



## Regional Dynamics and Russian Security Strategy in South Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan and India

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### Abstract

*The Policy of Russia towards South Asia has recently become the subject of numerous speculations. As ties between Russia and China, it is apparent that Russia is gradually getting rid of the India-centric policy in South Asia. Moreover, its behavior towards Pakistan is also changing at regional and international levels. This study critically analyzed the transformations in the Russian strategy about South Asia owing to changed scenario of international power structure. The regional dynamic of South Asia has been discussed to comprehend the transformations in Russian strategy towards South Asia and particularly India and Pakistan. It is argued that the security interests have promoted Russia to change its policies by balancing the power equation with USA by cooperating with China and Pakistan. It was also found that, though Russia-India relations lack the passion of past but still a valuable driver of Russian behavior in South Asia.*

**Key Words:** Indo-Pak Competition, Multipolarity, Regional Dynamics of South Asia, Security Strategy of Russia

### Introduction

Russia's policy towards South Asia is based on different circumstances like promotion of regionalism concept, warm water access, and countering US interest in this region. Historically, quest of Russia for warm water access became the cause of frequent military conflicts. Invasion of USSR on Afghanistan was an attempt of warm water access with different other objectives like to control Khyber Pass, antique trade way to China and need to one step closer with Iran as well as Middle Eastern countries. Russian desire for warm water access did not end with its withdrawal from Afghanistan (Mishra, 1990). The world's largest gas reservoirs need badly to link herself with global market. Historically Soviet-Union foreign policy is based on India centric. However, the changing dynamics of the region reduced gaps between Russia and Pakistan. When NATO troops will be out, then this strategic collaboration will be more fruitful. Considering this scenario, it has provided further changes to the leadership of both countries to redraft the chapter regarding Pak-Russia's bilateral relations. Russian foreign policy includes increase in regional influence for curtailing the US hegemony and growing economic influence vis-à-vis China. Consequently, if regional stability improves the opportunity of North-South, then Russia would defiantly become part of this change (Kaura, 2018a).

### Regional Dynamics of South Asia

There are two valuable points that explain the regional dynamic of South Asia (Rizvi, 2018). First is there is no common external security threat in response to which whole South Asia stand together. But the miserable condition is that South Asian states consider India as common enemy which in turn gives rise to blame game and security dilemma. The second point is any measures related to regional trade interdependence in the rubric of

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SAARC or any other initiative will benefit for India. India's domination in trade market is another challenge perceived by other states and especially by its potential rival Pakistan (Dash, 2008).

South Asian region is replete with interstate conflicts, competition, crisis, and warfare. Structural imbalance and Indo-Centric geography is the major cause of conflict in South Asia. South Asian states tend to move towards multilateral approach to rescue their sovereignty from Indian dominance and security policy (Pattanaik, 2016). The Structural asymmetry due to partition and defective distribution of political boundaries of the South Asian region are the chief reasons for instability. The South Asian states were created by intentionally disobeying the historical, cultural and religious relations which merged the different ethnicities and facilitated their free intraregional movement of people. A significant majority of one state became a minority in the bordering state due to formation of political boundaries. The miserable condition of one minority attracted the attention of fellow majority state (Yusin, 2009).

Security policies of Pakistan and especially India due to their leading nature is the second reason for persistent conflicts in South Asia (Javaid, 2014). Besides fragmentation of South Asia into small states, India is still largest multi-ethnic state in which all the South Asian nations are present in high magnitude. Thereby, India sought to merge the security of her independent peripheries to establish a British kind of sub-continental security framework. Indian grand strategy revolves around securing the northwest frontier of Indian, resist any foreign influence in South Asia, taking control over Indian ocean and its environs. Indian strategy to achieve regional autonomy by opposing external influence in South Asian affairs is still hypothetical (Mahajan, 2015). South Asian states perceive such kind of framework as threat to their sovereignty and independence which in turn producing security dilemmas. However, Bhutan and Nepal are exceptional cases to some extent due to their lethal dependency on India for all their import and export outside the world. Pakistan always seeks foreign assistance in diplomacy, economy, and security to enhance her comparative capability vis-à-vis India. China, Gulf States, and America remained vital assistants to Pakistan in undermining Indian hegemony. India is also unable to exert its hypothetical right over Sri Lank and Bangladesh because New Delhi cannot fulfill their economic needs and these peripheries are not surrounded by India like Nepal and Bhutan. Thereby, these smaller states sought foreign economic cooperation and accept Chinese ready temperament to support their autonomy (Chattopadhyay, 2011; Wagner, 2016). As Indian security policies perceive whole South Asia under its strategic vicinity like that Pakistan considers Kabul as its backyard (Tooba, 2015).

