

EMERGING COOPERATION BETWEEN CHINA-RUSSIA AND PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Over the past decade, the relationship between neighboring giants China and Russia has evolved from being a union formed out of convenience into one that holds immense strategic importance for both countries. One of the interesting dimensions of this strategic partnership is their growing interest in cultivating a strong relationship with Pakistan. China and Pakistan have marked a new era of emboldening their economic ties via CPEC, diplomatic ties through common framework of partnership and security ties as both countries cooperate on all military matters including joint military exercises. Russia on the other hand was always considered a traditional ally of India but has shifted its focus towards Pakistan and is boosting its military and diplomatic ties with Pakistan. The new emerging axis of China-Pakistan-Russia is inevitable as it stems from the congruence of interests between the countries: However, it is not without its share of challenges and any amount of distrust from either side can create fault lines.

Key Words: Geopolitics, China-Pakistan-Russia, Strategic Triangle, CPEC, Balance of Power

Introduction

China and Russia have strengthened their partnership considerably over the last decade. The first overseas visit undertaken by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Russia in 2013 highlighted the importance of this alliance in

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China's foreign strategy¹ symbolizing an effort undertaken to fortify relations with Russia. In addition, a statement was issued by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi on their plans to strengthen the relationship between the two countries with the aim to safeguard world peace and stability². The two countries have also shown interest in cultivating stronger relationship with Pakistan.

In recent years, Russia has taken increased political interest in Pakistan. Pakistan had remained almost invisible in Russia's foreign policy due to the prime reason that the former was a supporter of United States during cold war and thereafter during the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. However, in 2008, Russia's foreign policy document made references to developing relations with Pakistan and leading regional states³. Bilateral trade between the two countries has increased substantially with over 33% percent increase as compared to previous years; the trade between the two counties has now reached to a total volume of \$541 million as compared to \$400 million in year 2017.⁴ In terms of security, Russia lifted the self-imposed embargo on Pakistan in November 2014⁵, which earlier limited their cooperation in the areas of security and bilateral trade. Thereafter, military cooperation strengthened with Pakistan and a major military cooperation agreement was signed between Russia and Pakistan⁶. The cooperation entailed exchanging information on political and military issues, increasing collaboration in new sectors such as counter-terrorism and defense, having similar view points on Afghanistan and strengthening business cooperation.

China, on the other hand has always been considered as an 'all-weather' friend of Pakistan. The strain in Pak-US bilateral ties, sequel to President Trump's decision to suspend the Pakistani security assistance worth \$1.3 billion⁷ has further brought China and Pakistan closer to each other. This has further increased China's interest to invest in this 'all weather' partnership. Economically, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is yielding substantial dividends in terms of strengthening transport, port and industrial

¹ Sheng Wang and Xiao Luo, "Building a New Type of Sino-Russian Relationship," *Contemporary International Relations*, (2013): 89.

² Yi Wang. "China-Russia Strategic Coordination Has Become the Ballast Stone of Safeguarding World Peace and Stability," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China*. December 3, 2016. Accessed June 2, 2018 at: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1421647.shtml

³ Vladimir Moskalenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," Carnegie Moscow Center, (2014)

⁴ "Pak-Russia bilateral trade shows 33pc increase," APP, February 19, 2018.

⁵ Zachary Keck, "Russia Ends Arms Embargo against Pakistan," *Diplomat*, June 04, 2014.

⁶ Baqir Sajjad, "Pakistan, Russia sign landmark defense cooperation agreement," November 21, 2014

⁷ Michael Peel and Kiran Stacey, "Pakistan turns to Russia and China after US military aid freeze," *Financial Times*, January 28, 2018.

infrastructure. Besides, the people to people exchanges and generating power for both China and Pakistan. In terms of security, the prominent form of assistance and support given by China to Pakistan would be to support Pakistan's civil nuclear program⁸ and enable the sale of submarines⁹ built in China to Pakistan.

