

## **Challenges and Prospects for Pak-Russia Relations in the Evolving Multi-polar World**

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### **Introduction**

The Bi-polar World Order on which the Post-World War security was balanced crumbled with the disintegration of Soviet Union in December 1991. Downfall of the Soviet Union was believed by many in the West to be a victory of democracy over the totalitarian system, and the USA had emerged as the sole superpower of the world. American leaders following defeat of Iraq in the first Gulf war (1990-1991) emphasized unique position of the USA as the only superpower. 'End of history' for many had come. Strobe Talbot Deputy Secretary of State stated in 1992 "In the next century, nations as we know will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single global authority."<sup>1</sup> President H.W. Bush had expressed the new found confidence in a uni-polar world when he stated after the first Gulf War, "The world can therefore, seize the opportunity (Persian Gulf Crisis) to fulfill the long held promise of a New World Order, where diverse nations are drawn together in common cause to achieve the universal aspiration of mankind."<sup>2</sup>

The euphoria generated in the US by the demise of USSR however was short lived as some scholars pointed to unreality of the situation in which only one world power would remain supreme for a very long time. The ephemeral nature of uni-polarity and it's surrender to the multiple power centers at the systemic level was anticipated by Christopher Layne, as early as 1993.<sup>3</sup> However, the idea came into full force when Goldman Sach's report, in 2001, revealed the brilliant growth statistics of the BRICS.<sup>4</sup> Another report reviewing the BRICS progress, predicted the possibility of the upcoming N 11<sup>5</sup> as potential growth markets for the world.<sup>6</sup> These statistics increasingly point to the future political and economic power shift to Asia. Timothy Garton Ash explains the situation in his 2004 book;

So the old Atlantic-centered West, which has been shaping the world since about 1500, probably has no more than 20 years left in which it will still be the main world-shaper. That's another reason why it's so stupid for Europeans and Americans to waste any more time squabbling with each other. In a longer

historical perspective, this may be our last chance to set the agenda of world politics.<sup>7</sup>

In another important work on the subject, Richard N. Haas in his 2014 book, explains that contrary to the opinion of many authors who are of the view that the USA does not face a challenge to its security from any country, the uni-polarity of the world in the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be dominated by a system of non-polarity, though America would retain its primary position in the world.

The world has already witnessed the emergence of new power centers though not new poles yet. A resurgent Russian Federation spends approximately US\$ 84.5 billion on military annually, whereas the size of its economy in 2014 reached US\$ 1.1861 trillion. After the Crimean crisis sanctions were imposed against it by the West which adversely affected Russian economy but it still retains a prominent position in the world. China's economic rise has been phenomenal since 2005. Chinese annual military budget is approximately US\$ 216 billion, which is not commensurate with its economy that reached US\$ 10.36 trillion. European Union has evolved into a major economic entity with a combined GDP of US\$ 18.46 trillion in 2014.<sup>8</sup> None of these countries or entities however, poses a major challenge to the primacy of the USA but economic rise of BRICS states has decreased its relative power. Fareed Zaakaria in his seminal work *The Post American World* (2008) called this phenomenon "the third great power shift of the modern world" as not the fall of USA but "the rise of the rest."

### **Evolving Global Scenarios in the Multi-polar World**

The growing relations between the new emerging centers of power might provide the world with an opportunity to cast aside the age old global issues and big powers in the new world order may have preference for a different agenda. What might be their nature is a difficult question to answer at this stage. However the neo-realist and neo-liberals present diverging views regarding the impact of this systemic shift on the global politics. According to John Mearsheimer, the Neo-realists have two significant claims. Firstly, the distribution of power among states will tend to play a crucial role in determining its destiny and secondly, the multi-polar structures are more prone to instability and conflicts than bipolar structures. Thus the revival of multi-polarity at the conclusion of Cold War may unfold conflict and instability among the major European powers.<sup>9</sup>

