

Pakistan-Russia relations in the changing power dynamics of South Asia

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Abstract: The Asian region has great political, military, economic and geostrategic implications for the entire world. Contemporary challenges have influenced the international order, generally, after the cold war and especially in the past few years in the South Asian continent. Transformation of power in Southern, Eastern and Northern parts of Asia is an embodiment of new power structures on the globe. The rapid emergence of geo-strategic relations in South Asia has affected ties between old friends and foes. Pakistan and Russia, India and United States are now improving bilateral relations for the promotion of their mutual interests in the region. Russia, China and Pakistan are now to be the game changers in the 21st century. The purpose of this paper is to recapitulate heightened diplomatic and military ties between Russia and Pakistan in changing the power dynamics of the region.

Keywords: South Asia; Pakistan-Russia; Geo-strategic; Diplomacy; Power dynamics

1. Introduction

Asia is the largest and most inhabited continent in the world. It covers an area of 44,579,000 square kilometers, about 30% of Earth's total land area and 8.7% of the Earth's total surface area (United Nations Organization [UNO], 1999). It has great significance in the political history of the world not only being the largest continent in size but being an abode for the world's earliest civilizations. The continent is bounded by the Pacific Ocean on the east, the Indian Ocean on the south, the Arctic Ocean on the north and Europe on its western borders. The area consists of almost 49 sovereign states with international recognition and 06 non-recognized states. Asia also contains five acknowledged nuclear powers i.e. China, India, North Korea, Pakistan and Russia including two non-recognized nuclear states (i.e. Israel and Iran). Rapid economic growth in the region will make the 21st century an Asian Century. It is the world's most dynamic region and today accounts for 40 percent of the global economy (Lagarde, 2016). Over the next four years, even with slightly declining momentum, it stands to deliver nearly two-thirds of global growth (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2015).

The region can be divided into six major areas, Northern, Eastern, Southern, Western, South-East and Central Asia. The importance and significance of South Asia are acknowledged by the world due to its geographic and geo-strategic location between the Indian Ocean and great chain of mountains, diversified social, political and cultural values, huge population and emerging economic markets. After the successful nuclear tests of India and Pakistan, the

region has been marked as the most volatile and dangerous region of the world. Former US President Bill Clinton stated "The most dangerous place in the world today, I think you could argue is the Indian subcontinent and the line of control in Kashmir" (Clinton, 2000).

The Eurasian landmass is another historically recognized region of the Asian continent. The history explains the concept of land and sea power melee to turn into ultimate continental powers in Asia. Rule over the world is an ultimate desire of the world's major powers for long. Mackinder's famous "Heartland Theory" was a research-based assumption to recognize a superpower. He stated, "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World" (Mackinder, 1919). Eurasia is a topographical notion, landmass between Europe and the Asian continent consists of Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Caucasus, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. In the context of Heartland theory, Eurasia and Africa represent the 78% population and 2/3rd (approx. 11 million Square kilometers) of land area which supposed to be the Heart of the entire world. Heartland theory remained focused by US policymakers to counter former USSR and communism during the last century.

The significance of South Asia in the world's economy and politics is certain. Pakistan and India are major opponents in the South Asian region since their inception. The future prosperity, security and stability of the region are highly concerned with both countries. Former superpowers US and USSR played their role to maintain equilibrium and balance of power in the region. The strategic location of

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Pakistan and India fascinated both former superpowers to be the part of South Asian politics. Historically, Pakistan's foreign policies are visibly pro-American but on the other hand Indian diplomats leveraged their non-alignment strategy multidimensionally. They not only benefited by Russia (former USSR) but United States as well on different provocative and controversial disputes in the region against Pakistan and China. Chinese role in the region is more conspicuous due to its profound economic interests in Pakistan. Former strategic triangle of China, India and Pakistan is now transformed into pentagonal with the interference of United States and Russia in the strategic battle field of South Asia.

The power shift in different spheres of Asian content has resonated the world's political environment. After the collapse of USSR, the sphere of influence by the major powers in European and Asian hemisphere had been formed till 9/11 incident. After 9/11, new alliances were entered into, to combat terrorism in the world. Indo-US civil nuclear agreement of 2005, CPEC accord between China and Pakistan in 2015 and Iran, P5+1 nuke deal in July, 2015 are some events attracting global attention and assumed as the beginning of a new chapter and a mile stone of bilateral relations between old friends and foes. The power game between China, India and Russia in the region is surely dependent with the continental states and Pakistan's significance is certainly noteworthy.