Theoretical Framework

Realists and neo-realists recurrently use the concept of Balance of power (BOP). The concept simply implies that a state forms alliance with another state to balance the power of a more powerful state, in order to maintain equilibrium. In history, BOP was evident in Cold War (1945-1991) and a balance of power was maintained between the western powers and the eastern powers. At present the five nuclear powers; China, U.S, Russia, India, and Pakistan, maintain balance of power through their strategies in Asian continent, especially in South Asia. In the case of balancing, according to TV Paul there are three key types of balancing; hard, soft and asymmetric¹⁰. In the case of South Asia, states are pursuing soft balancing¹¹; Russia China and Pakistan are developing an alliance to balance the US and Indian strategic alliance in the region.

Development of a Cooperative Mechanism between China–Russia and Pakistan

China and Russia have strengthened their positions, polices and cooperation on political and security issues. Political leadership of China, Russia and Pakistan has also analyzed the threats and development of the international system in a similar manner. Most prominent is how they regard U.S intentions and behavior in terms of using sanctions on other countries and limiting their economic potentials.

In larger political spheres, Beijing, Moscow and Islamabad have a similar discourse on how they perceive U.S. In the case of China, it is U.S Pivot Asia, also known as Re-balancing Asia; an indirect threat for the Chinese regional interests. For the Russian Federation, it is the expansion of NATO into the post-Soviet independent states, where NATO is posing direct and indirect threats for Russia. For the Pakistan, it is the growing military

⁸ “China ‘to build third Hualong One nuclear reactor’ in Pakistan,” South China Morning Post, November 25, 2017.

⁹ “China-Pakistan military ties set to get even closer as ‘iron brothers’ eye new alliance,” South China Morning Post, January 7, 2018.

¹⁰ Snyder Glenn, *Alliance Politics*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 4

¹¹ T.V Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of U.S Primacy." *International Security*, (2005):47

cooperation between US and India, posing a serious threat, along eastern as well as western frontiers besides, the asymmetric warfare within Pakistan. While China does not pursue an outward policy of confrontation with U.S, Russia and Pakistan have expressed dissatisfaction when it comes to the approach of U.S in the war in Afghanistan.

A destabilized Afghanistan poses great threat for the regional countries, especially; Pakistan, China and Russia. However, instability in Afghanistan provides a pretext for the U.S to prolong its strategic presence there and keep destabilizing the region for the realization of its strategic interests. India is also being benefitted from volatility in Afghanistan, since it uses Afghan geopolitics for its geo-strategic and geo-economic interest. India uses Afghan soil against its rivals and promotes its interests in Central Asian region. Through its financial investment, Indian has attained the acceptability of Afghan authorities and a strong backing of United States, since both pursue common economic and strategic interests.

On the other hand, being the regional countries, China, Russia and Pakistan have convergence of interests both; strategic as well as economic interests. In 2016, Chinese President expressed his interest in collaborating with Russia in the high profile ‘One Belt One Road initiative (OBOR), renamed as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).¹² The initiative connects the landlocked part of China with vital European markets through infrastructure development of roads and highways eventually connecting with Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) initiative. The Russian led Eurasian Economic Union is an institution formalized in January 2015.¹³

Major objective of EEU is ‘regional economic integration’, currently consisting of five states; Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia, and Kyrgyzstan. There is a likely inclusion of Mongolia and Tajikistan in EEU in next few years. “With a GDP of \$1.59 trillion in 2015, an industrial production of \$1.3 trillion in 2014, and population of almost 200 million as of 2016, the union could represent a geopolitical success that supports both Putin’s ambitious political agenda and the Union’s economic prospects.”¹⁴ Similarly, the BRI has various projects, starting from China to Central Asia and onwards to African continent and Europe. It is indeed, the Chinese response to US Re-balancing of Asia.

¹² Greg Shtraks, “China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative and the Sino-Russian Entente,” National Bureau of Asian Research, August 9, 2016,

¹³ Bruno S.Sergi, Putin’s and Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union: A hybrid half-economics and half-political, *Journal of Eurasian Studies- Volume 9, Issue 1, January 2018*, Pages 52-60. Accessed at; <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366517300258>

¹⁴ Ibid.

