

## **Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints**

**Muhammad Hanif \***

### **Abstract**

It would be an important relationship for Pakistan to become a regional partner of Russia which is a major regional and world power, having great economic potential and the right to exercise the veto power at the UNSC. With the tense history of their Cold War relationship, the Afghan Jihad against Soviet occupation and the subsequent 'war on terror' now behind them, Pakistan and Russia see their strategic and economic interests converging in the face of the awaited withdrawal of US-led coalition forces from Afghanistan in 2014. Both envisage a role for themselves in achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan and economic cooperation in Central Asia. While Pakistan needs Russian investment for reviving its economy due to dwindling American aid, Russia also eyes Pakistan as a good destination for its investments and trade, with India getting closer to the US and Europe in its place. It is in this light that the recent progress in Pak-Russian relations is being seen. Another helping factor in this growing closeness is the strategic partnership India and the US have struck. Therefore, whatever the constraints, the relationship has strong prospects. And Pakistan has to keep its diplomatic focus on this mutual interest.

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Russia, India, United States, Cold War, Afghanistan, Central Asia.

### **Introduction**

**I**n the Cold War period relations between Pakistan and the then USSR remained generally uneasy barring some diplomatic initiatives for improvement. After Cold War's end and USSR's disintegration in 1991, the successor state Russia has regained and consolidated its politico-economic and military status as a major world power. Its economy is strong

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\* Col. Muhammad Hanif (ret'd), Consultant/Research Fellow, Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), Islamabad.

thanks to oil and gas revenues and its political stature high in a territorially reconciled neighbourhood. It has realigned its foreign policy and for the last couple of years has been re-asserting its position as a veto power in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Pakistan's strategic and economic interests make Russia an important regional player which regards Pakistan with greater interest in the post-Cold War era.

In the first decade after the end of the Cold War although bilateral visits remained a regular feature, progress in mutual relations remained sluggish. Trust building needed time while the factor of India's influence on Moscow was still there. Meanwhile new factors had emerged like Pakistan's support of the Taliban in Afghanistan in the later half of 1990s. Moreover it was a period of economic transition in Russia and its political adjustment in a united Europe without the East-West division. Vyacheslav Nikonov, Deputy Head of Foreign Affairs Committee told Russian Television in a telephonic interview, "In initial years of Perestroika, Russia was definitely Western- oriented; Gorbachev had been speaking about a 'common European home,' while Yelstin actually applied for NATO and EU membership. This has given us nothing as the only result of these efforts was Eastward expansion of NATO. Russia should turn to the East and become a self-sufficient centre of international strength. We cannot be integrated into European Union or NATO; we are too big and too Russian for that. Russia is doomed to be an independent central power."<sup>1</sup>

However, the terrorist attacks in the US on 9/11 and Pakistan's decision of abandoning the Taliban and joining the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan as a front line state altered the whole scenario and Russian perceptions about Pakistan's role in the region started to change for the better. The materialization of the 2003 visit to Moscow of Pervez Musharraf, then President, gave a major fillip to improving relations. Afterwards, the Indian nuclear deal and agreement of strategic partnership with the US further helped in opening up Russia towards Pakistan. Lately, Russian perception about Pakistan as a key player in achieving peace in Afghanistan appears to have favourably disposed the regional environment towards advancing Pakistan-Russia relations. Apart from strategic security reasons, many economic and trade related opportunities for both sides also favour the development of bilateral ties.

With the Cold War baggage in mind this paper traces the gradual warming up in bilateral relations between the two countries and the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://rt.com/politics/nikonov-interview-russia-us-west-425/> (accessed May 5, 2013).

progress attained since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, particularly during the ‘war on terror’ years. The paper analyses the quick progress made in improving relations during the period 2010-2012 highlighting the factors which crystallized the convergence of their strategic interests. The paper then highlights the prospects of developing closer bilateral strategic and economic relations. It identifies the likely obstacles and constraints which can hinder the progress and offers recommendations for Pakistan to strengthen its political, strategic and economic relations with Russia.

