

# **Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the US**

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## **Abstract**

*It is argued that there are no permanent friends or foes in the realm of international relations, only interests are primary and supreme. Every nation-state in the world adheres to this rule and Pakistan is no different. Given the roller-coaster nature of Pak-US relations, the former's foreign policy orientation has always remained buoyant with and peripheral to that of the latter. However, with the world shifting from unipolarity to multipolarity, Pakistan needs to modify its foreign policy orientation according to the changing international and regional circumstances. Significant global player such as Russia has emerged, who has a revisionist stance towards the contemporary state of affairs. Recently, Russia has managed to reassert its significance globally as well as regionally. It is also rethinking its policy towards South Asia. Therefore, being a strategically important country in this region, it becomes imperative for Pakistan to forget the Cold War baggage and look towards a different relationship with the regional power based on cooperation and mutual trust while maintaining stability in its bilateral relations with the US. This research aims to surmise the bilateral relationships of Pakistan with both, the US and Russia, the recent emerging trends in these relationships and what options does Pakistan have for balanced and stable relations with Russia and the US to achieve and secure its foreign policy objectives.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Russia, US, Bilateral Relations, Strategic Balance.

## **Introduction**

Pakistan is a country with a significant regional stature, which is now also increasing internationally. Its geographical location and contiguity with important land and sea routes makes it all the more relevant in the bigger scheme of contemporary global politics. Resultantly, Pakistan's foreign

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policy orientations and actions also have an impact on the regional and global state of affairs. Its economic policies, political preferences, security strategies and foreign policy decisions are pivotal in terms of shaping the environment of the entire region. Pakistan's relations with Russia, if compared with those of the US, have remained insignificant in magnitude due to several underlying and overarching factors. Although the two countries never indulged in any bilateral dispute with each other, their alliances, geopolitical interests and respective world views have always remained poles apart. Pakistan's rivalry with India and friendly ties with the US always cast a shadow on its already lukewarm relations with Russia.<sup>1</sup>

Historically, Pakistan's choice of the US as an ally inadvertently harmed its potential chances of forging mutual ties with Russia. The other limiting factor stunting the growth of Pakistan-Russia relations was Russia's Indo-centric South Asia policy.<sup>2</sup> However, major shift in the Russian policy vis-à-vis South Asia has now begun to emerge, which does not diminish Russia's bonhomie with India but simultaneously, it forges better ties with other countries in the region like Pakistan, China, Afghanistan and Iran.<sup>3</sup> It entails a careful balancing act that keeps both Russia and India at peace with each other and it also provides Russia with an opportunity to eye other potential markets for its massive defense exports.<sup>4</sup> Overall, the recent trends indicate that Russia's monochrome South Asia policy is now changing, which paves the way for Islamabad to improve its existent cordiality with the Kremlin.

An objective analysis of the existing literature reveals that the global constructs, which were largely shaped after the end of the Cold War, are in disarray. The world, at present, seems to be slipping into a transition. The world is no longer led by a single power bloc. It is moving from unipolarity to multi-polarity. In light of the current changing circumstances,

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<sup>1</sup> Fatima Raza, "Russia in South Asia: Balancing United States and China," *South Asian Voices*, March 14, 2017, <https://southasianvoices.org/russia-south-asia-balancing-united-states-china/>

<sup>2</sup> Almas Haider Naqvi and Yasir Masood, "Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernable Trends and Future," *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 2 (Winter 2017): 18-38, [http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-SS\\_Almas\\_and\\_Yasir\\_No-4\\_2017.pdf](http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-SS_Almas_and_Yasir_No-4_2017.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Harsh V. Pant, "Difficult Times Ahead for Russia-India Ties," *Diplomat*, March 29, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/difficult-times-ahead-for-russia-india-ties/>

<sup>4</sup> "Russia's Weapons Export Grows in 2017 in spite of Sanctions," *Xinhua News*, May 18, 2018, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/18/c\\_137188778.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-05/18/c_137188778.htm)

it is extremely important for Pakistan to be cognisant of these changes and shape its foreign policy actions and objectives according to international environment. This study will attempt to highlight the current nature of Pakistan's relations with Russia and the US. It will explore how the long-standing patterns of interaction changed in these relationships over the recent past? It traces the changes which have occurred in the attitudes of each state vis-à-vis Pakistan and vice versa. It highlights the options, which present times and circumstances offer to Pakistan to maximise the benefits of maintaining good and balanced relations with Russia as well as the US without compromising on its own national interests and image.