Whereas, US uses the concept of hard power and China respond it by soft power, through an economic engagement. The infrastructure projects under China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) will reap economic, social and demographic dividends not only for the two countries but for the region. In this regard, the Gwadar Economic zone which was inaugurated on January 29, 2018¹⁵ brings with it prospects of regional trade and greater economic collaboration between the three countries.

Security wise, these three countries have commonality of interests with respect to United States. President Trump's New National Security Strategy-2017¹⁶ and US South Asian (Afghan) Policy-2017 have created prejudices for Pakistan, China and Russia. The US National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly singles out China and Russia as competitors that have emerged to “challenge American power, influence, and interests.”¹⁷ It also recognizes the strategic significance of space and cyber as new domains, and discusses efforts by adversaries to lower confidence in democratic institutions. Moreover, it spells out that U.S. adversaries and competitors often resort to “gray zone”¹⁸ activities that are coercive yet do not meet the threshold of military action or unlawful behavior.

Upon decision of Trump administration to suspend military aid to Pakistan, the latter plans to strengthen its ties with Russia and China. China, on the other hand, is upgrading its naval capabilities and many analysts see it as a means to challenge U.S. naval supremacy in the region. According to a report released by China’s Department of Defense¹⁹, Chinese Navy; Peoples Liberation Army (N), possesses more than 300 vessels including but not limited to submarines, ships, patrol craft and combat ships. A statement by Xi Jinping in 2017 confirms China’s ambition stating their desire to build a navy that ranks at the highest order globally²⁰. Similarly, for Russia, there is increasing space for confrontation, especially in lieu of their opposing

¹⁵ “Free zone of Gwadar port inaugurated to boost regional development,” Xinhua Net, Saturday January 29, 2018.

¹⁶Yuki Tatsumi, The US National Security Strategy: Implications for the Indo-Pacific The Trump administration makes clear the Indo-Pacific is at the top of its strategic agenda, *The Diplomat*, December 21, 2017. Accessed at: <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/the-us-national-security-strategy-implications-for-the-indo-pacific/>

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹“Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China,” Office of the Secretary of Defense, (2017)

²⁰ “China’s Xi says navy should become world class,” Reuters, May 24, 2017.

position in Syria. The recent threat by President Trump over Russia's position in Syria indicates a volatile moment in the relationship between the two countries in April 2018.²¹

The Future Prospects of Partnership through SCO

On July 10th, 2015 President Vladimir Putin announced acceptance of Pakistan as a member of SCO in its annual summit²². The inclusion of Pakistan in SCO has broader implications for the harmony and stability for South Asia, Afghanistan and Central Asia. Politically, the U.S opposition not being always part of the official rhetoric of three countries, it certainly is an important dimension. SCO has been used in the past by China and Russia to encourage United States to set a time frame for the removal of its troops from Central Asia²³ and the common position towards the conflict in Syria and this was expressed in Bishkek Declaration²⁴. The three countries have the potential to come together due to their common stance towards regional players and opposition towards U.S intervention in Afghanistan and region.

For regional stability, peace in Afghanistan is a crucial factor and could be a strong contributing factor of the convergence of a similar stance adopted by Russia, China and Pakistan from the platform of SCO. A continued political instability in Afghanistan will have devastating repercussions for Pakistan, China and Russia and in the current scenario where Afghan security situation is deteriorating with each passing day, much remains to be achieved. It was because of this rationale; SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group was created in 2005 to proactively contribute in Afghanistan's inner matters by adopting supportive measures to create sustainable harmony in Afghanistan²⁵. President Putin has asserted that the greatest security threats facing the region emanated from Afghanistan and the central concern of SCO are terrorism that hampers regional peace and stability²⁶. To ensure regional security and to enhance regional stability, a stronger coordination between China-Russia-Pakistan is needed.

Economically, SCO has been seeking to enable economic co-operation through mutual trade among member states to become a more viable

²¹ "US-Russia tensions build as Moscow hits back at Trump's Twitter threat," *Guardian*, April 11, 2018.

