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[https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023\(VI-II\).02](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023(VI-II).02)**Abstract:** *It is argued that Pakistan and Russia had visible patterns of enmity before the 21st century. However, the abandonment of ideological constraints and shift in geopolitics, incentivize both states to forge closer relations primarily because of Machiavellian common cause. The study intends to highlight the major factors during multiple stages under the various leaders of Russia and Pakistan that reshaped the priorities of both states' vis a vis each other. Apropos of this view, three level of analysis is used to identify, individual, state and systematic factors, that act as an enabler and constraints in the growing relations between both countries. The study concludes that a balance of interests is key between Russia and Pakistan in complicated and multifaceted relations as both nations will look for opportunities to converge their interests while still pursuing their own geopolitical agendas.***Key Words:** Pakistan, Russia, Machiavellian Common Cause, Level of Analysis, Balance of Interests

Introduction

Russia and Pakistan have a complicated relationship as a result of their turbulent past. However, relations have evolved significantly over the past 25 years, with both countries moving from a period of cold relations to a strategic partnership. Over this time, geopolitical issues, together with worries about the economy and security, have significantly shaped their relationship. As Islamabad has increasingly distanced itself from the US, strengthened China's ties with Pakistan, and sought reconciliation

with Russia because of USA's exceptional favour to India's nuclear ambitions. On the other hand, Russia seeks to balance its interests between India and Pakistan based on the strategic and economic significance, each state extends (Khan, [2019](#)).

Conflicting interests and India's anti-policy towards Pakistan, particularly in the 1950s, have shaped relations between Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan partnered with the US out of concern for the USSR invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Nevertheless, with the fall of Russia and its

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evacuation from Afghanistan in accordance with the Geneva Convention. In order to restore a sense of legitimacy and peace in their bilateral relations, Pakistan sought to normalise relations with Russia. This initiative was supported by both states on all levels. Pakistan attempted to abandon its security policy to some extent in the era of geostrategic competition and prioritised the geostrategic approach (Studies, [2019](#)).

With a systematic view to understanding the factors that led to the apparent rapprochement between both Russia and Pakistan which historically remained uneasy and indifferent towards one another, the main goal of this study will be factors, what factors and why, in the evolution of relations between Pakistan and Russia since 1998. This is done in an effort to better comprehend the complicated relationship between Pakistan and Russia. By using three levels of analysis, the study seeks to identify the individual, state, and systematic factors that produce the point of convergence and divergence in Pakistan and Russia which is still cloaked in the fluidity of major events (Asia & Division, [2019](#)).

This research paper aims to investigate the post-1998 diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Russia and how some semblance of stability was reestablished between the two countries. This is what inspired us to want to comprehend how Pakistan and Russia interacted beginning in 1998 and continuing through the post-Covid-19 epidemic era. This is because, between 1998 and 2023, relations between Russia and Pakistan saw a striking alteration. When relations between Russia and Pakistan were formerly marked by obvious signs of hostility, the two countries set out on a path that eventually resulted in a change from tense to geo-strategic engagement (Hanif, [2013](#)).

Literature Review

From Strained Ties to Strategic Engagement: Unraveling the Factors Shaping Pakistan-Russia Relations

Despite the fact that Pakistan and Russia have made attempts to enhance their connection, there are still many obstacles to be addressed before they can forge a solid and long-lasting alliance. Here are some major arguments that have influenced Pakistan-Russia relations:

The Cold War Tango: Exploring the Impact of US-Pakistan Relations on Pakistan-Russia Dynamics

The Cold War partnership between Pakistan and the US widened the gap between Pakistan and Russia. Jalalzai ([2009](#)) claims that after Pakistan joined the SEATO and CENTO pacts in 1954 and 1955 and when Moscow supported India's stance on Kashmir in all international fora, including the UN Security Council, mutual mistrust increased. Ashier ([2012](#)) adds that Soviet intentions regarding the province of Baluchistan and its sympathy for Afghanistan in the Pakhtunistan conflict further deteriorated relations between the two nations. Murshed (2012) asserts that in addition to Pakistan's support for the Mujahidin, another source of dispute arose in the latter 1990s due to Pakistan's assistance to the Taliban outfits in Afghanistan's civil war and its eventual recognition of their government that the Soviets supposed to be deleterious for the region.