The underlying interests of Russia and the US in South Asia, especially after the initiation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), have made Pakistan an attractive partner for any power interested in the South Asian region. The policy-makers in Pakistan must realise its political, economic, strategic and geographic significance and make the best of this opportunity. More importantly, however, the significant shift in Russia's policy in South Asia particularly with reference to the US presence in this part of the world, also builds a persuasive case for warming up of relations between Pakistan and Russia. This research attempts to add a new perspective to the existing literature in terms of how Pakistan should determine its future foreign policy course while dealing with Russia and the US.

Pakistan's relations with the US, since its inception in 1947, have remained quite friendly, thus, by default setting Pakistan against Russia all through the Soviet era and afterwards. Pakistan's inclination towards the US was driven due to the economic and security compulsions as well as the ideological differences with Russia. Indian presence on the eastern border was a constant threat to Pakistan which compelled it to forge an alliance with a major power like the US. However, lately, with the rise of regionalism, interconnectivity, economic development in the Asian countries, particularly China's rise and the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan has brought to light some fissures between Pakistan and the US. The US President, Donald Trump, in his strategy announcement regarding South Asia, criticised Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and used a harsh tone for its peace-building efforts, which has strained relations between the two. Financial aid to Pakistan from the US was also blocked while its relations with India were better than ever. All these factors played

a major role in bringing Russia and Pakistan together. Presently, Russia has been looking to expand its forays into South Asia by forging better ties with Pakistan and by playing a major role in peace-building efforts in Afghanistan.

Thus, it is imperative to analyse how necessary it is for Pakistan to balance the US factor when improving bilateral relationship with Russia and what options are on the table for the country to maintain stable relationship with both the states (Russia and the US) without compromising on its own national security and political interests.

### **Pakistan's Relations with Russia and the US: An Historical Overview**

#### *Pak-US Relations during the Cold War*

Pakistan's relation with the US have always been described as 'a tale of exaggerated expectations, broken promises and disastrous misunderstandings.'<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the two countries have a relationship so entwined that one's survival is dependent on the other. Pakistan has always been disappointed in the US for not giving much weight to Pakistan's fear regarding hegemony, while on the same time; the US continuously expected Pakistan's assistance in fighting the war against Communism. During the post-partition era in South Asia, Truman's administration wanted to maintain strong bilateral relations with both the newborn states and expected them to maintain regional stability. However, Nehru's non-alignment policy directed the US interests more towards Pakistan. Pakistan, being an inborn insecure state, with the unending fear of sub-continental re-unity, reached out to the US for a "Strategic Alliance."<sup>6</sup> The two countries during the extended period of the Cold War had a purely counter-balance strategy, while Pakistan tried to contain the Indian influence over the region, the US reciprocated such behaviour in terms of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).

Soon enough, Pakistan's status vis-à-vis the US, emerged as 'the Eastern bastion against Communism,' with Turkey the Western bastion.

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<sup>5</sup> Husain Haqqani, *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013), 3, 6 and 5.

<sup>6</sup> Lubna Sunawar and Tatiana Coutto, "US Pakistan Relations during the Cold War," *Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies and Development* 1, (2015).

These strategic modifications in Pakistan's foreign policy, however, turned out to be counter-productive for the country as the US military assistance brought with it the propagation of anti-state/undemocratic tendencies within the country. In the years that immediately followed the independence, Pakistan under the rule of Liaquat Ali Khan, a strong supporter of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), practiced a fairly neutral foreign policy towards both the super-powers. However, as the USSR's inclination became clear with the vetoing of Kashmir issue resolutions in the UN in India's favour, Pakistan was now convinced as to which side to pick for the years to come.

