Pakistan-Russia Post 9/11 Relations: Is there a New Trajectory?

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Abstract

Pakistan-Russia relations remained chaotic during last seven decades. Their interactions were started in early sixties however; it proved a brief marriage of convenience as there was a divergence of interests during Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Viewing its national interests and religious affiliation, Pakistan favored and supported Afghanistan. It also extended her support for America's anti-Soviet operation which caused a chasm between Pak-Russia relations. On the other hand, Kremlin established deep strategic ties with India; arch rival of Pakistan, who frolicked a grievous role in rupturing Pak-Soviet links. Due to these cracks, both have failed to establish durable relationship during last century. However, enmity or amity; nothing is permanent in international political realm but national interest. In the backdrop of fast changing regional and global security milieu, states have reassessed their relations in immediate peripheries to mitigate emerging security threats. Viewing the geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions; Pakistan and Russia are also coming closer and reviving their relations. This study focuses on different opportunities of Pak-Russia cooperation as well as discusses their mutual interests mainly in terms of defense and economy.

Keywords: Pakistan, Russia, Bilateral Relations, Cold War, Asian Politics

Introduction

The Asian politics have always been questioned due to unprecedented and sudden changes in regional dynamics and strategic policies. History of Pak-Soviet relationship is full of misunderstandings and muddles. Since its inception Pakistan's relations remained unfriendly with Russian Empire due to former's pivot to American policies in Asia. Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan preferred to visit United States in 1950 instead of Soviet Union which sowed the seed of misperceptions in very early years. While India, following Kautilya's '*Mandala Philosophy*' a well-known statesman and political thinker in Indian history (Chandrasekaran, 2006), established friendly relations with Russia. Kautilya's favorite maxim described in his renowned treatise on polity, '*Arthashastra'(The Science of Material Gain),*is "your neighbor is your natural enemy and the neighbor's neighbor is your friend" (Rangarajan, 1992: Misra, 2015).Accordingly, India left no stone unturned to fill the vacuum and established strong economic and defense relations with Soviet Union.

During Cold War Pak-Russia relations changed into hostility when Pakistan decided to participate in Washington's proxy war against Soviet Union. Pakistan's territories and institutions were indirectly used against Russia (Khan, 2021). The tragedy of Pak-Russia relations is reflected in the lack of rationality. Pakistani establishment underestimated the value

of Soviet Union and nurtured her ties with the West. Such policy priorities made by Pakistani political elite paved the way for Russian support for India and an enmity towards Pakistan. The demise of Soviet empire in 1991 ended the Cold War as well as bipolar system that transformed the regional politics (Koslowski & Kratochwil, 1994).

After the twin towers quandary, Pakistan once again endorsed American led war on terror in Afghanistan. However, it is a bitter reality that Washington neglected Pakistan's sacrifices during this war and established strategic relations with New Delhi. Ultimately the situation forced Pakistan to reexamine its foreign policy preferences and established its diplomatic relations with Russia to balance the regional power politics. Russia also finds trade interests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Accordingly, Moscow is looking forward for strong economic, strategic and defense ties with Islamabad. Russia supported Pakistan's permanent membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). It also admires Pakistan role in the settlement of Afghan issue.

In international relations each state wants to establish affable interactions within its peripheries. Russia considers Pakistan a key player in regional strategic structure. There are many areas of mutual cooperation between the two countries, CPEC is one of them but it is necessary to build mutual trust and dispel misunderstandings of the history. Diversifying her relations with both India and Pakistan, Russia has to face new internal and external challenges in global political milieu. However, it will have to contend with China's increasing dominance in sub-continent.