2. Research methodology

This argument based, international strategic paper, employs a qualitative research methodology (Creswell 2009, pp. 3-21). The approach is fundamentally normative with empirical evidence presented to support judgments. Observations and discourse analyses of relationship perspectives and priorities provide descriptive and interpretive outcomes (Creswell 2013, pp. 97-102). The research is grounded in contemporary reality with experiential information and judgments gathered from a variety of sources (i.e books, monographs, research articles, newspapers and online resources). A correlational approach is employed in conducting comparative analyses and synthesizing the outcomes. The research is social constructivist and pragmatic; it employs multiple approaches in seeking understanding and meaning in complex regional risk contexts. This work seeks to advocate and participate in the regional strategic dialogue by proposing agendas for reform, with the focus on solutions that will be transformative (Creswell 2009, pp. 8-11, 66-67; Creswell 2013, pp. 24-29). The outcomes of this research are emergent and interpretive (Creswell 2009, pp. 175-176). The essence of this research approach is strategic policy analysis from my perspective as a participant in the sub-culture with extensive experience in high level strategic risk analysis in both the public and the private sectors. Fresh insights are presented

through a combination of analytical efforts that are primarily reflexive in nature (O'Reilly, pp. 13-17). Developing real-world policy requires multi-disciplinary perspectives that accommodate compromises between competing and conflicting demands in order to present balanced options. In seeking to produce robust, defensible and implementable policy outcomes, and in keeping with the imperatives of strategic analytical approaches, no single theoretical line of enquiry is entirely adequate. The convergent outcomes of multi-disciplinary approaches provide a loose analytical framework that enables synthesis.

3. Literature review

Shah (2001) highlighted that Pak-Russia relations requires modification of military thinking on both sides especially in Pakistan's side. Existing foreign policy also needs to be transformed in order to achieve maximum level of trust on both sides. Interaction in official spheres may help remove the mental roadblocks that have characterized relations between Russia and Pakistan. It is high time to shift policies from the Cold War paradigm of a zero-sum game to a more people-centered cooperative regional security. Khan & Altaf (2013) think that revision in foreign policy of Pakistan and Russia remained a neglected factor in the past. This was reflected in the statement of Pakistan foreign ministry on Lavrov's visit: "the two countries also share the common objective of peace and stability in the broader region and attach importance to regional connectivity both in terms of trade and energy cooperation.

Maitra (2013) expressed his opinion about Russian investment in the energy sector of Pakistan. He said that Russian investors are very much interested in the Thar Coal Project. The project is considered to be the largest coal-based energy project in the history of Pakistan. Ahmed (2017) added that after the tilt of Indian diplomacy towards America and the EU, Russian government is also reviewing its strategic objectives and desires to increase bilateral relations with Pakistan. The same approach is also under serious consideration in the Islamabad. Malik (2016) highlighted in his book that former Soviet Union, Russia and South Asian states needs to remove barriers between the relations of Russia and Pakistan. Wakhan Corridor will open a new road towards prosperity of the region. Perveen & Khalil (2015) thought that US presence in the Afghanistan and Indo-US, nexus urged Russia to foresee Pakistan's strategic significance in the region.

Hanif (2013) argued that although Pakistan and Russia relations remained dormant since long but there is huge opportunity for both to enhance bilateral relations. Russia have the potential to support Pakistan economy, regional politics, energy crises and veto in UNSC resolutions, whereas Pakistan can become a beneficial strategic partner for a growing Russia. Naqvi & Masood (2007) stated

that Russia and Pakistan can collaborate in the fields of defense, trade, investment, economy, agriculture, education, culture, science and technology. They further emphasized that Indian tilt towards western powers for mutual interests provided a space to Pakistan and even Russia to revive their latent bilateral relations. The future of the region will be more prosperous if both Kremlin and Islamabad join hands together.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. Pakistan and Russia relations; A brief overview

Diplomatic relations between Russia and Pakistan dates back to May 01, 1948, when embassies of both states were established at Moscow and Karachi respectively. There were ups and downs in relations between the two countries because of specifics of international politics of the "Cold War" period (Morgulov, 2013). Pakistan became a US ally after its independence and signed bilateral economic and military cooperation pacts with the west. Meanwhile, Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979, was a turning point in global politics. Pakistan being an ally and guardian of US interests in the region, aided CIA to lodge a covert operation against Soviet forces from Pakistani territory in the name of Jihad. United States propagated against USSR and communism to use Pakistani Mujahideen for containment of Soviet Union and eventual collapse of communism. Later these exertions resulted in dissolution of former USSR and emergence of a new world order. One of the major reasons of participation in Afghan, Soviet war was an ire against USSR and Indian diplomatic ties. The Kremlin has chosen its moment wisely. Islamabad has grown cautious lately about its alliance with the United States, as it perceives a lack of reliability from the White House (Frolovskiy, 2016).