In 1950, after a formal invitation from Washington, Liaquat Ali Khan visited the US to help gain support over voicing the Kashmir issue in the UN.<sup>7</sup> The US, however, found the issue insignificant and pressed for using the Karachi-Lahore area of Pakistan as a base for air operations against the USSR and a staging area for the forces engaged in the defence or recapture of the Middle Eastern oil areas.<sup>8</sup> Geopolitical considerations allowed Pakistan to receive aid from the US, free from obligation such as joining the US-led security pacts to encumber China. In the 1950s, Pakistan became America's 'most allied ally' when it came to containing the Soviet expansion.<sup>9</sup> The signing of the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement followed by the US sponsorship for Pakistan to become a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) were seen as clear initiatives to curb and contain Communism. In 1959, a cooperation agreement was signed between the two states, which stated that the US would be required to assist Pakistan if it became the victim of aggression from any other country (and particularly countries in the region mostly hinting towards India). This initiative put Pakistan's reservations against the US interest centric policies on a hold. With the US intelligence base in Badaber (Pakistan), the US could now easily look upon the activities of the USSR and China simultaneously.

The assistance Pakistan provided to the US did not, of course, come easy. The Muslim nations such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia had their

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<sup>7</sup> Mushtaq Ahmed, *Government and Politics* (Space Publishers; 3rd Edition, 1970), 107.

<sup>8</sup> Vojtech Mastny, "The Soviet Union's Partnership with India," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 3, (Summer 2010): 50-90.

<sup>9</sup> Robert G. Wirsing, "Precarious Partnership: Pakistan's Response to US Security Policies," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* (Summer 2003): 70.

reservations with the new western ally. At the same time, Pakistan had disturbed the two communist giants, the USSR and China. During the wars of 1965 and 1971, the US maintained a neutral position between India and Pakistan while providing military aid to both the countries. With the USSR's undivided loyalty lying with India followed by the new Indo-US military alliances, got Pakistan to rethink its strategic alliances. This led to improved relations with China, which soon led to extensive military and developmental support. In 1976, Pak-US relations, once again, faced turmoil as the Ford administration severely opposed the Nuclear Reprocessing Plant to be purchased by Pakistan from France. In 1979, the Carter administration cut-off the US aid to Pakistan causing the withdrawal of France's support to Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> The limited US interests in Pakistan were ephemeral as the Russian involvement in Afghanistan became a reality.

The US tested Pakistan as a frontline ally during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Like many Cold War-era partners, Pakistan was able to successfully bargain for significant assistance from Washington in exchange for its help in containing the USSR.<sup>11</sup> Both sides avoided deeper alignment of interests' vis-à-vis Afghanistan. However, as the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan, the US interest in Afghanistan evaporated very quickly. This provided impetus to brewing confrontation between the US and Pakistan over the issue of nuclear proliferation. By the end of the Cold War, both states had developed a huge underlying trust deficit and considered each other as "unreliable ally." In the US, Pakistan was considered as an ally, which was no longer of any use to the greater US interests and propagation of its foreign policy in the region. The aid to Pakistan was considered a liability on the US economy. While in Pakistan, the same sentiments existed regarding the US. A strong sense of bitterness and mistrust towards the US pervaded in the Pakistani society. It was believed that Pakistan was treated very unfairly by the US despite being a close ally in the South Asian region. This abrupt end of Pak-US cooperation left a bad taste in the mouth of the Pakistani establishment and decision-makers, which led them to believe that the US always wanted to subordinate Pakistan rather than adopt a foreign policy that would engender mutual gains and foster understanding between the two countries.

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<sup>10</sup> A. Q. Khan, Chairman, "The Journey of our Tests," *News*, May 28, 1999.

<sup>11</sup> Sunawar and Coutto, "US-Pakistan Relations," 12.