Except for the relation of Indo-Pak and Indo-Bangladesh Muslims, Indian involvement in Sri Lankan civil war is the evidence of this situation. Moreover, this structural asymmetry further bifurcates the region with inadequate distribution of natural resources especially rivers. The bequests of partitions and colonialism which further aided to the border disputes in South Asia Such as Kashmir, Siachen Glacier, Sir Creek, the enclave problem, Durand line and some others (Xiaoping, 2012).

### **Concerns for Russia in South Asia**

Russia's foremost purpose is the security reason which is called Siloviki (Force Structure). Its policy also includes regional military purposes, intelligence agencies' roles, and the military based industrial complex. The backbone of economic relationships between New Delhi and Moscow is the exporting arms to India. Consequently, they have great understanding of the different world issues. This strategic partnership based on nuclear cooperation appears rhetoric than reality. However, this arms market of Masco was threatened by US-Indian ties (Thornton, 2012).

The main reason behind emerging ties with Pakistan is based on the post-withdrawal of the US from this region. After withdrawal, two driving forces of Pakistan-Russia relations are curtailing terrorism and control narcotics smuggling. According Russian viewpoints, the enhanced collaboration is due to two reasons; anti-narcotics/trafficking efforts and anti-terrorism roles. Although there is little publication of this information but diplomats on both sides are sharing intelligence, combined operation against poppy crops and training a capacity building (Kaura, 2018b). Russia has millennium goals in Afghanistan to develop a railroad. Kabul Masco trade has grown dramatically in the previous years in which Russia enjoyed a massive surplus with its desiring interest. Comparatively America and Europe evenly regional countries like India and Iran Russia didn't provide any economic aid to Afghanistan since 2001 (Dörre & Kraudzun, 2012).

## **Russia's Afghanistan Policy vis-à-vis America**

Increasing ties of Russia with Afghanistan is based on her strategic interests that become more crucial after the withdrawal of NATO forces. Due to American as well as Russian agencies sharing information and the support of the northern alliance from Moscow, the defeat of Taliban was accomplished. But with the passage of time Moscow-Washington relationship weakened significantly from 2003 until because of the growing US focuses on this region rather than Taliban government. Due to the worst defeat in Afghanistan Russia always opposed engaging Taliban in any reconciliation process (Kaura, 2018b). Russia proved to be active in Afghanistan's incorporation in SCO but showed reluctance in the view of OSCE i.e. Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as no multilateral effort whether it should build an office in Afghanistan or not (Kuchins, 2014). In prediction, Russia will be in a careful manner to protect Russia and Central Asia from pathologies regarding across the border. Pathologies could be from the deep-seated Islamists groups or individuals on one side while drug trafficking on the other side (Ramani, 2017).

## **Transformation in Russia's Policy towards Pakistan**

Pakistan and Russia never enjoyed warmth relations from a historical perspective. It can be said that Pakistan has no independent policy relating to Russia since the Cold War. In the past, Pakistan has built relations Soviet Union considering either American or hostile neighbors. Consequently, there is no bilateral issue between Pakistan and Russia rather than shared aims or attention associated with regional and world political paradigm (Hanif, 2013).

In a historical sense, both countries have many chances to revisits and put a light on the bilateral relations but unfortunately both states remained unable to build cooperative relations. Skipping the mistake in 1947, Pakistan got two chances in attaining the breakthrough not only with the USSR but also with the rest of the international community also politically as well economically. Firstly, after the 1965 war with India, Pakistan could not resolve the Kashmir Issue in Tashkent conference, although the situation was in favor of Pakistan like China was in full support to Islamabad, America intention to resolve this problem and Soviet Union keen interest to take credit of this long-lost pending issue. Tactlessly, Pakistani leadership failed to achieve these desiring goals. Later in 1974, visit of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto to Moscow proved a great accomplishment in melting ice between both countries and resultantly a steel mill was founded by the USSR. But the attack of Soviets changed the whole scenario and Pakistan had long lasting fight known as proxy war on verge of United States. However, after Cold War and 9/11 incident both countries fail to attain cordiality in their ties due to Taliban factor (Hussain, 2012).

