

Pakistan _ Russia Nexus: A Game Changer for Eurasian Region

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Abstract

Cold war changed the political landscape of the world .It resulted into the emergence of new countries and Disintegration of USSR. It ended up bipolarity from the world and brought new world order according to which world determined its direction. The changing Geopolitics of Eurasian region is now reshaping the direction of world politics again and resulting into new emerging alliances. In current time frame Russia and Pakistan are creating their nexus with an objective of challenging the status quo position of United States, or pushing for greater bipolarity in global affairs. The increasing influence of ISIS in the region and instability in Afghanistan is the major driving force behind the establishment of Pak –Russia developing alliance. This emerging alliance has the potential to find out the political solution of Afghan problem by minimizing the US influence from Afghanistan. Moreover it seems that US is not interested in bringing peace and stability in Afghanistan due to its own strategic interests. By joining their hands together both Pakistan and Russia can preserve peace and stability in the region and their collaboration with China can do wonders by accelerating the economic activity in the region.

Key Words:

Pakistan –Russia nexus, Eurasian region, Geo strategic importance of Pakistan, Pakistan _Russia collaboration

Introduction

World political stature is in continuous transition and succeeding into apex of transformation. New emerging nexus of Pakistan and Russia is not only significant for both the countries but also considered a potential threat for US to counter its polices in the Afghanistan. Since the independence of Pakistan, Pakistan had cold relations with Russia or in other words both were cold war rivals .At the same time Russia had historic relations with India and acted as the traditional ally of India. The rapidly changing global politics revealed that there is no permanent friend and no permanent enemy in the international political arena, the only permanent entity is national and economic interest of any country. In recent time frame a unique merger of Pakistan and Russia is likely to establish. The basic objective behind this move is to bring greater bipolarity in the world affairs for challenging the hegemonic position of the US. India-Russian historical relations showed that Russia was most reliable friend and largest defence partner of India during

past four decades and supported India during Sino-Indian border war as well. Indian army faced difficulties after the disintegration of Soviet Union but India kept on receiving military equipment from its all-weather friend. Hence, Russia is taking interest in establishing friendly relations with Pakistan due to strategic compulsions for attaining more opportunity for defining its role and for re-balancing its position in region. Russia can create a congenial political environment along with regional actors to challenge US role to dislodge China as the major countervailing force in the region. This Russian grand strategy is to devise a game plan by increasing Russian influence in the region with the help of Pakistan to eliminate ISIS from the region. On the other hand, there is a great shift in Indian policies which are more involved in promoting US interest and enhancing cooperation in many fields like military, defence matters and nuclear arm collaboration. India also signed logistic exchange agreement against China with the collaboration of US. (Rizvi, 2002)

This Indian act created unrest in Russia and compelled Russia to review its association with India. India took its traditional ally Russia for granted for a longer period of time; Moscow observed the growing ties of India with the US patiently. However, Russia supported US struggle to get India into the non-proliferation mainstream through the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) waiver and in the nuclear energy expansion (Haripur nuclear project). On the other hand, Pakistan right from the day one preferred establishing its diplomatic relations with US instead of USSR. United States also considered the permanent feature of Pakistan's foreign policy. Most of the military and political leadership of Pakistan was pro American. In recent years military regime has shown their strength to fight against sponsored terrorism and to some extent the pursuance of foreign policy based on mutual economic and political relations. Pakistan's effort of strengthening relationship with Russia was not good news for US because Russia is still an obstacle for America in pursuance of its goal in Middle East. On the other hand Russia wants to develop its strategic partnership with Pakistan across Eurasian region to challenge American supremacy in the region. Furthermore, Russia can take maximum benefit from the access to the Arabian Sea where China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is actively functioning. For Pakistan, the current Indian military alliance with the United States is an opening of defense ties with Russia. A potential relationship between Pakistan and a major power other than the United States also has the potential to enhance Pakistan's weight in the international political arena. (Bacghi, 2018)