*Pak-US Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*

As the USSR fell apart, the geostrategic importance of Pakistan to the US greatly fell. After the rollback of the Soviet Red army from Afghanistan, Pakistan was left to bear the costs of the Afghan conflict alone, while the US carried the day by reaping most of the benefits.<sup>12</sup> The Afghan war left thousands of Afghanis on the right side of the Pak-Afghan border, along with the sentiments of hatred that had generated among the militant groups and split regime bearers of Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, a nuclear Pakistan was against the US interests in the region and, so, in 1990, came the Pressler Amendment. According to the document, the sanctions were to be placed on Pakistan in terms of military and economic assistance, if Pakistan would continue to pursue the dream of becoming a nuclear power. In light of the amendment, the US withheld the F-16 fighter jet supply to Pakistan, which Pakistan had already paid for. After Pakistan's May 1998 nuclear tests, President Bill Clinton imposed additional sanctions on Pakistan, invoking the 1994 Glenn Amendment, which authorises sanctions on Non-Nuclear Weapon States (NNWS) that detonate nuclear explosions and the Symington Amendment, which prohibits military and economic assistance to any country that delivers and/or receives nuclear assistance. In 1999, as Pakistan faced a military coup bringing Pervez Musharraf to power, the US prohibited all forms of military and economic help to Pakistan in light of its Foreign Assistance Act.

The whole decade in the post-Cold War era showcased severely deteriorated relations between the US and Pakistan. The US left Pakistan severely dismantled against the Afghanistan's post-Russian invasion, while Pakistan had soured relations with communist powers as well as regional allies. The good that came out of the century for Pakistan was its declaration as a nuclear power, which helped balance the tension with the neighbouring India using deterrence.

*Pak-US Relations post-9/11 and War on Terror*

Exactly 9 days after the 9/11 incident when the US President, George Bush, addressed the congress regarding his plans for War on Terror, it was made

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<sup>12</sup> Jehangir Khan, "US-Pakistan Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Implications for World Peace," MAGNT Research Report, 3 (4) (ISSN. 1444-8939).

very clear to every country (especially countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan) to pick a side, for they will either be fighting ‘with the US or against the US.’ Pakistan’s international isolation throughout the 1990s now allowed the country, to once again build some strong western alliances. In the light of this, Pervez Musharraf pledged alliance with the US. In the months that followed 9/11, four airports were provided to the US forces by Pakistan for logistic assistance along with Dalbadin, Pasni, Jacobabad and Shamsi (Kharan).<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the US also got help from Pakistan to engage in spying activities that included employing of planes for spying activity in North and South Waziristan, Hindu Kush, Zhob, Chitral and hilly zone between Afghanistan and Baluchistan. The devices used to track were also employed on various locations to perform the monitoring of activities in the border regions.<sup>14</sup> The US did not expect Pakistan to just be a staging ground for troops and intelligence activities, but also help the West (NATO and ISAF) eradicate the influence and network of al-Qaeda from the world.

### *Pak-Russia Relations during the Cold War*

The relationship of the two countries has always depended on Russia’s relations with India and the US. Soon after independence, Pakistan did not stand on solid foundations and suffered from inconsistencies and imbalance. Owing to some historical, geographical and ideological idiosyncrasies, Pakistan did not succeed in establishing closer, good neighbourly ties with the Soviet Union. During the Cold War, Pakistan being an insecure nation fearing the re-unity of the subcontinent and the Indian dominance did not take long before grabbing on to the strategic economic and military alliance a super power like the US had to offer. So, Pakistan sided with the US bloc.

The US and the Soviet Union extended an invitation to Pakistan in 1941 for a visit. The Pakistani Prime Minister at the time, Liaqat Ali Khan declined the Soviet invitation and paid an official visit to the US. Moreover, holding of two sessions of the International Economic Conference at Karachi and Tehran, in 1949, was interpreted by many observers in the USSR as Pakistan’s active participation in the Western efforts to create an

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<sup>13</sup> Ali Asghar, “Pak-US Relations Re-defined after 9/11,” *International Research Journal of Social Sciences* 4, no. 1 (January 2015): 74-78, <http://www.isca.in/IJSS/Archive/v4/i1/12.ISCA-IRJSS-2014-283.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Syed Saleem Shahzad, “Stage Set for Final Showdown,” *Asia Times Online*, July 21, 2004.



anti-Soviet, anti-socialist block.<sup>15</sup> The participation of Pakistan in the US-sponsored military alliances, SEATO and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), further deteriorated any possibilities of Pakistan-Soviet bilateral relations warming up. According to many analysts, the unfriendly position of the Soviet Union on the issues of Kashmir and Pashtunistan was a result of Pakistan's position on Communism and its siding with the US. The Soviets got further alienated from Pakistan after the Soviet's downed a US U2 spy plane, which was operating from an airbase in Badaber in Pakistan.