Converging Visions: Exploring the Strategic Interests of Pakistan and Russia in Promoting Regional Stability

The promotion of regional stability, particularly addressing the threat of terrorism and extremism, is something that both Pakistan and Russia are interested in.

Hanif (2013) claims that a number of variables (based on realism and commercial liberalism) cemented the convergence of their strategic goals, leading to improved relations in the twenty-first century. Therefore, the primary motivation for Pakistan's and Russia's national security policies, which has been shaped by regional politics, the new geo-economic competition, and the strategic calculus of security, has given the two nations the opportunity to engage in dialogue with one another.

Recent relations between Pakistan and Russia have been influenced by both nations' concerns about terrorism and anti-terrorism measures. If the stability in Afghanistan is not restored, the security of the entire region will be in jeopardy, a concern shared by both countries. The US retreat from Afghanistan has improved ties between the two states, allowing them to collaborate on regional security matters. The region's peace is crucial for all the regional nations, and the strategic culum can be a very useful tool. They understand how crucial it is to keep the area peaceful and prevent unrest from spreading from Afghanistan to Russia's other bordering nations as neighbours. Russia is the best solution due to South Asian countries' severe energy shortages and high demand for energy resources. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, South Asia has become Russia's largest energy export market, prompting Pakistan and Russia to try to increase bilateral trade and explore the possibility of joint ventures. Due to its growing energy requirements, Pakistan has indicated an interest in Russia's energy resources, particularly its natural gas and oil. The conflict for energy resources is still active and continues to influence historical events. And finally, Geopolitical opportunities have been made possible by the geopolitical competition at the world and regional levels. It can be claimed that Pakistan, which shares a complicated border with India and Afghanistan, aims to keep a

power balance in the entire region, diversify its international alliances, and compete with India in particular. By forging deeper connections with Russia, there is a remote chance that Russia will be diplomatically neutralized.

Exploring Energy Cooperation as a Catalyst for Normalizing Pakistan-Russia Relations

Pakistan and Russia have been working to strengthen their cooperation in the energy sector, including the construction of the North-South Gas Pipeline project. However, progress on this project has been slow, and there have been concerns about the viability of the project. According to Ahmed (2023), as both nations enter a new period of close cooperation, Pakistan's faltering economy may benefit if it can maintain a balance in preserving its relationship with Russia.

Forging Bonds of Strength: Analyzing the Evolution of Military Ties between Pakistan and Russia for Enhanced Bilateral Relations

In recent years, Russia has increased its military cooperation with Pakistan, notably by providing military equipment and holding joint military drills. Further agreements for improved naval partnership and allowing Pakistan's personnel to join Russia's military training facilities were made between Pakistan and Russia in 2018. (Ayaz, 2018) There is a more visible Pakistan-Russia security engagement in the 21st century. In an effort to deepen their diplomatic ties, Pakistan and Russia have hosted high-level meetings and exchanges. Nonetheless, some topics continue to be divisive, such as Russia's alliance with India and Pakistan's close connections to China.

Tracing the Historical Dynamics of Pakistan-Russia Relations amid US-Pakistan Alignment and Soviet Support for India

Pakistan sided with the US after gaining its independence, whereas India, Pakistan's regional adversary, was supported by the Soviet Union. Early in the 1950s, Pakistan joined the US-led military alliance known as the SEATO and the CENTO led to the first serious flashpoint between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. Khan et al. (2023) claim that the Soviet Union boosted its assistance to India, which had chosen a non-aligned foreign policy but was regarded as sympathetic to Soviet objectives despite this. According to Pradhan (2022), the USSR played a vital influence in the development of India's industrial foundation and the fulfilment of its defence needs.

Shah (2001) points out that the friendship treaty between Russia and India and Pakistan's successful endeavours to an entente between China and the US caused relations between Pakistan and the USSR to deteriorate further during the 1970s. By participating in the Security Council and providing India with military support during the Indo-Pakistan war in December 1971, the Soviet Union was instrumental in the fragmentation of East Pakistan. Pakistan became a significant base for the mujahideen rebels backed by Americans in their conflict with Soviet forces in 1979, following the Soviet invasion. According to Radyuhin (1999), Pakistan's choice to support the Afghan resistance significantly contributed to the rise in hostilities between Pakistan and the USSR.

Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, there was an opportunity for a new era of cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. Shah (2001) asserts that Pakistan's connections with the Russian Federation, which took over as the USSR's successor state, are inextricably linked to the history of its more than 40 years of prior relations with

the Soviet Union. Yet, there has been a noticeable improvement in ties between Russia and Pakistan as both nations have worked to forge deeper links in the economic, energy, and defence sectors. According to Bakshi (1999) due to the shifting geo-political environment after the demise of the USSR, Moscow tended to allot more significance to Pakistan and other Muslim states on its southern periphery. In the contemporary era, there are still challenges and areas of disagreement between the two countries, the historical context of their relationship is important in understanding the current state of bilateral relations.

The 21st-century balance of interests between Russia and Pakistan is complicated and multifaceted, with both nations looking for opportunities for collaboration while still pursuing their own geopolitical objectives. The struggle against terrorism is one area where Russia and Pakistan have common interests. According to Naqvi & Masood (2017), Pakistan and Russia are able to cooperate on a variety of levels because of their shared interests in key political and security concerns, such as maintaining regional stability and battling terrorism and drug trafficking. Both nations have experienced terrorist assaults, and they have been collaborating to fight extremist groups, especially in Afghanistan. Another area of mutual interest is trade and economic cooperation. According to Chai & Haiqi (2021), Russia's economic footprint in the region is still comparatively little, Pakistan can exploit this prospect to extend support and invite Russia's investments. There have been efforts to increase trade between the two countries, with Russia considering the possibility of investing in Pakistan's energy and infrastructure sectors.

However, there are also some sectors where Russia and Pakistan are at odds. One is the matter of India, which has historically been a close ally of Russia but has also recently

been forging closer connections with the United States. On the other side, Pakistan has been a major participant in China's Belt and Road Initiative and has been aiming to strengthen its ties with China. This has created some strategic tensions between Russia and Pakistan, as they navigate their relationships with these other powers.

Resilience Tested: Unveiling the Multi-Level Dynamics of Pakistan-Russia Relations through Kenneth Waltz's Theoretical Framework

The three levels of analysis are a framework used in international relations to understand and analyze the behaviour of states and their interactions with each other. According to Waltz (2001)

These Three Levels are

- Individual level: This level focuses on the personal characteristics, beliefs, and actions of individual leaders and decision-makers, and how they shape international relations.
- Domestic level: It looks at the domestic political, economic, and social factors that shape a state's behaviour and foreign policy (Telbami, 2002).
- Systemic level: It examines the broader international system and how it influences the behaviour of states, including the distribution of power, alliances, and international norms (Waltz three level of analysis, 1979).

Rationale

The concept of three levels of analysis was first presented in a book named "Theory of International Politics" written by famous international affairs expert Kenneth Waltz in 1979. According to him, three levels of study are essential to understanding the relationship between different political constituent units, such as Russia and

Pakistan, as well as the interaction between them. Significant occurrences of fluidity have historically been a good indicator of the tensile relationship between Pakistan and Russia, but recent changes in the geopolitical and economic landscape of the world have made the formation of cooperative partnerships necessary (Hurrell, 1995).

It may be claimed that Waltz's investigation of the individual level focuses on the ways in which certain decision-makers, such as the head of state, affect legislative decisions and foreign policy. Waltz suggested that particular leaders can have a big impact on world affairs. According to Kenneth Waltz, the primary subjects of discussion at the state level are the function of states as distinct political entities and how they will contribute to the global political system. The geo-economics strategy led to this dependence, just as it did with the dependence between two politically different constituent nations like Pakistan and Russia. Waltz has stated that domestic politics can influence a politician's actions and force them to forge diplomatic ties with foreign countries (Waltz, three levels of analysis 1979).

The systemic level is concerned with the operation of the international system, particularly the distribution of power among states and the existence of international institutions. The unexpected US pullout has created a political vacuum close to the Russian border, and Russia is concerned that if Afghanistan's semblance and beacons of hope are not restored, it will jeopardize both its geo-economic and geopolitical interests in the region of South Asia. The two nations have so established close relations. According to Waltz, the current geopolitical situation has compelled the two countries to put their recent crisis behind bars and start a new era of cooperation (Waltz Three level of Analysis, 1979).