Geostrategic Importance of Pakistan

During the first quarter of 20th century, Europe was known as the center of international politics but after two catastrophes European nations were more involved in restructuring their shattered economies. In the second half of twentieth century Eurasian region came in lime light due to its strategic and geopolitical significance. Pakistan is geo strategically considered a

significant country of South Asian region and is located in such a region which is considered the pivot or the heart land of the world. It is blessed with four weather terrific terrains, rich minerals, natural resources, deep valleys, thick forests and rivers. Pakistan provided route for transportation during war of terrorism, and also acted as a front line state against geographical significance. Its importance has further increased during the cold war when Pakistan became the front line state of the U.S policy of restraint of U.S.S.R. Similarly in post 9/11 time period Pakistan is considered the most significant country as far as the contemporary setting of the region are concerned. It is directly connected with central Asian republics, Western China, Russia, and Afghanistan which makes it core region or high priority zone. This region witnessed the great activities of super powers for the past twenty years. Pakistan can have certain advantages or disadvantages due to its geography. This fertile land is combination of resource rich area in the North-West on other hand people rich in the North-East. It is also known as junction of South Asia, West Asia and Central Asian region. Pakistan is having key geo-strategic position with most professional Armed Forces in the world. Pakistan also holds Gwadar port which is the only deep seaport in the region. Moreover, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which is a plan of One-Belt One Road (OBOR) project, could be a key game changer in the region. Other countries like Iran Afghanistan and Turkmenistan are giving positive signals to participate in the economic activity generated by CPEC (Ebrahim, 2016).

The Russian-Pakistan relationship with great partnership and participation in political affairs of region along can help in preservation of balance of Power in the region. Putin era, has been shaping new contours in international politics that could provide a favorable environment for improving Russia's overall relations with Pakistan. The current Pak-Russia military exercise is showing great Russian interests in Pakistan and accelerating the pace of mutual relationship. Pakistan – Russia partnership started with an innovative military collaboration to further boost the mutual interests.

Pakistan Russia Relationship, Historical Perspective

In past years both Pakistan and Russia had fluctuating relations, from cold to normal relation this journey is going on. Due to changing dynamics, geopolitical circumstances allowed both the countries to normalize their relations. In international politics there are no permanent friends and no permanent foes. States do not establish their relationship on the bases of emotions but they form their mutual relationship on the shared interests. The nature of convergence and divergence of mutual interests decides the nature of relationship. Pakistan had cold relations with Russia right from the day one but in recent time frame the nature of relationship has changed. In other words their partnership is moving from cold to warm (Shah, 2012).

Russia is situated in the continent of Europe; Russia has 16,377,742 square kilometers of land and 720,500 square kilometers of water, shaping it as the biggest country in the world with a total area of 17,098,242 square

kilometers. Initially there was difference in the ideologies of both the countries and Pakistan was not interested to develop relations with a communist country. It is a fact that a country cannot adopt its neighbors by its own choice. Initially Pakistan did not develop diplomatic relations with Russia contrary to that Nehru sent his sister (Veji Lakshmi Pandit) to Russia as representative of India in Russia. Afterwards Pakistan realized that it is almost impossible to ignore a regional power they started prompting their trade, educational and cultural exchange programs with Russia, besides Pakistan Steel Mills was also a joint venture of Pakistan and Russia. In recent Years Moscow showed great concern regarding the solution of the internal political and economic problems that Pakistan is facing right now. Russia offered technical assistance to Pakistan in the expansion of Pakistan steel mill, in 2011, then-Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin appreciated Pakistan's effort to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Moscow also condemned NATO attack at Salala check post and they viewed this attack as an infringement of sovereignty of Pakistan . Moscow also offered technical support for the Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants, and announced interest in Thar Coal Project. Both countries joint their hands together in preventing production and control of drugs in the region. At the same time Russia also lifted arm embargo from Pakistan but India is the biggest opposition of Pakistan Russia defence deal. Recently, the defense ministers of both countries Pakistan and Russia signed a treaty to grow defense and military cooperation. These initiatives are not enough to normalize the relationship between Pakistan and Russia. (Borthwick, 2006). Up till 1954, Soviet Union sustained its policy of neutrality and a non-interference on Kashmir issue but their stance changed due to Pakistan entry into western alliance system and showed their tilt toward Indian policy. Pakistan's entry into Western alliance system was not applauded by USSR (SEATO in 1954 and CENTO in 1955). US created Western alliance system to stop the spread of communism and Pakistan at that time expected that US would intervene to solve Kashmir dispute but it actually did not happen. Pakistan also anticipated that US would provide extensive economic and military aid to strengthen its defences against India, with which it had an unsettled dispute over Kashmir and fought a limited war in 1948. USSR took this initiative as the containment strategy of US .During that specific time period US assured Pakistan that Western alliance system would protect Pakistan against any aggression particularly from USSR and India. Soviet Union aggravated against Western alliance system and two super powers stood against each other which caused unrest in the whole world. On the other front USSR also had deteriorated relations with communist china. It provided great opportunity to India to get closer to USSR. In one of his speeches during his visit to India, the Soviet prime minister stated that he viewed Kashmir as the Northern part of India and the people of Kashmir as part of the Indian people .During the war of 1971 the reality of Pakistan_ US relations exposed and Soviet Union strongly supported India and Bangladesh. As a result of Russian support to India, Pakistan Russia relationship deteriorated when Soviet Union also advocated Indian stance on separation of East wing in international community and supported India in the United Nation as well.