²² "Pakistan, India join Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Dawn*, July 11, 2015

²³ Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership," *International Affairs* (2004): 296-298

²⁴ "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Discusses Syria in Bishkek," *The Moscow Times*, September 13, 2013.

²⁵ Raj Sharma, "SCO's Role In Afghanistan: Prospects and Challenges," no 24, *Mainstream Weekly*, 2015

²⁶ "Afghanistan threat on agenda for Xi, Putin at summit, says China," *Japan Times*, July 6, 2015

organization. For this purpose, it established Interbank Association in 2005 and a business Council in 2006²⁷. It was in the spirit of broader economic cooperation that SCO Development Fund was created. SCO expansion will sow the seeds for regional stability and will positively contribute towards the national interest of its members. As emphasized during the SCO Summit, took place in June 2018, the Minister of Commerce Gao Feng asserted that SCO members enjoy strong trade ties²⁸. In terms of estimates, China trade volume with other members rose to \$217.6 billion in 2017 which is an increase of 19% from the previous year. The structure of SCO is in essence conducive to encourage fruitful investments as evidenced by Chinese investment which has increased to approximately \$84 billion with SCO member states.

The spirit of SCO restrains from coercion in international affairs and due to its consent-based decision-making process, it instills assurance in its members. This is a new phase of regionalism where the member countries of SCO; China, Russia, and Pakistan can favor regional collaboration while operating under the umbrella of the organization to resolve the major issues of security due to the problems caused by terrorism, extremism and separatism. The fact that the consensus approach that drives the decision-making process in SCO prevents coercive cooperation. Undoubtedly, no regional organization can replace bilateral relations that countries neither utilize nor are able to resolve long-standing tensions between confrontational neighbors.

SCO has the potential to reduce the tensions between the conflicting parties by utilizing its diplomatic methods to influence achieve consensus. The fact that both Pakistan and India have been admitted together in SCO, manifests that member countries like China and Russia realize the sensitivities of Indo-Pak relations. The leading members share a unique relation with India and Pakistan. While Russia has closer ties with India, China has closer relations with Pakistan and they would not desire to offend either while being part of SCO.

Pakistan has been the victim of extremism, terrorism and separatism, the three core concerns identified by SCO. The fact that most terrorist organizations work through strong transnational networks therefore,

²⁷ Julie Boland, "Ten Years of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: A Lost Decade? A Partner for the U.S?," 21st Century Defense Initiative Policy Paper, *Brookings*, (2011): 14-15

²⁸ "SCO makes remarkable achievements in economic and trade cooperation," *People's Daily*, June 7, 2018

combating them single-handedly by one country may not a viable strategy. To ameliorate this problem, an effective counterterrorism strategy that allows the states to come together must be formulated. Since its formulation, SCO has been engaged in countering the menace of terrorism and created Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) in Tashkent, Uzbekistan in 2003²⁹ with the main purpose of coordinating non-military actions to tackle this problem. Post Bishkek summit in 2007, 1600 Chinese soldiers 2000 Russian military personnel and defense forces from Tajikistan Kazakhstan Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan took part in joint counter-terrorism military exercise known as Peace mission 2007³⁰. The inclusion of Pakistan to RATS will facilitate in a joint counter terrorism strategy to dismantle the safe havens of terrorism in both South Asia and Eurasia.

SCO could also be a significant platform to strengthen the cultural exchanges between China, Pakistan and Russia. During the Shanghai Summit Declaration on June 15, 2006 where SCO claimed that diversity in cultural traditions, values and model of development and course of history should not be taken as a pretext to interfere in other countries affairs³¹. It can be garnered from this development that SCO respects differences in civilizations and stresses upon conducting exchanges amongst civilization on an equal basis which leads to enhanced collaboration.