### **Theoretical Framework**

During the Cold War period, Pakistan had to align itself with the US by becoming part of CENTO and SEATO to respond to its security concerns from India and in this regard its foreign relations were guided by the realist theory of international politics. According to the realist theory,<sup>2</sup> as explained by Hans Morgenthau (1891-1976) and George Kennan (1904-2205) “since states are primary actors, are sovereign and there is anarchy at world stage in the sense that due to absence of a central controlling authority to regulate state behaviour, states try to defend their interests (the state survival being the prime interest) through coercion and use of force. Hence to defend themselves against aggression the states either try to maximize their power or seek alliances to create and maintain state of balance of power. In this context the ethics are inconsequential.” Since the US objective of making Pakistan a part of the above mentioned treaties was designed to contain the then Soviet Union, Soviet relations with Pakistan remained soured and even hostile at times. In response, during this period the Soviet Union always provided diplomatic and military assistance to India on issues related to Pakistan. Pakistan’s foreign policy also remained US-friendly to the extent that it acted as a US ally in organizing the Afghans’ resistance guerrilla war against the Soviet occupation from 1979 to 1989 (when USSR decided to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan). However since the emergence of Russia as heir to the USSR which broke up in 1992, its perceptions about Pakistan have undergone a positive change to which Pakistan has been more than receptive.

In the post Cold War world politics Russia as a multi-party democracy with a liberal economy has stabilized and consolidated its economic and military power and has also re-established itself as a major world power. It has started reasserting its influence in international affairs

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<sup>2</sup> Keith L. Shimko, *International Relations*, (US: Suzanne Jeans Publishers, 2008), 50.

which is its due as a major military and economic power possessing modern technological prowess and holding sway over vast territories across two continents. Being a veto power at the UN its significant international influence at the world stage is evident from its role in the Syrian crisis and Iran's nuclear programme tussle with the US. Russia, along with China, has already vetoed UNSC resolutions on the Syrian issue twice and obstructed further sanctions against Iran. Pakistan cannot fail but recognize this importance of Russia as a world and regional player and it would be natural for it to meet more than half way if a gesture of improvement in ties comes from Moscow that till 2000 had had concerns with Pakistan relating to its recognition of the Taliban government in Afghanistan.

That scenario however dramatically changed when in the wake of 9/11 attacks Pakistan reversed its Taliban policy and became part of the US and NATO led 'war on terror' in Afghanistan. Russia now sees how central Pakistan is to any scheme of ending the conflict in Afghanistan and bringing peace in the region. And now with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in sight, Russia and Pakistan's strategic interests in working for peace in Afghanistan and the region have come even closer. Moreover, Pakistan, which feels it was unduly treated to pressures from the US in the 'war on terror' that Russian leaders took notice of in their statements in favour of respecting Pakistan's sovereignty, wants to put its relations with Russia on a firm footing to diversify its foreign policy options. Similarly to have Pakistan's role in maintaining regional peace after the West's exit from Afghanistan, Russia has been making appropriate moves. These changing perceptions and efforts on both sides to develop closer relations have been reinforced by the evolving strategic partnership between China and Russia. These major powers are also moving closer to each other since both share views on building a world security architecture based on the principles of respecting sovereignty and integrity of the states and handling of crisis situations and interstate and intrastate disputes primarily through all inclusive internal, bilateral and multilateral dialogue under the UN sponsorship<sup>3</sup>. Both powers also agree that if the use of force appears to be the only option it has to be decided and monitored by the United Nations as is evident from their blocking of UNSC resolutions seeking UN approval for use of force in support of the Syrian opposition. Another development that inclines Pakistan towards Russia is India's strategic partnership with

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<sup>3</sup> "The Concept of Russian Foreign Policy", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, [http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D)

the US and Afghanistan which the former thinks is an attempt to establish Delhi's military influence in Afghanistan and which is a strategy that indeed may have the aim of encircling Pakistan. In this context Pakistan thinks that despite its friendship Russia has a nagging skepticism about India's future role in Afghanistan and Central Asia which might be in service of US strategic objectives in the region. Russia which sees Pakistan as a supportive hand in regional peace will not therefore support India in its anti-Pakistan Afghan politics. The pursuit of the realist theory on this two-way friendship track is thus quite evident.