The Neo-liberals on the other hand, foresee a growing interconnectedness and peace evolving in Western Europe, spreading eventually to its eastern and central flanks. Accordingly, they predict the deviation of world emphasis from Europe as it may not remain the only region of consolidation of wealth and power in next century. But such a scenario cannot be predicted for the other parts of the world. As they foresee the evolution of a multi-polar sub-system quite unlike their European counterparts, in the post-Cold War, eastern flank of Eurasia. According to them the non-structural factors in Europe were developed enough to help smoothen the rough edges inherent in a multi-polar system. However, their absence in Asia makes it the center stage of great power conflict. Thus a greater probability of Europe's past becoming Asia's future is predicted.<sup>10</sup> But for some analysts the prosperity of the forthcoming multi-polar world not only rests on the great power rivalry but also on the behavior of the middle and small powers as well as the potential of non-state actors equipped with nuclear weapons.<sup>11</sup>

The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy concept presents its vision of multi-polarity that unlike the classical realists does not focus on the beginning of instability and conflict but instead it presents a just distribution of power (nuclear arsenal and energy resources) among the emerging new and old power centers and the effective management of global diversity. Something the present World Order, according to them, has failed to achieve. As such it aims at the renunciation of balance of power politics and thus breaks away with the Cold War legacy.<sup>12</sup>

In the evolving Multi-polarity, Russia and China have begun asserting their power to protect their interests. Russia's role in the Syrian crisis during 2012 and its use of hard power during the Crimean crisis in early 2014 has raised its status in the world. In the wake of rising power of China and growing confidence of Russia in dealing with international affairs, states have begun readjusting their positions in the last few years. The US' Asia-Pacific policy is one major initiative that involves several states of the Pacific region as well as India. China and Russia also have taken some steps in order to strengthen their positions. Chinese construction on some islands in the South China Sea and strong position it has taken on Senkaku/Diayou Islands on which South Korea and Philippines also have a claim are indicative of Chinese growing power. This is despite South Korea and Philippines also have US support. In the Shangri-La Dialogue held on 29-31 May, 2015 in Singapore, the US Defense Secretary Ashton Carter criticized the Chinese

position openly on its stance on these islands to which the Chinese Foreign Minister retorted by saying that “disputes in the South China Sea will be resolved by negotiations between the states within the region.”<sup>13</sup> Implying that China would not like any outside power’s interference in the region.

The economic relations between the two states i.e. China and Russia are improving. Russia, whose economy is largely dependent on the export of oil and gas, is engaged in negotiating a deal worth slightly less than US\$ 400 billion that would annually supply 30 billion cubic meters of gas to China.<sup>14</sup> Pipeline for gas supply will be laid by the end of 2017 and completed by 2018 which will help overcome increasing Chinese energy need. During President Putin’s visit to China in November 2014 the leaders of the two countries also held talks about joint production of wide variety of industrial goods. When these projects come to fruition they will accrue economic as well as political benefits to both the countries. Chinese will have a secure and dependable supply of energy to Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei metropolitan area in the North of China and the Yangtze River Delta in the eastern region.<sup>15</sup> Russia thus will become less dependent on Europe for the purchase of its gas.

Pakistan too is readjusting its foreign policy in the emerging world situation. Security and economic progress are the two major areas of concern for Pakistani foreign policy makers. Efforts have been made to improve relations with all its neighbours, including India.<sup>16</sup> But the latter has not yet responded positively to Pakistan’s overtures. With other neighbours, particularly Afghanistan some progress has been made and both states are working to stabilize the region.