The bilateral relations between the Soviet Union and Pakistan showed signs of improvement after the exchange of envoys in 1949-51.<sup>16</sup> In 1956, the Soviet Union also took the initiative of constructing Steel Mills in Pakistan. The Soviet Deputy Premier's visit to Pakistan and declaring the resolution of the Kashmir dispute according to will of the Kashmiri people reflected the softening of Soviet policy towards Pakistan as well. In 1961, Pakistan was granted a loan worth US\$3 million for technical support in oil exploration. Some by-agreements were also signed: covering operation of air services; exchange of cultural delegations; assistance for mechanisation of agriculture; building power projects and promotion of technological and scientific knowledge, were inked. The Russian assistance to Pakistan to develop oil, gas and mineral resources was renewed in the 1960s with enhanced cooperation between the two countries. In the same year, the Soviet Union provided US\$519 million for the purchase of heavy machinery.<sup>17</sup>

In 1966, the Soviet Union also played the role of a mediator between Pakistan and India to sign the Tashkent Agreement. Then President of Pakistan, Ayub Khan, also paid a visit to the Soviet Union in 1967 in order to strengthen the bilateral relations between the two countries. During this visit, Pakistan and the Soviet Union agreed to increase bilateral trade up to US\$7 million. The USSR also promised US\$200 million for Pakistan's fourth 5-year Plan. Agreements regarding 30 developmental projects in Pakistan funded by the USSR were also signed during President Ayub's

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<sup>15</sup> Sarfaraz, Noor, "An Overview of Pak-Soviet/Russia Relations," *Research Journal of Area Study Centre* 71(Winter 2012): 1-28.

<sup>16</sup> Hafeez Khan "Pakistan's Relations with the USSR," *Pakistan Horizon* 14, no. 1(1961): 33-55, <http://www.jstor.org.vlib.interchange.at/stable/41403782>.

<sup>17</sup> Sarfaraz, Noor, "An Overview of Pak-Soviet/Russia Relations," *Research Journal of Area Study Centre* 71(Winter 2012): 1-28.

visit to the Soviet Union as well. Further impetus to better Pakistan-Soviet relations was provided by Prime Minister Bhutto's visit to the USSR twice in five years (1972-77). During Premier Bhutto's visits, both the countries agreed to restore Pakistan-Soviet trade, enhance cooperation in geological prospecting, building a metallurgical works in Karachi and help in power generation. They expressed unanimity of the views on resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, withdrawal of foreign troops from Indo-China, termination of the arms race and keeping nuclear disarmament under effective control. They also called for a rational approach to solve contentious issues. The identity of views ensured Pakistan's vote in UN in the USSR's favour. This assistance by the USSR to Pakistan held a lot of significance as it came with no political strings attached. 1973 saw the great improvement in Pak-Soviet relations in the fields of science and economy.<sup>18</sup>

Relations between Pakistan and Soviet Union soured after the ousting of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto from power by General Zia-ul-Haq in 1977. After the Saur Revolution in Afghanistan, the Soviet military invaded Afghanistan, in December 1979. During 1979-1989, the relation between the countries was severely harmed, as Pakistan once again sided with the US troops to fight the growing Russian dominance in Afghanistan. At the time, Pakistan was the principal base for the Afghan resistance to Soviet forces. Seen from Moscow, Pakistan was the enemy's backer, resource base and sanctuary.<sup>19</sup> During the Cold War, Pakistan played a pivotal role in training the Mujahedeen against the USSR forces in Afghanistan, which shattered any hopes for Pak-Russia relations in the times to come.

### *Pak-Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*

In the last decade of the 20th century as the USSR disintegrated, the relationship between Pakistan and Russia did not revive overnight. The grievances Russia held against Pakistan revolved around the Pak-US alliance during the Cold War, while Pakistan had reservations with Russia's unwavering support to India on the Kashmir Issue.

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<sup>18</sup> N. Amin, "Pak-Soviet Relations During ZA Bhutto's Era (1972-1977)," Unpublished M. Phil. Thesis, Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Peshawar 2008, 28.