Yet another dimension besides its strategic interests in the region that Pakistan seeks in this new phase of its relationship with Russia is in the economic realm which under the global drive can have its own growth momentum. Pakistan seeks Russian economic assistance in the form of foreign direct investment and technological cooperation particularly in the energy field. Russia seems inclined to responding to these needs in addition to increasing the trade volume. The development of these economic relations is taking place in the true spirit of the theory of commercial liberalism according to which trade, investment and interdependence are forces for peace.<sup>4</sup> In this paper the strategic and economic relations between Russia and Pakistan are examined largely in the theoretical framework of realism and commercial liberalism besides drawing insights from theories of constructivism and globalized interdependence.

### **Uneasy Bilateral Relations in the Cold War Period**

Soon after Pakistan's inception the then Soviet Union invited its first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan to visit Moscow. Later, in the same year the United States of America also invited him. Liaquat Ali Khan accepted the latter invitation.<sup>5</sup> It is believed that Liaquat Ali Khan preferred the US visit for prospects of procuring defence equipment and economic assistance which the Soviet Union despite Pakistan's repeated requests had not responded to.<sup>6</sup> These were urgently needed to bolster defence against India after the 1948 war over Kashmir and to support Pakistan's precarious

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<sup>4</sup> Keith L. Shimko, *International Relations*, 55.

<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Owais, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions," *Pakistan Horizon*, vol.60, no. 2 (April 2007): 127.

<sup>6</sup> Sabir Shah, "A Brief Recap of the Troubled Pak-Russia Relationship," *News International* (Islamabad), October 4, 2012, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-2-135657-A-brief-recap-of-the-troubled-Pak-Russia-relationship> (accessed May 4, 2013).

economic situation at that time. It was also thought that after losses suffered in World War II the Soviet Union would not be in a position to provide the kind of economic assistance Pakistan urgently needed.<sup>7</sup> On the other side Soviet suspicions grew that Pakistan was joining the anti-communist Western alliance which proved to be correct when in 1954 and 1955 Pakistan joined the SEATO and CENTO pacts.<sup>8</sup> That drew the USSR closer to India in a defence relationship under which Soviet military hardware started flowing to India disturbing the balance of power in South Asia. Moscow endorsed India's Kashmir<sup>9</sup> stand at all international forums including the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In the Cold War period, Soviet efforts to reach the warm waters of the Arabian Sea were interpreted in Pakistan as aimed at separating the Balochistan province from Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> The Soviet Union supported Afghanistan on the Pakhtunistan issue.<sup>11</sup> It also supported India in its military aggression in East Pakistan in 1971 under a Peace and Friendship Treaty it had signed with India in 1971 and facilitated the country's disintegration by vetoing an important resolution<sup>12</sup> at the UNSC that called for a ceasefire and could have provided time and space for a political solution.

The worst period of their relationship lasted a decade from 1979 to 1989 when Pakistan helped launch the US sponsored guerrilla war of the Mujahedin against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan. This bitter phase ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991.<sup>13</sup> But another source of tension arose in the later part of 1990s on account of Pakistan's support to the Taliban in the Afghan civil war and its ultimate recognition

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<sup>7</sup> Ardeshir Cowasjee, "A Recap of Soviet-Pakistan Relations," *Dawn*, March 13, 2011, <http://dawn.com/2011/03/13/a-recap-of-soviet-pakistan-relations/> (accessed May 4, 2013).