Pakistan’s relations with China have been historically good. Both the states have benefitted from their friendship in the past and their relations continue at an upward trajectory. A recent milestone in their relations was the economic corridor from Gwadar Port in Pakistan to Kashgar in north western China. China would invest \$ 46 billion in this project.<sup>17</sup>

### **Pakistan-Russia Relations**

Russia and Pakistan are making efforts to strengthen their relations to mutual advantage. This relationship has traversed a bumpy path since Pakistan’s independence in 1947 which coincided with the beginning of the Cold War. Forced

with acute security and economic problems, newly independent Pakistan was forced to look up to the West to meet urgently needed cash and defence needs. The then USSR was in no position to help the newly independent state with hard cash and the USSR had moved quickly to develop its relations with Pakistan's neighbor India, which posed the main threat to Pakistan's security. Despite having good relations with India, and Pakistan becoming a part of the Western Alliances, the USSR did not discount the importance of Pakistan completely and efforts were made from time to time to strengthen relations between the two states. In 1956, a Pakistani delegation visited Moscow to study the Soviet development and as gesture of goodwill the then Soviet PM Nikolai Bulganin offered technical and scientific help to Pakistan for projects involving the peaceful use of nuclear energy.<sup>18</sup>

The period from 1962-1971 in Pakistan-Russia relations was a rethinking phase in Pakistan where the question of the western alignment remained in focus. The period of the early 60s started manifesting strains in the Pak-US relations due to two important developments first the Soviet Union's extreme resentment toward Pakistan, when it downed the American spy plane U-2 that had taken off from a base near the Pakistani city of Peshawar. Secondly the development of ICBMs and SLBM had reduced the significance of maintaining land bases for the US. Furthermore the Kennedy administration in 1961, decided to support India as counterweight to China. The US and some western countries during the Sino-Indian border war of 1962 supplied weapons and other military equipment to India. Pakistan was further disillusioned from the US when the US did not live up to its promise to play a role in resolution of Jammu and Kashmir dispute. Therefore, Pakistan started taking concrete steps to develop relations with the non-western countries. Various steps were taken to improve relations with the Soviet Union and China and a number of agreements were signed with the Soviet Union for economic and technical cooperation. In 1961 USSR offered credit and technical assistance for oil exploration in Pakistan<sup>19</sup> and helped in the establishment of Pakistan-Soviet Oilfields, later named as Pakistan Oilfields in Morgah, Rawalpindi<sup>20</sup>. During President Ayub Khan's visit to Russia in April 1965, various MOUs were signed covering cooperation in trade, supply of machinery for oil exploration and cultural exchanges. The Soviet Union also promised to help Pakistan in the execution of 30 developmental projects during the third Five Year Plan period (1965-1970).<sup>21</sup>

### *Challenges and Prospects for Pak-Russia Relations*

The Soviet approach towards Pakistan-India disputes remained balanced and focused on the peaceful resolution of the conflicts by the two parties. They maintained their stance in the Rann of Kutch War between Pakistan and India in April 1965, and also in the full-fledged 1965 war. In 1966 the former USSR mediated the Tashkent declaration between Pakistan and India after the 1965 war. Pak-Russian military delegations also exchanged frequent visits in 1966 and 1968, resulting in the Soviet agreement to give Pakistan a limited supply of military equipment that included T-54-55 tanks, MI-8T/Hip-C helicopters<sup>22</sup>, their spares, 130mm guns, and vehicles.<sup>23</sup> During President Yahya Khan's visit to Moscow, in 1970, an agreement was signed for the construction of a steel mill in Karachi with the Soviet support.<sup>24</sup> Around this time Pakistan also facilitated the initial contacts between the US and Kissinger's secret visit from Rawalpindi to Peking. The Russians were unhappy about it. They then decided to strengthen the Indo-soviet co-operation<sup>25</sup> culminating in Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with India just before 1971 war with Pakistan.

During 1972-79 Pakistan's foreign policy was marked by bilateralism and non-alignment. The country adopted the policy of pragmatism as it preferred relationship based on common interests rather than permanent alignment with the big powers.