Theoretical Framework

Due to a hostile neighborhood, Pakistan's foreign policy decisions were viewed, subjugated and analyzed through the narrow lens of security. During Cold War era, Pakistan's decision to join American security alliances (Sattar, 2007) to respond to its security concerns from India was purely based on realist approach of international politics. Realists say that states are sovereign and primary actors in this world and in this anarchic system security and survivability is the basic agenda of every state. States have to make necessary arrangements in this regard. They use strategic concepts and try to enhance their capabilities to ensure their survival. To fortify its defense a state usually strengthens its internal security through military build-up as well as it joins hands with other states to form an alliance against the threat perception (Waltz, 1979). Accordingly, Pakistani policy makers went through the available possibilities and chosen the best options suited for Pakistan's national security objectives at that time. Viewing the growing presence of the US in South Asia and Indian tilt towards the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics); Pakistan opted to join strong American camp. Since American efforts were based on containment of Soviet advancements and Pakistan had to become a part of the US strategic battles that made Pakistan-Soviet relations hostile at times. However, with the progressive change in ground realities, Russian perceptions about Pakistan have undergone a positive change to which Pakistan has been more than receptive.

Russian Invasion in Afghanistan and Pakistan's Role

In 1973 prime minister of Afghanistan Mohammed Daoud Khan ousted King Zahir regime and People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA) with Marxist & Leninist tendencies came to the power in Afghanistan. Daoud Khan established firm ties with communist

Soviet Union, however, he himself was killed in a communist coup in 1978 and Nur Muhammad Taraki, a founding member of PDPA, became the head of the state. Later on, Soviet Union launched Hafizullah Amin, who assassinated the then President Nur Muhammad Taraki on September 14, 1979. However, the internal dissension caused a countryside revolt and distress that nurtured guerrilla freedom fighter's movement to challenge the Soviet supported Marxist government in Afghanistan. Eventually, the Soviet forces, led by Leonid Brezhnev invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 (Filby, 1993).

On the other side, the successive Soviet backed governments in Afghanistan caused a major unrest among American elements by launching a series of fundamental reforms, anti-imperialistic rhetoric and signing the friendship treaty with Soviet Union. So, the US initiated an anti-Russian campaign and started lobbying against pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan. It made an alliance of likeminded nations, Pakistan was one of them. It was propagated in Pakistan that Soviet intended to access warm waters of Arabian Sea after running over Pakistan (Hussain, 2012).Considering Russian invasion in Afghanistan; a great threat to country's sovereignty and integrity, Pakistani policy makers decided to cooperate with America in Afghan war. This collaboration created a serious drift in Pak-Russia relations as well as deteriorated country's economy and industry. This war resulted in migration of millions of Afghans and settling down in bordering areas of Pakistan (Britannica, 2020).

The political situation in Afghanistan and Middle East has a direct impact on the region. Pakistan's inclination towards America provided a chance to bring India and Russia close together. Another aspect of Pakistan's continued closeness with the US was to maintain the regional power equilibrium during Cold War as it has accepted the USSR as a friend of India. However, during the last decade of twentieth century there was a major shift in Pak-Russia foreign policy priorities.

Ups and Downs in Pakistan-Russia Relations

Pakistan's tendency towards the US has been driven by economic and security constraints as well as ideological differences with Russia. Former Soviet Union followed Marxist ideology, which was atheist in nature; while the Pakistani ideology based on Islam which is an antithesis of secularism. So, Liaquat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of newly born state 'Islamic Republic of Pakistan' neglected the Soviet Union's invitation to visit Moscow and accepted American invitation to visit Washington in 1949.Perhaps,after 1948 Pak-India war on Kashmir issue, Pakistan was urgently needed to bolster its defense against India. So, Pakistan prospected procurement of military hardware and economic assistance from the US. It was assumed that after the losses of World War II; Russia might not be able to provide such economic and military aid to Pakistan on urgent basis. Since then Pakistan is being considered an American Ally in the eyes of Soviets and the world. While, Russian political ideology suited for India, accordingly it had established close relationship with Kremlin in early 1950s who was also in dire need of allies during Cold War against the US (Hanif, 2013).