India signed a treaty of friendship with Soviet Union to collaborate with each other with an objective of promoting association in military and economic fields. During cold war Pakistan had tensed relationship with USSR, US used Peshawar airbase to spy against USSR. In other world one super power (US) used Pakistan against other super power (USSR). US fought proxy war in Afghanistan with USSR. In 1988, the Soviet Union terminated its nine-year damaging war in Afghanistan. Moreover, to weak Communist government Gorbachev denied sending more military forces to defend satellite states of the USSR. Iron curtain between East and West Berlin disappeared with the demolition of the Berlin Wall. This wall had great symbolic importance and destruction of this wall reunified Germany and appeared on the face of earth as Federal Republic of Germany. As result of disintegration of USSR Russian Confederation emerged with new congress. It was the time when most of the Soviet republics were getting independence and this political instability lasted till 1990. In August 1991 revolutionary elements amongst the remaining Communist Party leaders confined Gorbachev to house arrest in his house which is known as the August Coup. (Khan,2013)

Boris Yeltsin flogged violent resistance in Moscow, blocking the collaborators' military vehicles. The USSR was dissolved and powerful socialist state republics USSR fell down. The disintegration of USSR resulted into the emergence of fifteen sovereign states out of which nine were non-Muslims and six were Muslims states. In post-cold war era, world became unipolar and new world order established which determined the world direction. In pre and post-cold war period Pakistan had tensed relations with Russia but in current time frame existing regional and international challenges provided an opportunity to both the countries to maintain closer ties. Pak-Russia relationship will not only support in promoting peace and stability in the region but it will also generate economic activity. For Russia, Pakistan is substantial in two ways. First, it serves as an important junction of the Central Asian and the Kremlin. Secondly, strategic importance of Pakistan is an important factor in connecting the Central Asian region with the Middle East and Indian Ocean. Russia can access the international market to sell its goods in a very convenient manner through Pakistan. Pakistan can be a reasonable country in agricultural and textile goods for Russia. At the same time Energy sector is also significant area where Pakistan can acquire huge assistances by forming better connection with Russia. Both the countries Pakistan and Russia seem very passionate and optimistic to cope with the existing challenges. For that reason, Russia is activating its strengths against the unipolar world controlled by United States for the past few years. Moscow needs to emphasize its influence in the region, expecting the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent expansions. Growing military and Defence formation between India and US is also a driving force behind joint military exercises and a defense pact between Pakistan and Russia. Moscow has been fostering relations with India for longer period of time and will not deteriorate this partnership easily, but tilt toward Pakistan will give a signal that Russia has other options in the region other than India. (Farwa,2017). On the other hand, Pakistan has strategic