<sup>8</sup> Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan* (Lahore: Ariana Publications, 2004), 306.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>10</sup> Momina Ashier, "Fortifying Pak-Russia Relations," *Daily Times*, June 30, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Sanskar Shrivastava, "1971 India-Pakistan War: Role of Russia, China, America and Britain", *World Reporter*, October 30, 2011, <http://www.theworldreporter.com/2011/10/1971-india-pakistan-war-role-of-russia.html> (accessed May 4, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> "Fall of The Soviet Union", [http://www.coldwar.org/articles/90s/fall\\_of\\_the\\_soviet\\_union.asp](http://www.coldwar.org/articles/90s/fall_of_the_soviet_union.asp) (accessed May 5, 2013).

of their government which the Soviets believed was harmful for the entire region.<sup>14</sup>

However, despite this history of tense relations, both countries from time to time made moves to improve their relations. In 1958, the Soviet Union indicated its interest in providing economic and technical assistance to Pakistan in agriculture and control of floods. President Muhammad Ayub Khan visited the Soviet Union in April 1965,<sup>15</sup> the first ever visit of a Pakistani head of state. The visit helped in removing misunderstandings and agreements on trade, economic cooperation and cultural exchanges were signed.<sup>16</sup> In 1966 USSR mediated the famous Tashkent Declaration between Pakistan and India to end the 1965 war stalemate.<sup>17</sup> In that improved bilateral environment, in April 1968, Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin visited Pakistan and announced a limited supply of arms to Pakistan.<sup>18</sup> In 1969, President Yahya Khan visited Moscow and a deal for provision of some helicopters to Pakistan was signed.<sup>19</sup> When after the separation of East Pakistan in 1971 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto assumed power, he revised Pakistan's foreign policy withdrawing from SEATO in 1973 and CENTO in 1979.<sup>20</sup> As Prime Minister of Pakistan he visited USSR twice, first in March 1972 and then in October 1974 which considerably improved bilateral relations as a result of which the Soviet Union installed a steel mill in Karachi.<sup>21</sup> The Soviet President, Leonid Brezhnev, also made an effort to convince Pakistan about his Asian Collective Security Treaty plan which

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<sup>14</sup> S. Iftikhar Murshed, "Pakistan, Russia and the Taliban," *News International* (Islamabad), September 30, 2012, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-9-134923-Pakistan-Russia-and-the-Taliban> (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Ansar Mahmood Bhatti, "Pakistan-Russia Détente?," *Defence Journal*, (February, 2003), <http://www.defencejournal.com/2003/feb/pak-russia.htm> (accessed May 4, 2013)

<sup>16</sup> Muhammad Owais, "Pakistan- Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions," *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 60, no. 2, (April 2007): 127.

<sup>17</sup> Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan*, 310.

<sup>18</sup> Muhammad Owais, "Pakistan- Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions," 127.

<sup>19</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no.1 (2002), [http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/Pak-russia%20relations,%20opportunities%20Nazir\\_Vol\\_19\\_Issue\\_1\\_2012.pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/pdf-files/Pak-russia%20relations,%20opportunities%20Nazir_Vol_19_Issue_1_2012.pdf) (accessed May 4, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> "Milestones: 1953-1960", US Department of State, <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960> (accessed May 3, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options", 83.

could not materialize since China and India were also not in favour of such a proposal.<sup>22</sup> In the Cold War period these positive developments could not yield the desired results in creating sustainable friendly relations between Pakistan and Russia.