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 further affected the Soviet-Pakistan relations. Pakistan viewed this development as the violation of the sovereignty of a neighbouring Muslim country by a super power and felt insecure by the large Soviet military buildup in its neighbourhood. Pakistan demanded the withdrawal of the Soviet force and supported the Afghan Mujahedeen fighting against them. General Zia, actively contributed to the American led support of the Afghan jihad.<sup>26</sup>

### **Pak-Russia Converging Interests in the Post-communist Era 1992-2015**

The fall of Communism in 1985 and Soviet Union in 1991 led to the independence of the former Soviet republics. The Federation of Russia therefore remained occupied with economic and political problems at home. Later in 1991 the mothers of the Soviet soldiers appealed to the Pakistani Embassy in Moscow for the release of the Soviet soldiers from captivity. Nawaz Sharif in 1992 released the information about the Russian soldiers during the visit of the Russian Vice President Alexander

Rotskoy, under Yelstin. After, the fall of Nawaz government, Benazir become the Prime Minister in 1994-1995. She tried to repair relations with Russia but her efforts did not bear fruit due to Pakistan's recognition of Taliban government in Afghanistan. Yet in 1996 Russia agreed to launch Pakistan's second satellite, Badr-B from its Baikonour Cosmodrome at a minimum cost.<sup>27</sup> But Russia's condemnation of Pakistan as responsible for Kargil war created negative feelings in Pakistan. The Russian deputy foreign minister Alexander Losyukov however visited Pakistan in 2001, where both the countries agreed upon cooperating in economic development and working toward regional peace and prosperity.<sup>28</sup>

The Sept 9/11 event pushed Russia into close collaboration with the western alliance's war on terror. It also helped in improving mutual collaboration with Pakistan. In 2007 the Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan and held detailed discussions with President Musharaf.<sup>29</sup> Musharaf had two meetings with President Putin first one in Almaty in 2002<sup>30</sup> and the second in 2003.<sup>31</sup> The bilateral relations in 2010 during PPP government were maintained and Pakistan was invited to participate in the regional security summit in Sochi, which was attended by president Zardari.<sup>32</sup> In 2011 Russia supported the idea of full-membership of Pakistan in the SCO. It also showed interest in the expansion of Karachi steel mill, and collaboration in the Guddu-Mazaffargarh power plants as well as Thar coal project<sup>33</sup>. In the same year Prime Minister Yousef Raza Gillani's meeting with President Putin after the 10<sup>th</sup> SCO summit expressed his willingness to speed up the process for the framework of the proposed Free trade and currency swap arrangement to boost bilateral trade between the two states.<sup>34</sup> Pakistan also supported Russia's desire for getting observer status in SAARC and OIC. The early 2015 witnessed the signing of CASA-1000 agreement.<sup>35</sup> Russia supports the mega energy project, (CASA-1000) which aims at transmitting electricity from Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> The most recent move of the Russian government of inviting Pakistan, to attend the 4<sup>th</sup> Moscow International Security Conference, and a politically approved deal to sell Pakistan Mil Mi-35 Hind E helicopters<sup>37</sup>, as well as the three day visit of General Raheel Sharif in June 2015 to Moscow are signs of increasing cooperation in defence field between the two countries.<sup>38</sup>

One area for the mutual partnership between Russia and Pakistan is Russia's concern for security, especially fighting terrorism and achieving stability in Afghanistan. The fighters of radical Muslim movements in the Central Asia,

Caucasus and the neighboring Afghanistan, have made their presence known in the Russian mainland (Moscow) on various occasions through the Central Asian Republics. Frequent instances involving Chechen rebels targeting hospitals, schools, theatres, apartment buildings as well as the subway stations have occurred in Russia in the past fifteen years (1995-2010).<sup>39</sup> The issue of illegal drug trafficking is another area of concern for Russia. According to the 2009, UN Office on Drugs and Crime Prevention Report, Russia has become the number one consumer of heroin and opium, as 21 percent of the world's heroin production and 5 percent of the world opium-based drugs are consumed by the Russian population. There are approximately 1.68 million opiate users in Russia and about 90 percent of the drug addicts in Russia use the Afghan heroin and opiates.<sup>40</sup> Different initiatives have been taken by President Putin for curbing the threat of radical Muslim movements by seeking observer status for itself in the OIC, SAARC, establishing contacts with Hamas and supporting the existence of an independent Palestinian state.<sup>41</sup>