Individual Level

Personal characteristics and beliefs of the leaders of Pakistan and Russia have influenced their countries' relationship. For example, during the 1990s, Russian leaders viewed Pakistan as a supporter of the Taliban in Afghanistan and a destabilizing force in the region. However, in the early 2000s, there was a change in leadership in both countries, with Vladimir Putin becoming the President of Russia and Pervez Musharraf taking over as the military ruler of Pakistan. Both leaders saw the potential for closer ties between their countries, and this led to a thaw in relations. Clary (2022) believes that "Putin's no ideological hang-ups with autocracy – military or otherwise and similarly ideological limitations on a new Pakistani leadership was gone that lead the two governments to explore possible avenues of cooperation" (Waltz Three level of analysis, n.d.).

Recently, Putin and Khan are strong leaders who have emphasized their own values and beliefs in their leadership styles; they differ in their backgrounds, personalities, and policy priorities. Putin's focus on stability and control contrasts with Khan's emphasis on change and reform, while Putin's nationalism and traditionalism contrast with Khan's focus on social justice and Islamic values. However, Pakistan-Russia relations have seen a significant improvement in recent years, particularly during the era of Prime Minister Imran Khan. Clary (2022) highlights Putin and Imran's relationship as an enabling factor between both countries to reciprocate the other efforts to embrace each other.

Domestic Level

Domestic political and economic factors have also influenced the Pakistan-Russia relationship. In the 1990s, Pakistan was under sanctions due to its nuclear program, which limited its ability to engage with

Russia. However, in the early 2000s, Pakistan's economy began to improve, and it started to look for new partners to help it modernize its military. At the same time, Russia was looking to expand its economic and political influence in Asia and saw Pakistan as a potential partner. This led to the signing of several agreements between the two countries, including a defence cooperation agreement in 2014. Clary (2022) identified "the two pillars of potential cooperation proposed by relationship optimists: possible economic and energy ties; and potential defence and security partnership."

Systemic Level

According to Clary (2022), Pakistan is too small to independently influence how world politics are organized. It is compelled to manoeuvre inside a framework others have established while attempting to hammer out the finest bargain possible. Although Pakistani strategy is not wholly reactive, it does depend on resources outside of what it can generate on its own to pursue its long-term strategic objectives of competing with India and establishing a non-hostile regime in Afghanistan. So, in addition to skilful foreign policy, it also needs a good fortune to achieve its declared foreign policy aims.

In the past, the Pakistan-Russia ties have not changed Pakistan's situation and are not anticipated in the future. Pakistan did not escape from its huge strategic predicaments. Those who maintain that Russia can do so are disregarding the geopolitical and geo-economic limitations faced by Pakistan and Russia in the 21st century.

Overall, the Pakistan-Russia relationship since 1998 can be understood using the three levels of analysis framework. While there have been some challenges along the way, the relationship has evolved and diversified over time, driven by factors at the individual, domestic, and systemic levels.

Analysis of Uncharted Horizons: Assessing the Resurgence of Pakistan- Russia Relations from 1998 to 2023

Pakistan-Russia relations under the leadership of President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during the years 1998–1999 were marked by substantial changes as both nations took steps to strengthen their ties. Discussions between Pakistan and Russia have included issues notably commerce, energy, environmental pollution, and drug trafficking. Kaushik (2019) claims that both states disregarded the Indian aspect within their new-look-relationship. Yevgeny Primakov, the Russian foreign minister at the time, made his first trip to Pakistan in more than 20 years in 1998. Later that year, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz travelled to Moscow in response. These trips were intended to strengthen the two parties' ties and look into potential new areas of collaboration. Nawaz Sharif, a former prime minister of Pakistan, praised Moscow as a "global force" and emphasized the significance of a multipolar world when in Russia in 1999. (Kaushiki, 2019)

The relationship between Pakistan and Russia significantly improved between 1999 and 2008 as both nations worked to strengthen their political, military, and economic ties. Since then, the two nations have kept up this trend, furthering their collaboration on a wide range of issues. In October 1999, when Gen. Musharraf ousted Mr Sharif, the Russian government voiced concern for the leader's well-being because he had only visited Moscow six months before, but gradually relations mended because Putin had no ideological freight, according to Clary (2022). Pakistan became a crucial ally in the US-led war on terror in 2001 following the 9/11 attacks in the US. Khan (2021) claims that throughout the Musharraf administration (1999–2008), Russia maintained friendly ties with

Pakistan and generally backed the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Russia and Pakistan agreed on strengthening their defence cooperation by signing a memorandum of understanding in 2003. This agreement paved the way for collaborative military exercises and the interchange of military personnel between the two countries. Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, made his first state visit to Pakistan in almost 40 years in 2005. Putin and Musharraf inked many agreements during his visit that improved bilateral ties between the two nations. Russia declared its support for Pakistan's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a body that coordinates regional security, in 2007. In 2005, Pakistan joined the group as an observer, and its admission was interpreted as a sign of expanding bilateral collaboration (Hussain, 2012).