depth which can help Pakistan in shifting geopolitics and changing dynamics to meet regional challenges which India and Russia do not have. Former and Current military leadership worked hard to enhance Pakistan positive image in the world and now Pakistan really wants respectful relationship with United States on an equal base. In other words Pakistan is not ready to fulfill usual demands of US to do more. Pakistan has given a clear-cut signal to US that Pakistan needs a peaceful solution of Afghanistan without involvement of US and in this regard Russia can act as the natural ally of Pakistan. Moreover expected alliance of China, Russia and Pakistan can be a win-win partnership for regional peace, stability, and trade endeavors. Geo-political relations are rapidly changing in South Asia, India and US are strengthening their defense and trade ties due to growing influence of China's in the region. In case of success of that emerging alliance between Pakistan and Russia there is a possibility that in projected timeframe Russia would address the Kashmir dispute and will play positive role between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Historical incidents such as USSR Support to Afghanistan on the issue of Pakhtunistan and Pakistan support to US during Afghan war deteriorated relations between Islamabad and Moscow. On the other side, Islamabad and Washington, which were allies against the former Soviet Union and cooperated in the 1980s Afghan War, are drifting away and not revering same level of relationship which they had in the past. (Salman, 2011)

Pakistan _Russia Collaboration: Implications for Afghanistan

In recent years it has been observed an equally valuable partnership between Russia and Pakistan is growing. In current time frame Russia intended to enhance its political influence across Eurasian region, Russia Pakistan tandem can also challenge American supremacy in South Asian region. Moreover, Russia can determine Pakistan's key role against growing influence of ISIS. Additionally, Russia is also aware of Pakistan initiatives of CPEC and its benefits across Arabian Sea. For Pakistan, the current Indian military partnership with the United States is considered an eye opening and future challenges for Russia as well. On the other hand a growing relationship between Pakistan and Russia also has the potential to increase Pakistan's weight in the international political stature. The growing influence of ISIS in Afghanistan is the source of tension for both Russia and Pakistan. The increased penetration of ISIS not only compelled Russia and Pakistan to pay attention but it also driven china to come across on the same axis along with Russia and Pakistan. India is trying to convince Russia to not to collaborate along with Pakistan. As a matter of fact Russia realized the role and importance of Pakistan to eliminate and counter ISIS in Afghanistan. In present scenario China is sincerely putting its efforts to maintain peace and stability in Afghanistan. ISIS is emerging as physical threat and expanding their influence and existence in the region and US is providing strength in the expansion of ISIS. (Hussnain,2012)

In a nut shell Peaceful and Stable Afghanistan is essential for Pakistan

and Russia for their politico economic stability. It would be only possible in case of US withdrawal from the region. To bring out the peaceful solution of Afghan problems the genuine concerns of Taliban's must address. Another factor which is beneficial for both Pakistan and Russia is that US is losing its grip in Afghanistan and now they are using India by assigning a specific role in Afghanistan which is an eye opener for Pakistan and Russia. With ISIS/Daesh presence in Afghanistan's adjacent provinces with Pakistan and its operational terrorist activities within Afghanistan and Pakistan, the regional and neighboring nations looking towards Russia and China to fix this upcoming threat of penetrating ISIS in Afghan region. In order to strengthen its position US is trying to inject ISIS into this region for exploitation of Russian and Chinese weaknesses in Chechnya and Sinkiang. Pakistan, China and Russia are taking joint initiatives to counter US game plan and for that trilateral summits are initiated. Hence US, NATO and India are putting their efforts to shatter these initiatives. Iran is also giving a positive signal to support this initiative of Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan realized that the role of regional stakeholders is the key to the long lasting sustainable peace in the region and involvement of extra regional players is no more acceptable. The Russia-Pakistan collaboration is a positive initiative or in other words a step towards prosperity and progress in the region. US and its partner are trying to convince international community against this new initiative. For the first time in the military history of Pakistan, Russia, both the countries initiated vast scale joint military exercises with each other. Moreover, Russia also delivered four well equipped Mi-35M helicopters to Pakistan. These expansions reveal that as Russia disconnected itself from its past relationship with India, which immediately improved Pak-Russia relationship (Woods, 2016)