The hopes for robust Pak-Russia bilateral relations took a nose dive when Pakistan decided to join American security alliances South-East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO)in 1954 and 1955 respectively (Sidky, 1976). Resultantly,

Russia and India drew closer and got engaged with each other diplomatically. Moscow had started providing strategic support as well as supply of defense equipment to New Delhi. Nikita Khrushchev, during his first grand tour to Asia, visited India, Burma and Afghanistan but overlooked Pakistan intentionally. Russia had also started endorsing Indian stance over Kashmir at all forums including United Nations (H.U. Khan, 2019).

Despite all these, both countries, Russia and Pakistan have made time to time efforts to improve bilateral relations. Nikita Khrushchev, after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953, introduced a major turn in Russian foreign policy to respond rapid transformations in international politics. In the struggle against imperialism Kremlin made strenuous efforts to gather concurring nations and decolonization provided Moscow an opportunity to extend her influence over post-colonial regimes in terms of political, economic and military support. Khrushchev sent her close confidante Anastas Mikoyan to Pakistan in March 1956. Consequently, a parliamentary delegation of Pakistan led by Ayub Khuhro also visited Russia in the same year (Radchenko, 2018).

In 1958, Russian government showed consent to provide economic and technical support to Pakistan in flood control and agricultural development. President Ayub Khan was the first ever Pakistani head of the state who visited Moscow in April 1965. This visit helped in thawing the ice and mitigating the misperceptions between Pakistan and Soviet establishments. Agreements on economic & trade cooperation and cultural exchanges were signed during this visit (Owais, 2007). Moscow had also arranged a dialogue between Pakistan and India to end the 1965 war impasse which resulted in an agreement called 'Tashkent Declaration' signed between Pakistani president Ayub Khan and Indian prime minister Lal Bahadur Shastri on January 4, 1966 (Sultana et al., 2019). Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin announced limited arms supply to Pakistan during his visit to Pakistan in April 1968. Next year Yahya Khan, president of Pakistan, reached Russia on state visit and finalized a deal to purchase some helicopters (Hanif, 2013).

However, a drift in Pak-Russia relations could never be ended. During 1970's the USSR and China were struggling for the leadership of communist world and Pakistan once again perturbed Moscow by arranging American president Nixon's visit to Beijing in 1971(Burr, 2002). USSR took this as a part of anti-Russia campaign and denoted Pakistan as a facilitator for her enemies to gather against Moscow. It resulted in "India–Soviet Mutual Friendship treaty" in August 1971 and Pakistan has to pay a heavy cost in this regard. Soviet Union openly supported Indian stance in insurgency in Eastern Pakistan that resulted in the creation of Bangladesh (Khan, 2021). It had also provided India with sufficient financial and defense support during Cold War era. Moscow had remained major defense partner and largest arms supplier to New Delhi including cruise missiles, combat jets and battle tanks (Ahmad, 2018).

Pakistan had made significant efforts during Ayub and Bhutto eras to normalize relations with Soviet Union. In 1960 Soviet Union established Pakistan-Soviet Oilfield in Pakistan to search and tap oil reservoirs in Pakistan. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto came to power, after the separation of East Pakistan, in 1971. He revised the foreign policy of Pakistan and left SEATO and CENTO in 1973 and 1979 receptively. Mr. Bhutto visited Moscow in 1972 & 1974, during this he made deliberate efforts to warm and improve the relations. Resultantly, USSR installed billion dollars' worth Pakistan Steel Mill in Karachi in 1973 on its own expense. Soviet invasion in Afghanistan

in 1979, once again caused deterioration of Pak-Soviet relations due to former's extended support with America and Saudi Arabia's financial support for Afghan Mujahedeen fighting against Soviet troops (Hussain, 2012; Hanif, 2013).

The collapse of Soviet Empire in 1991 ended the Cold War between USSR and US (Siddiqi, 2014). However, Pakistan continued its support and assistance to newly established Taliban government in Afghanistan in 1990's, due to that improvement in sustainable friendly relations between Pakistan and Russia could not be achieved. However, transitory relations between Pakistan and Russia have also carry some initiatives to sustain some sort of normality in the relationship like trade, technical assistance, launching thermal projects, granting loans etc.