Relations with Pakistan carry special significance for Russia due to its geographical location and influence in south-western Asia especially the Muslim world, which shares direct borders with the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in order to root out the narco-threat mainly emanating from Afghanistan Russia has proposed an international strategy focused on introducing economic, social and legal measures in Afghanistan and beyond. It aims at creating strong "antidrug security belts" on all sides of the periphery of Afghan borders and next door states, that will help control the flow of drugs trade outside and inside its borders. But such a plan will work only with the collaboration of Afghan government, international military forces and the neighboring states.<sup>43</sup> Negotiations were held by the Federal Drug Control service of Russia for developing cooperation with Pakistan in Russia's fight against drug trade and terrorism. Thus, Pakistan has the potential of becoming an important partner for Russia in fighting its problem of terrorism and drug trafficking due to Pakistan's extensive experience in the War on Terror and in dealing with the post NATO Afghanistan. Pakistan's recent participation in the 4<sup>th</sup> annual Moscow International Security Conference and the deal regarding the sale of MIL, Mi-35 helicopters to Pakistan are steps towards enhancing the Russian security by controlling the problems of terrorism.<sup>44</sup> Pakistan and Russia have joint working groups on counterterrorism and on other new challenges to international and strategic stability that have held regular meetings.

Another area of potential collaboration between Russia and Pakistan can be in the field of outer space. Russia aims at curbing the placement of nuclear weapons and arms race in the outer space. Russia and China in 2014 proposed a new draft of Treaty PAROS as well as other practical steps taken related to the no placement of weapons in Outer Space. Russia seeks Pakistan's support by signing a bilateral understanding in the field of outer space security that aims at developing mechanisms of transparency and CBMs that will lead to minimizing the trust deficit between Pakistan and India.

Energy is an important tool of the economic development of a country. Pakistan's daily consumption of oil was estimated at 437 barrels per day in 2014 where as its production was only 81 barrels per day in 2013.<sup>45</sup> The production of coal in 2012 remained at 3,407 thousand tons and the consumption at 7,013 thousand tons in 2013.<sup>46</sup> In order to meet the short-fall in the production and consumption of oil Pakistan has to import huge amounts from the gulf countries. Russia having abundant oil, gas and coal can help in meeting Pakistan's growing needs. Pakistan's geographic position gives it access to gas rich regions: IP (Iran, Pakistan) and TAPI (Turkmenistan Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipelines are planned. TAPI connects Russia and CARs with the South Asian states. Both the projects are economically and technically viable but since the latter enjoys Russia and US support<sup>47</sup> it has better chances of early implementation. Moreover, collaborations are expected between the two countries in the fields of gas and oil exploration, construction of floating LNG terminals, North South gas pipeline from Gwadar to Nawabshah as well as modernization of oil and gas infrastructure and innovative technology solutions in coal industry.<sup>48</sup> The Russian bank Vnesh Torgov Bank offered a credit line of US\$ 1 billion for energy projects in Pakistan in 2014.<sup>49</sup>

The bilateral trade between Russia and Pakistan remained at US\$ 419.34 million in 2013-2014 as against US\$ 484.47 in the previous year, reflecting a decline of US\$ 65.13 million. The current major Pakistani imports by Russia include cotton fabric, fresh fruit and fruit preparations, synthetic fabrics, rice, vegetables and medical and surgical goods as well as beef and dairy products and vegetables and fruits.<sup>50</sup>

Since the recent western sanctions are hit the Russian economy severely, the total Russian food imports from the west particularly European countries has declined by US\$ 16 billion that can be filled by the Pakistani agricultural sector. The