Moscow formally declared "the pivot to the East" in 2010. (*povorot na vostok*). (Chia & Haiqi, 2021) Pakistan and Russia sought to deepen their economic and political relations from 2008 to 2013, capitalizing on the advances made in the preceding ten years. Since then, the two nations' relationship has flourished, with Russia being an important partner in Pakistan's efforts to meet its energy needs and development. General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, the Chief of the Army Staff of Pakistan, visited Moscow in 2009 and met with Russian military officials to discuss ways to improve military cooperation between the two nations. (Singh, 2016) An agreement to enhance bilateral trade to \$2 billion by 2015 was signed by Russia and Pakistan in 2010. (Naqvi & Masood, 2017) The two countries also agreed to hold regular consultations on regional and global issues.

In 2011, Pakistan and Russia signed an agreement to build a gas pipeline between the two countries, which would help to address Pakistan's energy crisis. The

pipeline was to be constructed with Russian investment, but the project has not yet materialized. President Medvedev stated that "We are very close neighbours; we are in the same region. Our borders don't touch but our hearts do." (Kremlin, 2011)

Both nations worked to strengthen their connections in a number of areas, including defence, energy, and regional cooperation, between 2013 and 2018. These changes were viewed as a significant departure from Pakistan's previous foreign policy, which had been more in line with the US and China. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in 2013, they had their first-ever trilateral [meeting](#) with China to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. (MOFA, 2013) Furthermore, during this time period, both agreed to cooperate in the energy sector and struck an agreement in 2014 to build the North-South gas pipeline from Lahore to Karachi. (MOFA, 2014) In 2015, Russia lifted its ban on importing Pakistani rice, and in 2017, both countries agreed to establish a joint investment fund. In 2016, Pakistan became a full member of the SCO, which includes Russia and China. In 2016, Russia agreed to sell four Mi-35 attack helicopters to Pakistan, and in 2017, the two countries held their first-ever joint military exercise called "Friendship 2017" (Khan, 2021).

Relations between Pakistan and Russia have greatly improved recently, and both nations are seeking to strengthen their defence and economic cooperation. Yet, difficulties and points of contention persist, particularly when it comes to matters of regional security, such as the situation in Afghanistan. Relations between Pakistan and Russia have been shaped in part by the shifting geopolitical circumstances in the area. In addition, Pakistan and Russia now have more chances to collaborate on regional economic initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor thanks to China's ascent as a global power.

From 1998 to 2023, overall ties between Pakistan and Russia have improved due to causes at systemic, domestic, and individual levels. The two nations seem determined to strengthen their relationship and expand collaboration in various fields, despite the possibility that there will still be some impediments along the way.

Conclusion: Forging a Resilient Partnership

In conclusion, the changing geopolitical scenario presents an opportunity for Pakistan and Russia to strengthen their ties and work towards mutual benefit. By increasing economic cooperation, collaborating on security and defence, and promoting cultural exchanges, the two countries can build a more robust and enduring relationship.

Due to their conflicting interests during the Cold War era, Pakistan and Russia have historically had a tense and suspicious relationship. Yet, relations between the two nations have been gradually warming in recent years. The shifting geopolitical landscape offers both nations a chance to deepen their relations. One way forward for Pakistan and Russia could be to increase their economic cooperation. Both countries have a lot to offer each other in terms of trade and investment. Russia has expertise in areas such as energy, infrastructure, and defence, while Pakistan has a growing market and strategic location. By leveraging their strengths, the two countries can work towards developing mutually beneficial economic ties.

Defence and security could be major areas of collaboration. Although Pakistan has historically been a US ally, its relationship with the US has been strained in recent years. Russia, on the other hand, has been growing its influence in the region. By forging closer ties, Pakistan and Russia can work together to counter regional security threats, including terrorism. Lastly,

cultural and people-to-people exchanges can also play a crucial role in strengthening the ties between the two countries. Both countries have rich cultural histories and can learn a lot from each other. Increased

tourism, student exchanges, and cultural events can help build bridges between the two nations and promote greater understanding and cooperation.

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