<sup>19</sup> "Global Insider: Russia-Pakistan Relations," *World Politics Review*, February 18, 2011, <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/trend-lines/7933/global-insider-russia-pakistan-relations>

Russia has always had trust issues with Pakistan and as Pakistan emerged as a nuclear power, Russia's insecurities grew. Russia was also worried about the presence of the Chechen separatists and the Central Asian militants in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Nevertheless, with the changing world order, the alliances changed too. As the US backstabbed Pakistan in the case of the Afghan War, severely damaging the international image of Pakistan and leaving the country now insecure on its eastern as well as western border. As the Washington-Delhi alliance got stronger, Moscow now wanted to look past its reservations against Islamabad. Meanwhile, Pakistan tried to juggle both the US and Russia at the same time. The US still happened to be one of the biggest contributors to Pakistan's instable economy and also a strong military aid provider. However, with the declaration of Pakistan as a nuclear power, the aid went on halt. The Pak-US relation has always been directly dependent on the strained Pakistan-Russia relation, and vice versa.<sup>20</sup>

Then came the 9/11, and Musharraf's pledge of alliance to the US on the War on Terror yet again put Pakistan-Russia relations on the backseat. Russia hopes that improving ties with Pakistan gives it leverage at two levels. Firstly, it will obtain an advantage on issues of terrorism and on Afghanistan by building better relations with Islamabad. It also wished to capitalise on the differences between the US and Pakistan to carve out a role for itself in the region. Secondly, Russia is also of the view that building better relations with Pakistan will partially counter any alignment between India and the US and could help impede India from getting too close to the US.<sup>21</sup>

## **Recent Trends in Pakistan Russia Relations and the US Factor**

### *Revival of Pakistan's Regional Significance*

The recent Afghan tilt towards India, GCC-India alliance and Delhi's attempts to sabotage the SAARC summit have come to make Pakistan

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<sup>20</sup> Uma Purushothaman, "The Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement: Should India Worry?," Observer Research Foundation, Issue Brief no. 117, November 2015, [https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ORFIssueBrief\\_117.pdf](https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/ORFIssueBrief_117.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Tim Craig, "As the US Moves Closer to India, Pakistan Looks to Russia," *Washington Post*, January 28, 2015.

realise that it is high time for the nation to play its geo-strategic card and gain the influence it has had long coming. The country's foreign policy has faced certain impediments in recent years and they must be overcome without compromising the sovereignty and national interests of the country.

The growing US-India relations along with the shrinking of the coalition support fund and the recent US-India-Afghanistan alliance against Taliban has made Pakistan realise the US isolation tactics. However, the new Trump administration can turn out to revive the strained relationships and restore benefits to both the nations. In this time of need, Russia can turn out to be a beneficial ally for Pakistan, while of course simultaneously balancing neutrality with the US. Pakistan is expecting to set ties of military aid with Russia and suspects that the Russian products will be of much more high quality as compared to what have Ukraine, Turkey and others been providing. Russia's natural resources and technology can also serve to be an added advantage of the fruitful Pak-Russian relations.<sup>22</sup>

Pakistan has become a recent eye-turner with the establishment initiative of the CPEC. Given the geostrategic significance of the Gwadar port, the completion of the CPEC will change the face of world trade. Keeping in mind the flow of wealth from Europe to Asia forecasted in light of multi-polar order, the completion of the CPEC will almost halve the trade costs for China, which happens to be one of the biggest mass providers of technology and low-cost goods around the world. Pakistan will simultaneously benefit from the high-quality influx of goods, the boost in available jobs for the locals and not to mention, the upcoming mutual alliances with countries interested in benefiting from the CPEC. The revival of Pakistan as a significant geostrategic player is already paving way for better Pak-Russia relations. Meanwhile, the US is trying to balance and limit the influence of rising Russia on the region. With the Crimean referendum in place, China's growing influence on South China Sea, soured relations with North Korea and the Indian duplication of the US policies, the US needs to take a long look at the repercussions of relations with Pakistan, which happens to have undeniable strategic significance for the US as of now.

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<sup>22</sup> Purushothaman, "The Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement."