Pakistani government plans to fill the Russian demand and export sugar, wheat and increases the export of agricultural and dairy produce to Russia.<sup>51</sup> The first Russian Expo in Pakistan was held in June 2014 in Karachi that showcased heavy and light industrial goods. There are great prospects for Russia to meet Pakistani demands for iron, steel, chemicals, energy, wood pulp and paper, in addition to electrical and power equipment, railway, transport, shipyard road building technology and IT. In 2015, the Russian government is expected to organize exhibitions in Russia for the display of Pakistani export commodities.<sup>52</sup> In order to facilitate trade flows between the two countries the Russian Vnesh Torgov Bank has offered cooperation in the financial transactions.<sup>53</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Pakistan-Russia bilateral relations have traversed a lot of rough patches in the last seventy years of their diplomatic history. Cold War politics and Pakistan's threat perception vis-à-vis its eastern neighbor, India largely dictated the parameters of their relations during these years. These were further marred by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan's decision to side with the forces that opposed and fought against the occupation of a brother Muslim state with which it shared its western border.

After the disintegration of Soviet Union and collapse of the bipolar political world order significant changes have occurred in the world politics and global power structure. Russian Federation is re-emerging as an important player in the world affairs. China's economic rise in the last two decades has been unprecedented in the world history. According to IMF estimates it is now world's number one economic power. The rise of China and to an extent India and other east Asian and south Asian states is taking place in the backdrop of decline of western power, including that of the USA.

These changing times have created opportunities for Pakistan and Russian Federation to review their policies and co-operate on issues of common interests. Both countries have already taken initial but significant steps to strengthen their relations. These include co-operation on curtailing drug trafficking, fighting terrorism, increase in bilateral trade beside strategic issues pertaining to peace and stability in Afghanistan as well as purchase of defence equipment from Russia by Pakistan.

The two countries, along with other members, can work together under the aegis of Shanghai Co-operation Organization for stability in the region. As the interests of both Russia and Pakistan converge there is greater likelihood of further strengthening of their mutual relations in the future.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>2</sup> George H.W. Bush, 'State of the Union address', *Miller Center*, January 29, 1991, <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/speech-3429>

<sup>3</sup> He explains, the uni-polar moment as a geopolitical interlude giving way to multi-polarity by 2000-2010. Uni-polarity, according to him carried the seeds of its own destruction since the "systemic constraints- balancing, uneven growth rates and the sameness effect-impel other states to become great powers." Christopher Layne, "The Uni-polar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise?" *International Security* 17, no.4 (Spring 1993):7

<sup>4</sup> The report shows the total contribution of BRICS to the world GDP in terms of PPP in US \$ by 2002 as 23.3 percent that was expected to rise up to 27.0 percent in another 10 years. It also predicted the likely Chinese lead of the BRICS whereas it forecasted a growth rate relative to the G7 for Brazil, Russia and India. Thus, suggested the timely incorporation of the BRICS into the G7 by making it 8 or 9. Jim O'Neill, "Building Better Global Economic BRICS, Global Economics" *Global Economics*, no.66 (2001) <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/build-better-brics.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Next 11 was the idea floated by Jim O'Neill, in 2005 by GSAM. Which include the emerging economies that have promising outlooks for global investors and could become top-20 economies by 2025 namely Bangladesh, Egypt, Indonesia, Iran, Korea, Mexico, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Turkey and Vietnam. Jim O'Neill, *BRICS and Beyond*, (Goldman Sachs, 2007):161, available at <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/brics-book/brics-full-book.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> In Jim O'Neill's 2011 review he could see the BRICS economic progression as \$13 trillion and were declared to be on the fringe of taking over the US and EU in the future. It forecasted the future growth rates of the BRICS to progress by \$12-14 trillion, and a likelihood of some countries to enter the BRICS club owing to their large populations. These countries could be categorized as the prospective "Growth Markets".

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<sup>8</sup> SIPRI website available at [http://www.sipri.org/googlemaps/milex\\_top\\_15\\_2014\\_exp\\_map.html](http://www.sipri.org/googlemaps/milex_top_15_2014_exp_map.html), data on the GDP is taken from World Bank website available at <http://data.worldbank.org/country>

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## Challenges and Prospects for Pak-Russia Relations

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