A Critical Analysis of the Challenges Facing the Partnership

a. Pakistan-China Partnership

While China and Pakistan have been classically termed as ‘all-weather friends’, the relationship has its share of constraints. In the past, the suspicion by Chinese authorities that Uyghur militants were operating in Pakistan and fueling terrorist incidents in Xinjiang province of China was pre-dominant³². The fact that Xinjiang has been prone to a terrorist incidents as well as increasing fundamentalism increased concerns of Chinese government regarding Pakistan’s actions to fight terrorism³³. However, Pakistani military operations against terrorists organizations; both local and foreigners have proved that, Pakistan does not allow its soil to be used by any terrorist organization or any country. Both China and Russia have been

²⁹ Marcel Haas, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the OSCE: Two of a kind?,” *Clingendael* (2014):248

³⁰ “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Holds Biggest War Games Ahead of Leaders’ Summit,” *VOA*, October 27, 2009

³¹ “Moscow, Beijing to sign declaration on world order,” *RIA Novosti*, June 29, 2005.

³² “Pakistan Tells China that All Uyghur Terrorists were Annihilated,” *Voice of America*, September 23, 2015.

³³ “US News Media: The Problem of The New Silk Road: Needs to Solve the Threat of Terrorism,” Accessed June 2, 2018, <http://finance.takungpao.com.hk/hgjj/q/2014/0505/2457376.html>

globally appreciating the role played by Pakistan towards combating the extremism, terrorism and separatism.

Economically while CPEC projects are considered to be a game changer, the security threats, posed by terrorism and internal insecurity and instability in Pakistan would have implications for the smooth running of the project³⁴. Chinese analysts had fear that the projects' construction sites and personals may be targeted by extremists due to previous incidence of attack on Chinese engineers by militants³⁵.

Indeed, Pakistan Army took over the responsibility for the security of CPEC right from the beginning. For this purpose, a special force of a division plus size was raised under a Major General, called Special Security Division (SSD). This security division is fully functional now with a force of 15000 men and officers. The troops having been trained on the lines of Special Services Group (SSG) and counter terrorism force. These men assumed their duties in those areas, where developmental work is going on the CPEC. Furthermore, with respect to security, there has been no incident of breach of security (except mentioned above and an attempt of terrorism against Chinese Consulate at Karachi in November 2018), ever since this project started. Over the period, the aspects related to security of CPEC, raised by various quarters have been addressed.

Pakistan and China desire that regional countries to take part in this project of economic prosperity. In this regard, Afghanistan and Iran are two significant countries, which may join the project at later stages. Pakistan, China and Russia needs to have consensus on all issues by formulating supplementing policies for each other's benefit. CPEC is a project of immense economic potential for Pakistan and all regional states. With its completion, there will be major economic activity all over Pakistan, western China and neighboring countries. CPEC entered into a new phase in 2017-2018, touching more critical and sensitive areas of trade, industrialisation and financial settlement systems.

However, the project faces its share of complications. While the quantum of investments in the power sector, and loans for road projects, currently under implementation are worth \$27 billion by the Planning Commission, estimates suggest that these would add to foreign repayment

³⁴ Shi Zhiqin, Lu Yang, "The Benefits and Risks of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," Carnegie Tsinghua Center, December 21, 2016

³⁵ Mayank Pratap Singh, "Baloch Rebels Attack Dudher Project Site, 2 Chinese Engineers Killed, Many Hurt," India Today, September 28, 2016.

obligations by \$3bn to 3.5bn per annum over the next few years³⁶. Pakistan faces economic constraints towards re-payment of this foreign investment.

The long-term success of this project hinges upon the extent to which China and Pakistan promote the free flow of capital in an orderly manner and enhance the facilitation in cross-border transfer of legitimate funds and open up their financial sector to each other. In November 2018, Pakistani Foreign Minister and his Chinese counterpart reiterated timeframe of CPEC completion and also reiterated to continue work on all on-going projects between Pakistan and China, CPEC being the most favourite. In this regard, China needs to address the multiple Pakistani concerns. Visit of Prime Minister, Imran Khan has made some progress; however, there is no documentary evidence available to really assess the outcome of the visit and the reservations made by Financial Advisor, Abdul Razzaq Dawood. Despite all these, CPEC will be implemented for the common good of Pakistan and China.