Russia's Balancing Strategy in South Asia

The US titled Pakistan as non-NATO ally during war on terror started after September 11, 2001, however, it was not more than empty talks as the US provided India with civil nuclear technology but refused to provide the same to Pakistan. Washington's unprecedented strategic support for New Delhi caused serious reservations for policy elite in Islamabad. To fill this vacuum, Moscow has come forward and adopted a balancing strategy towards Islamabad and New Delhi (Khan, 2021). It not just looks to safeguard its customary binds with New Delhi, a key US accomplice, yet additionally assembled linkages with China's close ally; Pakistan. Previously, Russia has supported India at the UNSC (United Nation's Security Council) by supporting her stance on Kashmir issue. But during the Six-country Speaker's Conference in Islamabad it acknowledged Pakistan's efforts and supported its position on Kashmir. It also emphasized that to attain global as well as regional harmony and peace, the issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be resolved as per the UNSC resolutions (Pant, 2018).

Pakistan acknowledged Russian president Putin's sincere offers for diminishing India-Pakistan strains following Indian animosity along the working boundary and the line of control. US President Trump's Afghan procedure depending on a military arrangement rather than an arranged settlement was condemned by Russia which upheld Islamabad a vital part in regional security scenario. It has declared that Islamabad is a key regional player and underestimating its efforts for regional peace may result in destabilizing the locale security circumstance and cause negative ramifications for the whole region. Likewise, when India and Afghanistan tried to snub Pakistan on the issue of terrorism during Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference in Amritsar, Russian negotiators excused Indian and Afghan, thrashing against Pakistan, commenting that it is not justified to condemn Pakistan for worse security situation in the region. Mr. Zamir Kabulov, Russia's special envoy to Afghanistan, said that "allegations against Pakistan by India and Afghanistan are totally baseless" (Sajjanhar, 2016). Such discretionary attitude of Russia towards Pakistan demonstrates that the two nations are seeing each other as correlative accomplice for regional balance.

Russo-Pakistan Relations in Current Millennia: A Growing Bonhomie

Russia's growing engagement in regional affairs of South Asia carries two basic reasons. First of all, it views changing dynamics in Afghanistan with strategic concerns; second one is its zeal to establish security and trade ties with regional states. So, Moscow is ready to play a role of major external player in regional political and strategic settings (Khalid, 2018).

After the collapse of the bipolar system, the entire world falls under uni-polar system. Accordingly, the global states reoriented their policy preferences while interacting with global states. Further, after the triumph in Cold War, the US had left this region unnoticed which forced regional states as well as Pakistan to go for other options. So, Mr. Nawaz Sharif, then prime minister of Pakistan paid a state visit to Moscow in early 1999 and a number of trade and industry related agreements were signed during this landmark visit (Hussain, 2012).In the start of new century president Pervez Musharraf also toured Russia in 2003.Kremlinappreciated Musharraf's efforts to prevent a militant Islamic regime in Afghanistan. Moscow welcomed Islamabad's decision of abandoning the Taliban support and joining the anti-terrorist coalition after 9/11 (Smith, 2004; H.U. Khan, 2019). Eventually Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov came to Pakistan on a 3-day official visit in 2007. Mr. Fradkov had an in-depth discussion with President Pervez Musharraf and Pakistani counterpart Shoukat Aziz on increased economic cooperation between both states (Haq, 2007). In October 2015, both states have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to construct Karachi to Lahore - North-South Gas Pipeline. Russian government has proposed its state-owned RT Global Resources, an auxiliary of RosTec Corporation to execute this venture. Further, Pakistan's Oil and Gas Company (OGDCL) and Russia's Gazprom International have also signed an MOU in Moscow in 2017(Sultana et al., 2019).

