhance the scope of Russian ties with Asian countries including South Asia.