Chinese Consul General in Pakistan, Long Dingbin has said that, “Instead of hard cash, China plans to eventually provide multiple forms of bailout packages [to Pakistan] in the shape of phenomenal investments in fresh projects.”³⁷ This would provide a chance for Pakistan to overcome its financial crisis. During the visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to Beijing, fifteen new agreements have been signed between Pakistan and China. All these agreements are aimed to an enhanced “cooperation in politics and the financial sector and will also improve cultural ties.”³⁸

b. Pakistan-Russia Partnership

Russia and Pakistan started coming closer to each other towards the beginning of 21st Century. Though there has been an enthusiasm on both sides, yet they had their own limitations and constraints. First and foremost, of these are the fears that reside in Russian circles to not offend India. The possible cooperation between Russia and Pakistan especially in areas of missile technology, strike aircraft, missile defense and submarine technology has been viewed with pessimism by India³⁹. In 2007, Pakistan was the recipient of JF-17 thunder Jet fighters which were jointly developed by

³⁶ Khaleeq Kiani, “CPEC enters most crucial phase.” DAWN, Dec 25, 2017.

³⁷ China to provide 'multiple forms of bailout packages' to Pakistan, Dawn, December 2, 2018. Accessed at; <https://www.dawn.com/news/1448985/china-to-provide-multiple-forms-of-bailout-packages-to-pakistan-official>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ H. V. Pant, “The Pakistan Thorn in China-India-U.S. Relations,” Washington Quarterly (2012): 85

Pakistan and China and fitted with Russian RD-93 engines⁴⁰. The fear to upset India remains a pertinent factor in Russia-Pakistan relations. This was also evident when the Dushanbe Four Summit in Pakistan in 2012 was derailed by President Putin who decided not to visit Islamabad until he visited New Delhi and Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was sent to Pakistan instead⁴¹. Russia has deep and enduring strategic, economic and political relationship with India, which runs counter to Pakistani interests.

Another factor that still hasn't evolved in the context of Russia-Pakistan economic relations is the lack of confidence of Russian investors in Pakistan. The way investors perceive doing business in Pakistan is heightened by concerns of Moscow about the security of its personnel and investments. Case in point is the North-South gas pipeline whereby the project agreement signed in October 2015 was expected to be concluded in December 2017 faced a stalemate⁴². The project aimed to connect Karachi's Liquefied Natural Gas terminal with those of Lahore through an 1100-kilometer-long pipeline with a capacity of 12.4 cubic meters per annum, but, did not progress. This was mainly due to Pakistan insisting on reducing the LNG fees despite it being revised twice.⁴³ The Russian companies were reluctant to approve these changes and expressed concern that this would delay the project⁴⁴. While Moscow remains eager to cooperate with Pakistan to develop infrastructure projects, this can only be ensured if there are more confidence building measures between Pakistan, Russia and China with assurances for the long-term security of investments.

Over the past decade, the developments at bi-lateral level have paved the way for a deeper cooperation between Pakistan and Russia, whereas, Pakistan already has deeper military relationship with China. One such development is signing of an agreement between Pakistan and Russia for training of Pakistani troops and officers in Russia. The agreement is result of lot of homework between Russia and Pakistan, spreading over last two decades. It is indeed, a beginning of a new cooperative mechanism in the defense cooperation between Pakistan and Russia.

⁴⁰ "The RD-93 Engine Was Found Highly Reliable," *Voenno-Promyshlennyy Kur'er*, March 22, 2013.

⁴¹ Vladimir Moskalenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, (2014): 9-12.

⁴² "Pakistan Russia Sign Agreement for Construction of North-South Gas Pipeline," *Dawn*, October 16, 2015.

⁴³ Zafar Bhutta, "\$2b North-South pipeline: Pakistan asks Russia to further cut LNG supply fee", *Express Tribune*, February 11, 2017.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*

c. **China-Russia Partnership**

There has been a gradual rapprochement between China and Russia, starting from the decade of 1990. The events following the US invasion of Afghanistan, gave a new impetus to this trend of closeness against a common adversary. Despite this growing closeness, there is a historical weakness in China-Russia partnership. China's potential to be a strategic threat to Russia increased post-Cold-War as many analysts pointed out the growing asymmetry of economic power of both states.