There is emerging trend in Pakistan that Pakistan must restructure its diplomatic image in international community by convincing Pakistan's role as front line state in war against terrorism. In this regard it would be beneficial for Pakistan to set up its strong military and economic links with Russia. For Pakistan, smooth relationships with Russia can improve its worth in international politics by sending strong message to the United States that a new, durable partnership is establishing. The emerging bilateral relationship is strengthening in many fields including security, energy, and economies and also indicating that strong bonding between the two states ended up the animosity of the Cold War. It is mandatory for Pakistan to not only pursue a strong foreign policy to grip regional affairs but to continue positive relationships with all the major powers and regional powers as well (Rahman, 2007). Russia can get access to warm water through Pakistan and can also sell its weapons to Pakistan. As a matter of fact Russia is also facing problems in its major defense market (India), it could be the reason of Russian detachment from India and its search for new markets. Russia needed Pakistan due to its significant geopolitical location for stabilizing Afghanistan, whereas Pakistan considers that political strength of Afghanistan will also improve Pakistan's internal security conditions. In a nut shell, CPEC projects will boost up economic conditions of Pakistan. It will also support

Pakistan's political aims and objectives and opportunity for further expansion in trade, political and economic relations with Russia. CPEC will be a crucial foundation of economic integration from the county to the global level and will offer land-locked states like Russia to get an opportunity of entering in the warm water of the Arabian Sea through Pakistan. It is also anticipated that Moscow and Islamabad will discuss the merger of CPEC with the Eurasian Economic Union in projected timeframe.

Role of Russia in CPEC

To avoid global isolation, Pakistan invited Russia to contribute in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) with an objective to support Pakistan and China within the region. The Pakistan-Russia Reconciliation and their shared vision and strong bonding with China is very beneficial in many ways. As far as the economic condition of Pakistan is concerned it seems to be changed because Pakistan holds a key strategic position in the region which is essential for all the leading powers in current scenario due to CPEC. An Indian terrorist activity in Kashmir has exposed the so called secular image of India in front of international community and it had a trickledown effect on Indo_ Russia relationship. Although international community is not condemning Indian acts of violence openly but Russia has changed its policy stance towards India, is now showing clear indications of getting into closer relationships with Pakistan. Russia's joining in CPEC will be an opportunity for China, Russia and Pakistan to enhance cooperation. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is considered as a leading project of the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) .It is a great deal of investment and Pakistan has already approved Russian request for using the Gwadar Port, for its exports . China and Russia have been a long time deliberate partners primarily due to their ideological clashes with the United States, which developed as a common enemy to both the countries. The reason that the China-Russia-Pakistan triangle is emerging as a reality (along with Russia's status as the chief weapon supplier to India) would not only result in serving these states to fight the threat of extremism and terrorism but also to confront the United States' growing influence in the region. As a matter of fact, this alliance of Pakistan, China and Russia appears to be a more threatening force as all the three states are nuclear powers .The Russian participation in CPEC, and usage of the Gwadar Port, can increase Sino-Russian collaboration and is also beneficial for upcoming multinational cooperation, in current time frame . Russia and Pakistan are both cooperative toward China. (Kasting ,2012).As far as Russia-Pakistan collaboration and Russia's role in the CPEC is concerned, China considered them as major stakeholders not only CPEC but also for the regional challenges in current and projected time frame .In addition to above as result of increased military and economic ties between India and US Russia along with Pakistan is trying to maintain balance of power in the region to maximize its national interests. The Gwadar Port is very beneficial for china and many countries like Iran and Turkmenistan for trade. India has intentions to abolish CPEC to maintain its and its hegemony in the region and to destroy the emerging alliances. Due to globalization and regional integration Russia's existence

in the CPEC would help to stop the international community from giving undue attention to China and eliminate the avoidable suspicions over the so-called China factor. Russia's participation in the CPEC is beneficial in many ways for Pakistan to cope up its challenges of deteriorated economy and political settings. CPEC is not only China's interest but it can integrate the whole region and increase economically and politically. China has gained first-mover advantage, as well as capital and geographic advantages. If Russia joins the project, it will be a stakeholder which shares economic risk, especially security risk, and has the same or similar goals. (Mateen,2015)

US Response on Pak -Russia Emerging Alliance

In current circumstances Afghanistan is acting as a proxy-zone between US and Russia. On the other hand Unstable Afghanistan is not in the favor of Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan again became the most important actor for a viable peaceful solution to the Afghan problem. CPEC is considered a regional connector and game changer for the region and will enhance strategic, partnership among the member countries. In Past US had strong connection with India but after CPEC U.S is focusing more on India to strengthen its strategic connections to pledge growing China. China always considered Pakistan as a counterbalance to Indian supremacy in the region. As Central Asia was also a part of former USSR till early nineties and even after disintegration of USSR Russia still has its strategic interest in the region. In shifting geopolitics, strategically vital relations between Pakistan and Russia could support Afghanistan peace process with the help of china.