*Shift in US and Russian Foreign Policy towards Pakistan*

Russia's foreign policy, in general, is undergoing a transformation as Moscow transitions to a new paradigm of conducting its international relations, which according to its leadership, is to balance relationships with everyone and maintaining peace and stability across the globe with all states. This feat is impossible without Russia's display of impartiality towards all states. Due to this, Russia has been diversifying its relations in South Asia all across the board and with every single actor. Therefore, it seems that Russia does not have a comprehensive policy for Pakistan or South Asia in general but it does seem to be in the process of formulating one for the near future.

Moscow's relations with Islamabad have experienced a notable change over the past couple of years. Russia's balancing strategy is not directed against anyone, nor is it meant to be for anyone's benefit either. Rather, it attempts to be just that – balancing, or finding equilibrium – in order to put Russia in the position to ensure stability in the various regions of Eurasia, in this case, South Asia.

Comparison of the Russian policy to India's heralded one of "multi-alignment" is pertinent. Though unlike how the latter hides behind this slogan to overtly side with the US against China, Moscow has no such intentions whatsoever and is actually practicing the said policy as it is supposed to be. The same also goes for Pakistan, which has a history of seeking diverse relationships in order to balance between multiple actors and especially Great Powers. Russia, however, is showing restraint in boosting the bilateral relations with Pakistan in a full-fledged manner, as evident from the recent statements by the Russian President Putin<sup>23</sup> about India, being one of the oldest and most reliable partners of Russia and the current Russian stance on Kashmir.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the things are looking up for the improvement of bilateral relations between the two Cold War adversaries. More fields of cooperation are being identified and worked upon by the leadership of both countries now, which is a good sign as it will

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<sup>23</sup> News Desk, "India is Russia's Privileged Strategic Partner: Vladimir Putin," *Indian Express*, October 13, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> "Russia's Position on Kashmir is Clear: MEA," *Business Standard*, June 02, 2017, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/russia-s-position-on-kashmir-is-clear-mea-117060200102\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/russia-s-position-on-kashmir-is-clear-mea-117060200102_1.html)

not only help both countries to benefit from each other but it would be highly fruitful for the entire region as well.

The US relationship with Pakistan has always been a political rollercoaster ride. There have been times of extreme highs (such as in the mid-1950s and throughout the Afghan War in the 1980s) and at times they have experienced severe turbulence (like in the 1990s and Post 9/11). In the contemporary times, the Pakistan-US relationship is at its lowest, to put it mildly. Both countries have a serious trust deficit. The interests of both the countries vary a great deal: interests clash on the peace-process in Afghanistan, on the issue of terrorism and Pakistan's ever increasing friendship with China.

After the assumption of power by the new administration in the US, it is very difficult to predict exactly what Trump's policy will be towards Pakistan, but considering this decision maker's personal biases, it's likely that he views the country in the simplistic and stereotyped sense of being a "Muslim terrorist-exporting Chinese ally," which hits all the "red flags" in his mind concerning Muslims, terrorism, and China. If that's the case, then Trump's approach to Pakistan will probably be negative, such as recommencing drone strikes against it and applying concerted international pressure to pin the blame for regional terrorism squarely on its doorstep.

It is highly imperative for the US administration to keep their personal prejudices aside and understand the crucial role that Islamabad must play in bringing peace to the region in general and Afghanistan in particular. The US policy-makers will have to disown their country's previous decades-long policy of using Afghanistan as a springboard for exporting regional chaos (and blaming Pakistan for it) and find a way to pragmatically engage Pakistan in a productive manner that can serve the national interests of both the countries in the region without compromising that of other stakeholders.

There is a strong chance that President Trump, under the guise of his sincere or disingenuous outreaches towards Pakistan uses this strategy in order to reap even more strategic dividends from India. In this scenario, Pakistan will be used by the US once again only to be abandoned later by the US, after it had squeezed as much it could from India. The economic and environmental disagreements between the US and India hint that there is some trouble after all on some fronts, though not large enough to offset

their military-strategic partnership. Under such pretext, the US might try engaging more with Pakistan in order to make India insecure and get it to enter into unilateral concessions in order to 'win' the US back. All these are still speculations at best, and the US policy for Pakistan is still waited upon but the signs being shown by the US administration as of late vis-a-vis Pakistan paint an overall grim picture with regards to the bilateral relationship.