Diplomatic and mutual cooperation on different political, economic, scientific and strategic issues were discussed during exchange of visits by dignitaries from both sides after December 1991. Bilateral cooperation in the fields of culture, economy, science and technology has emerged. The Kremlin has grown cautious lately about India's augmenting defense cooperation with the United States and other Western nations (Frolovskiy, 2016). Russian aspiration for elevation of mutual harmony and collaboration was a diversion from USSR's previous policies. Russian government acknowledges Pakistan role for peace and stability in Asia, especially South and Central Asia. Pakistan also recognized Russian significance in the region being an emerging economic and military giant. Fears of religious extremism in Central Asia and Afghanistan combined with disillusionment about the roles of India and the U.S in South Asia, could push Russia and Pakistan closer together (Hashmi, 2016).

Contemporary trend of heightened diplomatic relations boosted in 2014 when Russian government

divulged from the arms and military hardware embargo against Pakistan. Moscow ratified to supply four Mi-35 helicopters to Islamabad, in 2015. "Following the results of the talks held earlier on helicopters, which Pakistan would like to get from Russia, a draft contract on the delivery of four Mi-35M gunships has been sent to the Pakistani side. Pakistan is now studying the document" (TASS, 2015). Moreover, Russia encouraged Pakistan to join SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization) as a full member and supported the matter unconditionally. Later in June 2015 Pakistan became a full member of SCO after signing MoOs at Tashkent. The memorandum was signed by Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's advisor on foreign affairs Sartaj Aziz, at SCO's Heads of State Summit at Tashkent (ANI, 2016). Putin told Chinese state news agency Xinhua ahead of the summit that the accession of Pakistan and India would increase SCO's "relevance, both in the region and worldwide" (Express Tribune, 2016). Joint military exercises between Russian and Pakistani defense forces is beginning of new era in mutual peace and stability efforts of the both states in South Asian region. A series of war games known as Friendship 2016 kicked off in September at a Special Forces academy in Cherat (Dawn, 2016). The same are held on regular basis since 2016. Senior Indian military officers and diplomats said that Russia had "disregarded" Indian overtures to Moscow to call off its 16-day long 'Friendship 2016' exercise with the Pakistan Army: the first-ever joint drill between Russia and Pakistan (Bedi, 2016).

4.2. Future prospective roadmap

Russia and Pakistan share consensus on numerous issues of national, regional and international interests (i.e regional peace and stability, terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human trafficking, smuggling of narcotics, maritime security, illegal trafficking of goods, proliferation of WMDs, enhancement of mutual cooperation in the fields of economics, agriculture, trade, commerce, science and technology. Notwithstanding protracted peace and stability in Afghanistan which is only possible with sincere efforts of Pakistan. However, both states may consider following aspects for further heightening diplomatic bonds in future:

- Russia and Pakistan should review their existing foreign policies and make it more balanced in view of contemporary geo-strategic and geo-economic challenges of the region. This will lead both countries to extend their cooperation in their relevant fields of interest.
- Kremlin has to play persuasive part for resolution of all skirmishes including cross border terrorism, water distribution, infringe of LOC and particularly Kashmir issue between New Delhi and Islamabad. Tenacity of cited issues by Russia

will be a step towards the restoration of former glory, being a key regional power.