Recently both countries pushed for greater engagement across the board. It was a common thought that the strategic partnership could not be achieved as there were anguish bilateral relations in the past. Pakistan, the main beneficiary for the military support from the United States, remained stuck with America, as Soviets got India on their side in the Cold war period. In this existing situation, Pakistan as a member of SEATO as well as ENTO focused on restricting the Soviets' control in this area (Rana, 2017).

Though Russia had not restrained history in this region but has created new points strategically as well as politically and in Pakistan it can be seen in recent years. Driving forces that complied with Russia in pursuit of Pakistan policy in general and typically in this region, Russia wanted to pursue the policies regarding multi-vectored in reaction to the geopolitical shifting as NATO troops withdrew (Afridi & Afridi, 2015). Russia is focusing to attain prescribed objectives via SCO. That's why Russia focused on to grant Pakistan full membership of SCO. Russia stated justification alike about Pakistan as it joined in May 2012 while Sergei Lavrov gave his statement about India and Pakistan, "we should take an active part in all international discussions on Afghanistan, coordinating our positions and stressing the SCO's readiness to contribute to efforts by the international community aimed at the political and economic revival of Afghanistan" ("Russia Calls," 2012). Moscow is looking for Pakistan as a suitable buyer of defense items in upcoming years. Russia wants to attain Pakistani support for controlling Muslim insurgents at domestic level. Russia is emphasizing to play a leading role in all spheres of influence in adjacent territories as well as South Asian region. Another factor is to check USA influence in this region (Naqvi & Masood, 2017).

## Decreasing Warmth Relations of India and Russia

Russian Prime Ministers Putin and Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani meeting on two consecutive summits in Dushanbe and Petersburg respectively was a declaration of new ties. A statement was given by Prime Minister Putin that, "Pakistan today is not only an important trade and economic partner of Russia but also the most important Russian partner in South Asia and in the Islamic world." The changing of Russia's policies regarding south Asia especially India, as it had Moscow on its side always, is due to the imbalance between New Delhi and Washington over the military-politics coalition to halt the strategic interests of Russia as well as China." (Mahmood & Baloch, 2013).

Russia has continued to enlarge relations with India in August 2012 with the celebration of 65 years friendship and 41 anniversary of India Russia friendship treaty. Indian political experts consider Russia is the main strategic partner of Bharat. India is emerging global power in upcoming scenario and Masco wants to seek its support in upcoming political milieu (Joshi & Sharma, 2017).

The indo-Russian relationship is recognized as military-technical support. In accordance with the report of Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Russia transferred some material in the sense of arms database counted \$6.415 billion into 2011 and this figure could be increased approximately 40 percent in 2012. In mentioned years Russia exported Arms substances to India known as the highest importer of arms material. In a decade consisted of 2001 to 2012 the total amount of an arms export was counted \$21 billion brought by Russia that is highest figure of China's arms export \$19.8 billion granted to India in the same decade (Rekha, 2016).

Indo-Russian relations known as the cornerstone in the strategic scenario stated that the incumbent President of Russia Putin. Some experts are of the view that India as a great worth in the eyes of Russia due to having an important strategic position in South Asia while Russia is a diehard supporter to get made India as a permanent member of Security Council. Although Indo-Russian relationship is increasing in the sense of defense or logistic support, yet India has shown some aggression to Russian policy having tendency to Pakistan (Purushothaman, 2015). The Deputy Prime Minister of Russia named Dmitry Rogozin had to clarify to India that Moscow is not supporting Islamabad as well as New Delhi. Along with this it is said that the Russian interests have convergence to India rather than Pakistan therefore in distinct years Russia supported to India in enhancing the energy sector of the country by making some mega blueprints such as Kudankulam nuclear power plant (KNPP) 2012 and third and fourth of mentioned power plant in the series of six in 2013 and 2014 (Anupama, 2017).