Advancement in Pak-Russia collaboration during last two decades remained slow but steady. These advancements can be quoted as a precedent of shared interests, joint endeavors, improvement and innovation in Pakistan-Russia strategic relations in 21st century. Russia has also showed consent to invest about fourteen billion dollars in Pakistan's energy sector including offshore gas pipeline and underground gas storage facility (Energy World, 2019). Another agreement has been signed between Russian firms; Himmash Apparat and Inter Rao and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Oil and Gas Company (KPOGCL) to establish a medium level treatment plant at Kohat. Russian telecom firm, Vimpel Com, now called VEON, invested one billion dollars to purchase Warid and Mobilink (Sultana et al., 2019). Russia is also financing in different energy and development projects to supply electricity to Afghanistan and Pakistan through Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. As a result, Pakistani authorities allowed Russia to access warm waters and use Gwadar deep sea port in Baluchistan for its exports (M.T.F. Khan, 2019).

Strategic Relations between Pakistan -Russia

The way that relations among Russia and Pakistan are endured at the moment has not worked well. However, the evolving geo-strategic environment of international politics has enforced them to have a useful and amicable relationship. Further perspective of Pakistan-Russia collaborative ties can be defined under following dimensions.

Islamabad - Moscow Relations in Military Perspective

In order to equip its army with latest weaponry and defense technology different Pakistani governments have worked hard for conducive environment with technologically advanced countries to access modern defense system. The US arms embargo under Pressler amendment in 1990 was crucial for the Pakistan which put country's security and defense capabilities under a great threat (Mahmood, 1994; Akhtar, 2017). It was the time when Islamabad started searching for new avenues of military & defense technologies, so it established

strategic ties with Russia; one of the largest producer of latest defense equipment. Russian establishment also welcomed Pakistan's behavioral shift from West to East, at that time when India started preferring Washington over Moscow. In 2014, US arms supply to India surpassed of the USSR. Resultantly, Russian arms embargo against Pakistan, imposed during Afghan-Soviet war, came to an enduring Russian defense minister's visit to Pakistan in June 2014. Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement was also signed between the two in November 2014 (H. U. Khan, 2019).

Both the states were agreed to commence strategic dialogues and outline an institutional framework to solidify their renewed intimacy. Subsequently, Russian Air and Naval Chiefs visited Pakistan in 2013 and 2014 respectively. During Russian Army Chief and Spy Chief's visit to Pakistan, military personals of both states had talked over initiation of joint ventures for intelligence and regional security. They have also signed an accord on technical cooperation for collaboration in weapons development and arms supply. Russian Special Forces troops joined military exercises in Pakistan in September 2016 (Khan, 2016). This century's first arms deal between Pakistan and Russia was matured through "Pakistan Army Aviation Corps" (PAAC) purchase of four Mi-35M and two Mi-171E multi-role helicopters along with its spare parts, training of technicians and ammunition from Russia in August 2017 (Gady, 2018). These helicopters have the assault and cargo ability with mountainous terrain and can be deployed "round the clock" in adverse weather conditions. Further, it also facilitated Pakistan to import Russian RD-93 engines used in JF-17 combat aircraft (Kurita, 2019).

Moscow and Islamabad had promised for cooperation in promoting international peace and security, the exchange of information on politico-military issues, intensification of counterterrorism and arms control activities and sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations. Militaries of both states have also conducted three joint training sessions under bilateral training cooperation agreement (Kapoor, 2019).Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed met Colonel General Olag Salyukov in Moscow in April 2018. During this visit General Salyukov, acknowledged Pakistan's efforts in war against terrorism and role for regional peace and stability (Sultana et al., 2019)

In the backdrop of Indo-US nuclear deal, Pakistan has emerged as potential partner for Russia in South Asia. Looking more specifically, India, which was highly depended of Russian weaponry in history, is enhancing its military and defense engagement with the US and Israel, and when West is imposing sanctions on Moscow's energy exports, Russia is looking for new markets and reliable alternatives; Pakistan could become a choice (Purushothaman, 2015). The year 2014 can be denoted as turning point in Pak-Russia security and defense ties. Firstly, Russian government lifted ban on weapons trade with Pakistan. Secondly, the naval forces of both sates along with their anti-drug agencies conducted first joint drill to restrict drugs smuggling in North Arabian Sea. Thirdly, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu came to Pakistan and both states agreed on extending defense cooperation as well as exchange of information on security related issues and countering-terrorism (Roy, 2014).

Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC) of Pakistan and Russia has been denoted as the highest defense collaboration forum between both countries. The first meeting of JMCC was held in August 2018 in which Moscow and Islamabad have signed a contract for military

training of Pakistani military officers from Russian military institutions and an agreement on expansion of naval cooperation was also signed in the same year. Negotiations for the procurement of T-90 tanks, air defense systems and Su-35 fighter aircraft from Russia have also been finalized that will certainly help Pakistan in improving counterterrorism capacity and balancing conventional forces against India (Kurita, 2019).

Trade-Investment opportunities

This century has opened numerous opportunities in economic and trade cooperation between Russia and Pakistan. Both the states had shown eagerness to improve economic cooperation during Nawaz Sharif's epic visit to Russia in 1999 (Hussain, 2012). An era of warm relations between both states began with this visit. Antonio Shchenko, Russian ambassador to Pakistan, met with Mr. Altaf Muhammad Salim, Federal Minister for Privatization in Islamabad in 2002, in which they shared their experiences and discussed the future prospects in privatization sector. The Russian ambassador stressed on conditions involved in the modification of fertility treatment and has emphasized on strengthening the economic and trade ties between Moscow and Islamabad. While Russian engineers are already working for the upgradation of Karachi Steel Mill (Smith, 2004).

Though Pak-Russo bilateral trade is not significant yet, however, there is an upward trend as it is gaining a gradual momentum during last few years. Both states have agreed on establishing an effective institutional mechanism for bilateral interactions. The Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC) on economic, trade, scientific and technical cooperation between Pakistan-Russia has played a commendable role in the development of healthy trade relations, mutual cooperation in the fields of economy, science, metallurgy, telecommunication, education and information technology. Officials of both countries have conducted several rounds of composite dialogues to deepen cooperation on the issue of common interest. Discussions on Free Trade Agreement between Pakistan and Eurasian Economic Commission have also been conducted (Sultana et al., 2019).

It is mutually advantageous for Pakistan and Russian federation to strengthen economic and strategic relations. Prospects are bright for cooperating in trade, investment, infrastructure development, energy and agriculture sectors. IGC is committed for widening the scope of Pak-Russia bilateral trade, dynamic development of economic ties and to open new vistas for trade-investment opportunities. Pakistan-Russia Business Forum (PRBF) established in 2009 has also been playing the role of a dedicated bridge in phenomenal growth between the two countries. It is a platform that helps to promote Pak-Russia bilateral relations in trade, investment, science and technology, social cultural, industry and tourism (Muhammad, 2018).

Scientific and Technological Cooperation

A breakthrough in scientific and technological cooperation between Russia and Pakistan was achieved in 1999, when space agencies of both states; Sputnik and SUPARCO agreed on a joint venture to launch a 'Scientific Research Satellite'. Apart from that a great potential of cooperation has also been identified in energy sector, aircraft industry, production of passenger vehicles and agricultural machinery. Pakistan has a great opportunity to have a technical know-how from Russia through such deals (Shah, 2001). Contemporary regional environment and

geopolitical situation caused an upward trajectory in flourishing Pakistan-Russia relations in current millennia. On the invitation of President Putin, President Musharraf visited Moscow in February 2003 and both the states promised to augment their collaboration in the fields of metallurgy, power engineering, information technology, telecommunication, research and a number of infrastructure development projects (Hanif, 2013).