In 1980, Soviet Union's GDP was five times higher than that of China but by the end of 1990s, China's GDP was five times higher than Russia and the economic gap continued to widen since then. Chinese military expenditures increased since 1990s and from early 2000s it exceeded Russia. In 2000, China's military expenditure was roughly equal to Russia (\$30 billion) and by 2010 China's military budget (\$110 billion) surpassed Russia (\$50 billion).⁴⁵

In Russian political and academic circles apprehensions persisted regarding China as source of danger. Another leading academician, Alexei Bogaturov asserted that China was a formidable geopolitical rival of Russia. Various opinion polls at that time showed China ranking second in Russia's potential enemies list in public perception⁴⁶.

China and Russia also have different approaches with respect to their economies. While China focused on strengthening its commercial and manufacturing power and embraced international economic integration, Russia, on the other hand showed less interest in enhancing its economic integration. As the competition in the area of research and development increases in the 21st century, Russia faces the problem of garnering sufficient financial resources to cater to the demands of the education sector and research.

China on the other hand has strengthened its research-based programs and has diversified its economy by adopting the latest trends. It has cultivated a strong economic partnership with Pakistan and other regional countries. While Russia faces the problem of slow growth in its knowledge-based economy due to scarcity of researchers and finances, China succeeds in these areas by encouraging innovation in small and medium private companies.⁴⁷ Harley proposed that Russia should adopt China's example of

⁴⁵ Ibid

⁴⁶ BlackJoseph, *Vladimir Putin and the New World Order: Looking East, Looking West?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004): 36.

⁴⁷ Harley Balzer, Yukon Huang, James F.Collins, "Russia and China in the Global Economy," *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, (2008): 1

embracing globalization⁴⁸. On the other hand, Lowell Dittmer argues that despite Russia's enhanced positive perception of China's economic model, it still retains some condescending views about Beijing⁴⁹.

Way Forward and Conclusion

Following key deductions emerge from the debate, carried out in this research:-

- A willing Russia and an all times friendly China provide Pakistan an excellent alternative mechanism for enhancing and strengthen its military and security ties, particularly in the wake of its fallout with the United States.
- The confidence building measures initiated by China towards Russia, Pakistan and other regional countries need to be enhanced and continued on regular basis. This process is extremely essential for the promotion of regionalism, establishment of peace and promotion of economic cooperation among all regional states.
- The changing and an over ambitious Indian role together with United States, runs counter to regional stability and national interest of Pakistan, China and Russia. As a resurgent power, Russia has a very decisive role to play with a clear focus. It needs to constructively unambiguously engage with China, Pakistan and other regional countries on converging issues. Russia needs to strengthen dialogue between members of military, civil and economic institutions in Pakistan in order to broaden and deepen the cooperation on diverse issues.
- China, Russia and Pakistan need to adopt a common discourse with respect to U.S policies of interventionism and unilateralism with a common aim to bring peace in this region; the South and Central Asia.

China and Russia, the two global powers have shown an active interest in strengthening their relations with Pakistan over the past decade. The drivers of China's growing interest in Pakistan range from political and security in consideration of the political fallout between U.S and Pakistan, and economic, in consideration of China-Pakistan Economic Corridors', a project for the mutual benefit for the two countries.

⁴⁸ Ibid

⁴⁹ Dittmer, Lowell, *Political and Cultural Roots of Sino-Russian Partnership*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012):57.

On the other hand, Pakistan-Russia relations initially remained lukewarm politically, but gradually strengthened in last one decade. Politically, like China, Russia also takes interest in Pakistan to counter U.S influence in the region, while economically the ties between two countries need to be strengthened. The emergence of a strategic triangle between China-Russia and Pakistan, when viewed in terms of balance of power dynamics, stands out being the most significant aspect.

The recent developments in global affairs strengthen the position of this trio; China-Pakistan and Russia on having a similar discourse on how they perceive U.S. reinforces this dynamic. The three countries not only have political convergence, but also economic and military convergences as well. However, this partnership is not devoid of its own problems and weakening bilateral relations between any two countries, part of this troika which can limit their cooperation in any future scenario.

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