Russian foreign policies towards South Asia can be divided into two major periods i.e., the Soviet period and the Russian period. In pre-Cold War period, the former Soviet Union intended towards South Asia in November 1955 when Nikita Khrushchev visited India and started foreign aid program towards India. Later, bilateral relations were got strengthened and the officials of both countries intermittently. Despite this warmth in relations, India remained nonaligned in Cold War in contrast to Pakistan who turned into the frontline ally of US in the Cold War. Pakistan's role in disintegration of Soviet empire is evident (Mishra, 1990).

When the division of the Soviet Union occurred then this change altered the world scenario from bipolarity to unipolarity and United States remained only the superpower to have its influence in any part of the globe. Primarily, US tried to establish its supremacy having stress on constitutionalism, efficiency, and validity. After the period of Soviet Union partition, Russian federation kept its focus on the national situation. In the foremost decade after breaking up of Soviet Union, as it were unrest, disorder, and serious challenges but Russia did not separate itself instead it built relations with China politically as well as economically and became a member of IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank as well. It was very shocking related to Russian masses because of political chaos, confusion, losing identity and status as well. Many problems came up politically and economically, but Russia faced it overwhelming much efforts. Therefore, its identity among international communities was determined by its domestic position. Subsequently, Russia limited its actions internationally during this decade. Sino-Russian goals in South Asian region will risk the US try to hold itself in this region and the exercise impacts on the related elites will also be affected in its neighboring states.

## Simultaneous Presence of Russia, China, India, and Pakistan in SCO

Many different actors are playing their roles to secure their interests in South Asia after the Cold war. The end of Cold War had called forth the wave of foreign policy realignment as fifteen new states came into existence

after the disintegration of USSR. Moreover, the inimical consequences of American unilateralism were revealed by world in Gulf War. China and Russia joined hands through Shanghai Five which triggered USA to realign with India to counter possible China-led economic axis. The evolution of re-alignment gave new aspects to regional dynamics and the strategic stability of South Asia.

Moscow gave the opinion that the solution for regional problems lies in the increased role for the utmost illustrative organization in this region i.e. SCO. Members are expected to remove the informal block for the new states to enroll which was imposed in 2006 and following this condition, Pakistan and India became the formal members of SCO in 2017. There is a dire need to resolve the delicate border issues between two countries and Russia would be an effective mediator (Qadir & Rehman, 2016). India and Pakistan are arch-rivals and there is unlikely to be coincidence in their mutual interests so SCO can provide the platform to decrease their bilateral tension in the presence of external factors (Thoker & Singh, 2017).

SCO charter is well defined, and its objectives include toning up mutual trust, political and economic relations, education and cultural exchange and cope with emerging climate change. The security model of this organization revolves around military cooperation to counteract the regional and domestic threats which mainly includes the drugs and arms as well as terrorism and organized crimes. Coalition countries are fighting against extremism, terrorism, and separatism and in this regard, they are taking exercises on behalf of military ground, air and naval grounds to improve their capabilities. Military exercises indicate that the member states are fighting against a common enemy. These three evils are widely present in the member states and pose a great threat to their national integrity and autonomy (Aris, 2009). An innovative approach of SCO was the formation of RATS i.e. Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. RATS Headquarter is an excellent center to share the secret information related to three evils of separatism, extremism, and terrorism. It is like a data bank about the terrorist activities and it organizes seminars to reduce or eradicate terrorism, provides specialized training and maintains interaction with other international security organizations. There has been a healthy collaboration between judicial system, security agencies related to law enforcement, the chief prosecutor, secretaries and ministers of member states (de Haas, 2016).