- India is one of the biggest military hardware importer of Russian armament at present. Pakistan also deserves to enjoy privileges for import of desired armament and defence systems. If it happens, Russia, will be recognized as regional counter balancing force in South Asia to promote long term peace and stability in the region. This move will also be beneficial for Russian arms dealers as well.
- Russia may build a cohesive approach towards South Asian states to organize a collective security platform similar to its Collective Security Treaty Organization. Establishment of a regional military alliance will revive the lost glory and hegemony of the former super power and will be a milestone in the strategic balance of South Asia.
- Conduct of joint military exercises of tri-services (i.e Army, Navy, Air Force) on regular basis will be an advanced option to take mutual benefit of counter terrorism experiences of both nations. Islamabad will be more valuable for Moscow as Pakistan Army is successfully fighting an unrestrained war against terrorism and non-state actors for more than a decade. Exchange of counter terrorism tactics will be in the best interests of both partners.
- Pakistani politicians and stakeholder in Afghanistan should play their role for establishment of permanent peace through consensus among all belligerent Afghan groups to protect the region from an uncontrolled and devastating war. At the moment, Pakistan and Russia are providing two main tried and tested routes for transit by providing logistic and material support to ISAF at Afghanistan. Any expansion in bilateral relations of Russia and Pakistan will certainly influence the Afghan regime and United States.
- Sociable bilateral relations with all regional partners especially Iran and Central Asian Republics is the dire need of Islamabad and Moscow for enhancement of trade and commerce, social and cultural harmony and to avail CPEC collective economic benefits. Keeping in view the increasing relations of Russia and China, Pakistan can also offer a naval base to Russia at the deep sea port of Gwadar with mutual consent of China. A combination of Russian, Chinese and Pakistani naval forces at the strategic port in the Indian Ocean will not only change the power balance but will be a real challenge for United States and its allies operating in the Indian Ocean.
- Formation of consistent sports events, exchange of student's fellowships, normalization in the process of immigration and visa services, facilitation in tourism and exchange of fine arts experts will be commendable for development and establishment of favorable public opinion

between the two states. "In modern society, the voice of the people forms the crux of any legislation or policy in the land. While this facet of societal feedback is prevalent in all societies regardless of the degree of authoritarianism, it is especially true for democratic societies of the world" (Naqvi, 2015).

- Oil and energy resources are the main concern of today's world. Russian economy is heavily dependent upon its huge reserves of oil, gas and other energy resources. Meanwhile, Pakistan is facing acute shortage of energy resources and its substitutes. Declining of energy sector in Pakistan can be boosted with Russian assistance with establishment of energy projects. The situation will be win-win for Russian economy to be safe from the constant menace of oil and gas embargos from European states. Pakistan has to play its part as some of renowned Russian companies are ready to invest in energy projects in this part of the region.

5. Conclusion

Power as an ultimate tool for protection of national interests and political transformation is an obsolete theory. Global politics is changing day by day as old friends and foes are no more exists. According to Lord Palmerston, "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow" (Palmerston, 1852). The pursuit of national interests by means and use of hard power has been swapped in 21st century. In today's world soft power strategies are more significant as compared to hard power tools. Success of the country's strategic goals is not dependent on arms and ammunition of one's nation alone but with soft power tactics. According to Joseph Nye " In today's world strong economics, foreign policy, diplomatic relations, universities, sports grounds and cultural institutions have more significance than military hardware to influence global community (Nye; 1988).

USSR adventure in Afghanistan in 1979 is an example of a perfect failure of military intervention. The estimated cost equipment and supplies during Afghan war from 1980 to 1986 would have been approximately 3-3.5 billion rubles (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2000). The Soviet forces bared a loss of more than 14000 casualties and 53,000 wounded (Wikipedia; n.d). Pakistan can also learn from past experiences with US and its allies. Provision of safe heaven to Mujahideen against USSR resulted severe damage to the state and society. Liberal elements of Pakistani society are at the siege of extremists. Kalashnikov culture, extremism, sectarianism, religious and ethnic bigotry were inherited from 1980s era during so-called Afghan Jihad. Pakistan needs to learn from the history. Abraham Lincoln, in the context of American Civil war of 1861 to 1865 said "Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared

with the men of this, we shall have as weak and as strong, as silly and as wise, as bad and as good. Let us therefore study the incidents in this as philosophy to learn wisdom from and none of them as wrongs to be avenged" (Lincoln; n.d).

The future of South Asian region will be remarkable for the entire world. Pakistan not only needs to strengthen diplomatic bounds with Russia and China but also with neighbors (i.e Iran and Eurasian republics). Chinese government exertions for "One Belt One Road" are a step towards economic and infrastructure development of entire Asian region. Rail and road connectivity will not only raise Chinese trade but will be a tool for local economic escalation. The ongoing China Pakistan Economic Corridor will be tool for all Asian republics to be organized at one platform. Hence, CPEC will be an economic diplomacy tool for entire region. In Pakistan and Russian prospective, construction is better option than destruction so both states needs to escalate their partnerships and diplomatic ties. The future of the entire region is now primarily in the hands of Russia, China and Pakistan.

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