A delegation of Russian oil and gas companies visited Pakistan in 2006 and discussed the prospects of investment in Pakistan's oil and gas fields. Both states agreed on cross-border pipeline project, upgradation of oilfields, liquefied natural gas, oil, and gas exploration. Aleksandr Bornov, head of the delegation, promised to mobilize a number of drilling and exploratory rigs, high-caliber professionals, unitary pipeline construction machinery, optical fiber and logging equipment to Pakistan. Some other MoUs have also been finalized between Pakistan and Russian oil and gas companies (Durrani, 2006). Magnitogorsk; Iron and Steel Works of Russia also showed commitment to invest $2 billion in revamping and modernization of Pakistan Steel (Rahman, 2007). President Vladimir Putin offered technical assistance to Pakistan for expansion of Karachi Steel Mill, development and technical assistance for Thar Coal Project as well as for the Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants (Hanif, 2013).

Russian ambassador Alexey Dedov during his visit to Pakistan in August 2018 expressed that Russia and Pakistan are closely in touch on strategic and counterterrorism issues. He also praised the role of Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) in strengthening economic, trade, scientific and technical cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. "Russia believes that working together in IGC and in other bilateral mechanisms will help fast implementation of bilateral projects" he said. He also proclaimed that, "Russia never had an objection over Pakistan's membership in Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and would extend support in future as well. To a question on playing role of mediator on ending stalemate in relations between Pakistan and India, he said the efforts could be exercised when both sides requested about it" (Rizvi, 2018). Pakistan may request Russia to support its NSG bid and for transferring the latest nuclear technology and equipment for the peaceful use of nuclear energy. It would help Pakistan in fulfilling her energy needs as well as mitigate international community's concerns regarding Pakistan's nuclear program (H. U. Khan, 2019).

Social and Cultural Relations

Pak-Russia socio cultural engagement was started in 1964 by signing an educational exchange program. Then exchange of dance performances and film festivals were also conducted between both states. Pakistan cultural show in Dushanbe in 1965 was a landmark (Iqbal et al., 2011). In response a Pakistani delegation reached Moscow to learn the techniques of Soviet Union's industrial and agricultural development. President Ayub Khan paid a visit to USSR in 1965 which resulted in extenuating the misunderstandings between both states (Hanif, 2013). Resultantly both states agreed on signing three agreements on trade, economy and cultural exchanges (Owais, 2007). 'Tashkent Declaration' is a Russian mediation during Pakistan-India border war in 1965(Khan, 2003). Russian magazine 'Tulu' was also published during 1960's in Pakistan. Another document on Cultural and Scientific collaboration was inked in 1968 when Russian Prime Minister Kosygin visited Pakistan (Shah & Parveen, 2016). However, these rapprochements halted during Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. Further, Moscow's persistent

support for India particularly during Pakistan-India war of 1971 and Pakistan's inclining behavior towards Washington debilitated Pak-Soviet relations (Hussain, 2012).

Counterterrorism Cooperation between Pakistan and Russia

Attacks on twin towers in United States caused reorientation of security strategies all over the world. Pakistan joined the US led war on terror and stopped supporting Taliban regime in Afghanistan that is, by and large, blamed for spreading terrorism in the world. Russian government was also considered Taliban responsible for uprising in Chechnya and Dagestan. To overcome such situations, Russia started extending political and material support to anti-Taliban coalitions. In 2003Pervez Musharraf, the first Pakistani president who visited Russia since 1972,toured Moscow and he declared that Chechnya is Russian domestic issue and Pakistan have no support for Islamic armed groups fighting in Russia or Central Asia. In response Russian Prime Minister Fradkov visited Pakistan in 2007 (Haq, 2007).

Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism for territorial security was established in 2002 and intergovernmental framework for a Quadripartite Summit joined by Afghanistan and Tajikistan was launched in 2009. Through profound support for Pakistan to join SCO, Russia aimed to tackle three evils of terrorism, extremism and separatism through a collective regional security approach. First joint counterterrorism exercises termed as *'DRUZBA'* between Russo-Pak armies were conducted in September-October 2016.India urged to halt Russia from joining these exercises but Russia did not bother, even similar drills were repeated from September to October 2017 (Khan, 2017). Third joint drill *'DRUZBA-III'* was conducted in 2018 in Cherat, KPK (Sultana et al., 2019). Counterterrorism is the main focus of Pak-Russia security cooperation. Composite dialogue on regional issues between foreign ministries of Russia and Pakistan were held in December 2016 (Kurita, 2019). Russian Ambassador Alexey Dedov visited Pakistan in 2018 and acknowledged Pakistan's sacrifices during war against terrorism and efforts to exterminate terrorism from its tribal regions and Afghan borders. He avowed that "Russia will continue to support Pakistan in this regard" (Qureshi, 2018).