*Is Pakistan's Balanced Relationship with Russia and the US, a Possibility*

It is going to be challenging for Pakistan to strike any sort of "balance" in its relations with the US because of the fact that Washington now regards Islamabad as an "accomplice" to what it perceives to be Beijing's "bid for global power," so there is almost no way that the US will look past this game-changing geostrategic fact in order to narrowly cultivate positive relations with Pakistan at the expense of trying to impede the CPEC. Imbalance, not balance, will come to define the relations that Pakistan has with the US and the Eurasian partners. There is no way to compare Pakistan-China strategic partnership with the sham of an "anti-terrorist" "alliance" that the US-Pakistani one was supposed to be, especially considering the American support for Afghanistan's state-to-state aggression against Pakistan in recent years and its clandestine backing of RAW terrorists waging war in Balochistan and beyond.

Even bearing in mind that the forth coming Russian-Pakistani strategic partnership is still in its early stages, it cannot be compared to Islamabad's relationship with Washington. Russia and Pakistan faced-off in Afghanistan during the 1980s, while the US and Pakistan cooperated there to an extent in the 2000s. Islamabad "won" the first war but "lost" the second, and remaining in a high-level "partnership" with the US is not going to change that. In fact, it is the whole reason for Pakistan's present "defeat" (if it can be looked at in such a way) and why the Afghan state apparatus has turned against its neighbour and is even welcoming the Indian military-terrorist influence into its eastern borderlands for this purpose. Faced with this ever-growing predicament, the best course of action for Pakistan is to expand its relations with Russia, China and Iran in order to counter the strategic disaster that Afghanistan is becoming for all of them and the developing Moscow peace process attempts to do just that through encouraging tighter multi-polar Eurasian coordination in tackling the country's conflict.

The consequences of this imbalance between Pakistan's "traditional" relations with the US and its "new" ones with the Eurasian countries will reverberate throughout South Asia because it will make the country ground zero in the hybrid war on China (as waged against the CPEC), though there's really no practical way to get around this eventuality. Pakistan will not abandon CPEC, so it will, therefore, remain the prime target of the joint US-Indian destabilisation operations. Accordingly, Pakistan should work with its Eurasian partners in order to strengthen its anti-terrorist capacities even further and publicly shed light on what's going on in order to instructively inform the masses about the new strategic state of affairs in their country, region, hemisphere and the world more generally. The combined capabilities of the Russian, Chinese, Iranian and Pakistani information apparatuses should be more than enough to make a convincing case to those in the world who care to listen that South Asia is becoming the central battleground in the new Cold War between the multi-polar and unipolar forces.

It is uncomfortable to think about and will probably trigger accusatory remarks of "fear mongering," but the sooner that Pakistani strategists, decision makers and the political leadership accept this inevitability, the less behind the curve they will be in defending against this eventuality and the more collective of a response they will be able to harness in protecting their country. It's largely 'outdated' to think in terms of a "bloc mentality," but as a simplified (operative word) explanation for what's taking place in Eurasia nowadays, it is essentially the multi-polar bloc of Russia-China-Pakistan vs. the uni-polar one of the US-India-Afghanistan, with Iran throwing its weight behind the multi-polar forces but with the potential of playing a double game against Pakistan if India is successful in convincing it that India-backed cross-border attacks are some sort of "conspiracy" hatched by Islamabad. This is the reality of the present-day geopolitical situation surrounding Afghanistan and it's the guiding dynamic, which will determine Pakistan's relations with the US going forward.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan should confidently embrace its geopolitical destiny in serving as the spine/zipper of the emerging pan-Eurasian cooperation due to the CPEC and must enhance its relations with its regional partners. As mentioned earlier, achieving a perfect balance between the two powers (the US and



Russia) seems to be a farfetched dream. Nevertheless, Pakistan should try to adopt a carefully balanced foreign policy in approaching Russia and the US. Pakistan should learn from its past experiences and construct a foreign policy that will help in achieving a balance between the two global powers. It will also help accelerate Pakistan's economic development, which would consequentially stabilise its position in the region as a balanced state striving to bring about equilibrium to a highly misbalanced situation. Greater connectivity ushers in deeper cooperation, which Pakistan has the potential to achieve if it makes the right choices.