It has been mentioned in the charter of SCO that the core role of the organization is to fight against three problems which are terrorism, extremism, and separatism. Tendencies to these evils are widely present in SCO states. Newly members Pakistan and India are extremely infested by these challenges. SCO objectives are so lofty and profound that without regional cooperation such objectives can't be achieved. Haunted by these evils, turbulent Pakistan and India have no chance except cooperation under the auspicious of SCO. In this regard SCO provides a prime platform for both countries to fight against common enemy and get rid of mutual hostility. It is dire need of time that Pakistan and India solve their bilateral tension by negotiation and diplomacy and SCO is big glimmer of hope in this regard (Siddiqi, 2018). It is mandatory for every member of SCO to participate in the joint military exercises of RATS. Apart from joint military exercise, all the countries are obliged to exchange secret information concerning terrorism. It happened first time in the past of Pakistan and India that both countries became the part of combined military drill of SCO Peace Mission against terrorism held in 2018 in Russia. It is good omen for both neighboring states to root out the menace of terrorism, extremism, and sectarianism to prosperity and stability. After getting the platform of SAARC both arch-rivals are going to stand permanently under the umbrella of another regional organization known as SCO.

The guarantee of submissive behavior among India and Pakistan could be difficult (Kazmi, 2018). However, the tranquillity of both countries in SCO since 2005 shows their willingness to cooperate at multilateral stage. It is speculated that by joining India and Pakistan of SCO, China is trying to secure its Silk Road project because these two countries can blow up this project. Except all speculations, Indo-Pak conflict has come on such a platform that has the potential to facilitate dialogue between the two rivals. Although it seems like a fantasy, the halted peace dialogues and frozen economic cooperation can be resumed. Moreover, New Delhi's apprehensions about Pakistan's dual role in terrorism can be reduced by taking help from antiterrorist structure of SCO. If now any crisis between India and Pakistan arises then the other member states will see it as an attempt to undermine regional security. Therefore, member states will force them to wipe out confrontation. However, India and Pakistan are important for other member states in such a way that both countries are responsible for the success

of one belt one road project having involved all the members of SCO either directly or indirectly. (Freeman, 2018).

Russia and China are a pivotal member of the organization can influence South Asian stability. SCO can achieve number of benefits from Pakistan. Pakistan can deter the rising Indo-US ties due to US pivot to Asia policy. Pakistan provides shortest route to Arabian Sea for SCO states. Pakistan is also an active member of another Eurasian economic and political organization called ECO. Pakistan can play the role of mediator in boosting up the relationship between two countries. Strong ties between ECO and SCO can greatly influence the strategic environment of Eurasian region and improve the security of more than half of the global humanity. Pakistan has ability to enhance its trade because of its free trade agreement with ECO as well as China keeping SAARC as well. Pakistan's efforts against terrorism are remarkable and SCO can take benefit of its expertise in combating three evils in relative areas. Pakistan mostly sought American and western markets to buy weapon for its military stock but now under the SCO, Pakistan may divert its arms trade with Russia (Zeb, 2018).

India is seeking a difficult way to access central Asia from Iran. SCO can provide an opportunity for India to access central Asia by becoming part of silk route. This is only possible when Indo-Pak bilateral relations will be good, and SCO has again the ability to solve this issue. Terrorism, Afghanistan stability, human rights violation in Kashmir, cross border terrorism in India and Pakistan, connectivity of South Asian region with central Asia and Indian border disputes with China are some areas regarding South Asia that can be addressed at the forum SCO. It is believed that if SCO will become more effective and powerful if it succeeds in improving bilateral relations of the two South Asian rivals. Indo-Russia ties, Pak-China ties, Indo-Pak mistrust, Indo-China disputes are considered as some physical and technological impediments which may reduce the SCO effectiveness (Volkhonsky, 2018).

## Conclusion

The policy of Russian government can be evaluated in the sense of changes in regional as well as internationally. The US is losing control over the region and China, on the other hand, proving itself to be assertive and changing the direction of the scenario. China has its strong economic corridor so can be the source of bridge to fulfill the gap between Russia and India. The national interests of India and Russia determine the durability of their mutual relationship. A strong Russian Chinese and Pakistanis alliance should play a leading role to compel India to be part of an anti-Russian bloc. The fundamental strategic synergy of India with Russia is to support a multipolar order in which India can evolve as a dominant power. An assertive and friendly Russia is essential to maintain an ideal international balance. As the defensive attitudes between Pakistan and China are going to strengthen and there is a need to manage the powers in the South Asian region. Therefore, India will seek for strong partnership between Japan and America. That would be good omen to establish power equilibrium in the region.

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