Russia and the U.S could again move near to a proxy-war in Afghanistan. US wants to pressurize Pakistan to not to support Russian alliance backed by China, Turkey, Iran, and Central Asian republics to protect their future interests in region. The emerging Pak –Russo nexus is not a serious threat for US but it will also challenge the role and hegemony of NATO. Russia openly accepts its current contacts with Afghan Taliban with an objective to damage ISIS by intervening a negotiated settlement between Kabul government and Taliban hence China also looking forward to accommodate Taliban peacefully in the region. In November 2015, China tried to play the role of a mediator between Kabul and Taliban but not succeeded. Pakistan and US have diversified strategic interests in the region and after 2002 the priorities have been changed. Pakistan's economic and military connections with the US are at stake but it is understandable that both have diverse national interests in Afghanistan. Russia can act as an important strategic counterbalance against US increased pressure. But on the other hand Pakistan is not in the position to remain isolated in the international community by deteriorating its connections with the US. To settle the matter and to find a middle way Russia is the best option to support Pakistan against US. For the smooth functioning and success of CPEC a peaceful Pakistan is required along with a politically stable Afghanistan also. With these changes in world politics New regional alliances are also steadily developing and showing changes in regional policies and

interest. US-India and Turkey-Russia appear to be the new evolving strategic arrangements. Russia can also help Pakistan to minimize its economic difficulties, energy crisis and can support it into its strategic interests. Russia can safeguard more safety support to Pakistan to alleviate internal security matters and defense abilities. A stable Pakistan is in the strategic interests of Russia, China to diminish and offset the US power in Afghanistan. Developing US-India relationships are the motivation for Pakistan's growing connections with Russia. Pakistan is noticing adjustment in US diplomatic policy regarding Pakistan. Every action has a reaction, and Pakistan sensed the necessity to improve close connections with Russia after President Obama's two visits to India. US changed its policy towards India when Modi elected as Indian Prime Minister for political purposes and as a result of that US-India nuclear deal completed against the law of non-proliferation of nuclear weapon.(Peter,2009)

Conclusion

The Pakistan Russia emerging alliance is not only beneficial for both the countries but it is crucial for the peace prosperity and economic uplifting of the region. On the other hand such developments in Russia-Pakistan relations create major problems for India. Indians are not happy neither about the military drills between the two nations, nor the fact that Pakistan is purchasing weapons from their top military equipment importer. During the Cold War period, India and Russia were particularly close to each other but in current time frame new Indian generation does not have a tilt towards Russia as compared to Cold War generation. It is far more suitable and more attractive for the new generation of India to move towards the United States. While , Russia is losing its grip in India even though Moscow continues to be the country's key supplier of weapons. But since Russian President Vladimir Putin is the master of long-term planning in global relations, he knows where this is al going. Russia chose Pakistan, which happens to be India's biggest enemy and at the same time a close friend of China, whom Russia has been trifling with for the past few years. The rapidly changing political situation of Eurasian region may result into a major transformation. Recently during his speech President Donald Trump's warned to take action against the influence of militant's operative in Afghanistan. In response of speech Donald Trump both China and Russia strongly condemned his point of view by saying that Pakistan was the worst sufferer of war against terrorism with massive infrastructural and human losses. They also gave the message to Washington that in current situation it will not easy to isolate Pakistan in the region moreover the new assigned role to India will not acceptable for Pakistan China and Russia. They also alleged that isolating Pakistan could disturb the U.S. relationship with Islamabad and will move it closer to Russia, Iran and China and destabilization of the region. In the nut shell it can be concluded that Eurasian region is considered the most significant political nerve these days and to grip that particular region all the major stakeholders including Russia and US must understand the crucial role of Pakistan. In other words Pakistan is necessary to understand the politico social pattern of this region. (Rafique,2015)

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