Prospects and Limits of Pakistan-Russia Relations

Despite the all above discussion the experts of international relations prospect a limit to the rapprochement of Pakistan and Russia. The major factor is the history of Indo-Russian close relationship. India is much vigilant about growing Pak-Russia strategic, economic and defense ties. It also has communicated its reservations to Russian authorities in this regard. On the other side, if Russia goes farther in its relations with Pakistan, which will still remain less important in comparison to its relations with traditional partner India. Particularly Russia remained India's top exporter in arms trade during past years. Russian military industrial complex could also not have survived without its major arms importers like India and China. Further, Pakistan could also not offer trade opportunities to Russia on the same scale as India. Though, Russia may show resentment on India's impetuous rapprochement with the United States, however, it seems inapt that Moscow will prioritize its relations with Islamabad at the expense of its historical relations with New Delhi. The same can be concluded from the statement of Russian Ambassador to India that "Russia's ties with Pakistan and India cannot be equalized" (Gurung, 2018). He further explained that the security cooperation and military exercises between Russia and Pakistan are

for the purpose of counterterrorism and provision of Mi-35M helicopters to Pakistan is to be used in counterterrorism operations (Purushothaman, 2015).

The above scenario shows that Russian establishment wants to uphold its traditional engagement with India as well as strengthening its relations with Pakistan, without involving in Pak-India conflicts. It seems that Russia through its inclining behavior towards Pakistan, wants to restrict India from deepening its relations with the US. It is clear that the current advancement in Pak-Russia relations has progressed rapidly because it in a sense started from "nothing." Probably, this collaboration will continue to go forward. However, it seems that this cooperation has to face many hurdles before it turned into a strategic partnership which goes beyond the security orbit, tackling with the terrorism and Afghanistan issue, and a "jab" at the Indo-US rapprochement.

Conclusion

Pakistan's decision to join anti-Soviet block during Cold War worsened Pak-Russia relations, however, after 9/11 Pakistan and Russia have initiated a process of fostering closer ties based on geostatic compulsions. Pakistan's decision to abandon Taliban support during war on terror and Washington's cold shoulder for Pakistan in later years, paved the way for mutual trust and closeness between Pakistan and Russia. Both the states envisioned convergence between their regional strategic and economic interests. Islamabad and Moscow have started cooperation in resolving regional security issues and prospects for economic integration. Russian leaders have acknowledged Pakistan's efforts to eradicate terrorism, resolving Afghan conflict and role for regional peace and security. Russia has showed keen interest in fostering collaborative ties with Pakistan through its strategic, technical, infrastructural and economic support. Similarly, Pakistan visualized Russia as a strong regional partner and a future alternative of the US as well as an economic opportunity.

Since Russia-Pakis friendship is largely the outcome of US-Pakistan deteriorating relations, hence it is greatly dependent on the future course of Pakistan-US relations. Thus, Pakistan should not over-estimate this interim friendship with Russia due to the above discussed reasons. Since the incentives behind this new relationship are global dynamics, security concerns, and above all need of the time. It is still to see a lot about the durability and nature of this Russo-Pak relationship. Future co-operation between both states may be helpful to overcome the threat of terrorism and emergent radical entities which have seriously threatened the regional peace and economic integration. Prospects for strengthening trade links, investments and cooperation in the energy and defense sectors are even greater if Pakistan and Russia ignore their annoying past. It is, therefore, the need of the hour that Russia and Pakistan both have strong economic and strategic relations for the sake of their own as well as region's integration.

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