## **Progress Attained in Improving Relations in the Post Cold War Era**

### *Development of Relations before 9/11*

In the post Cold War period, Pakistan and Russia found opportunities for making a new beginning in developing better relations. Both countries started reviewing their old policies and initiated various foreign policy initiatives to develop closer friendly relations. The progress made in improving relations is reflected in bilateral diplomatic visits and related agreements signed particularly after 9/11, in the environment of the ‘war on terror’.<sup>23</sup> These endeavours were quite in line with the new world trend of countries pursuing independent foreign policies to advance their national interests in the best possible manner within the constraints of a unipolar world order led by the US. These diplomatic initiatives include the visits to Pakistan by Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoy in December 1992, Foreign Minister Kozyrev in April 1993, and First Deputy Foreign Minister Adamishin in May 1994. In return, Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Akram Zaki visited Russia in 1992 and Foreign Minister Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali visited Moscow in July 1994. During the latter’s visit an important protocol was also signed on holding regular consultations between foreign ministers of the two countries. In September 1995, a Russian parliamentary delegation visited Pakistan. The leader of the delegation, Alexander Vengerovsky, disclosed that Russia was ready to supply military hardware to Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> This developing close relationship was however again interrupted on account of Pakistan’s support to the Taliban government which Russia feared could spark separatism in some of the Central Asian

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<sup>22</sup> Debidatta Aurobina Mahapatra, “Vladimir Putin’s, Pakistan Visit and India”, September 24, 2012, [http://idrus.in/articles/2012/09/24/validinir\\_putin\\_Pakistan-visit\\_and\\_india\\_17855-html](http://idrus.in/articles/2012/09/24/validinir_putin_Pakistan-visit_and_india_17855-html).

<sup>23</sup> Nazir Hussain, “Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options”, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Muhammad Owais, “Pakistan- Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions”, 129.



States (CARs) and even in Russia itself. Yet both sides continued their efforts to improve relations.

Nawaz Sharif, as Prime Minister of Pakistan, visited Russia in 1999 and signed quite a few trade and industry related agreements. This visit greatly helped in breaking the ice and opening a new chapter of bilateral relations.<sup>25</sup> The visit was termed by the Russian President Boris Yeltsin as a “new chapter in relations between the two countries oriented into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>26</sup> There onwards exchange of visits by representatives of both countries became a regular feature. In September 1999 special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Pakistan and after discussions with the Pakistani leadership, he stated that Pakistan was capable of playing a stabilizing role in the region by helping in addressing the issues of international terrorism, narcotics trafficking and religious extremism.<sup>27</sup> A major development in bilateral relations occurred in 2001, before the 9/11 attacks in the US when as a consequence of visit to Russia by the ISI Chief, General Mehmood, as President Musharraf’s special envoy, an agreement was concluded for the sale of sixteen MI-17 military cargo helicopters to Pakistan.<sup>28</sup> Since that visit, Pakistan and Russia have been engaged in proactive diplomacy to improve bilateral relations and intense high level interactions have continued to take place between two countries.

#### *Advancement of Relations in the Aftermath of 9/11*

After 9/11 Pakistan’s major policy shift in abandoning the Taliban and becoming a front line state in fighting the international ‘war on terror’ in Afghanistan greatly helped in improving its relations with Russia. They established a major working group in 2002 called the Consultative Group on Strategic Stability and also signed an agreement to cooperate in handling threats to regional stability.<sup>29</sup> Aziz Ahmed Khan, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited Moscow in January 2002 for consultations on trade, economic and political matters. In early 2002, a Russian business delegation visited Pakistan as a consequence of which the Pakistan-Russia Business Forum and Pakistan-Russia Business Council were created targeting a turnover of one billion dollars worth of trade and

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<sup>25</sup> Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan*, 319.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Owais, “Pakistan- Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions”, 129.

<sup>27</sup> Musa Khan Jalalzai, *The Foreign Policy of Pakistan*, 320

<sup>28</sup> Muhammad Owais, “Pakistan- Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions”, 130.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 130-131

investments in the coming years.<sup>30</sup> A major development in bilateral relations was the visit of President Pervez Musharraf to Russia in 2003. This land mark visit and President Musharraf's earlier meetings with Russian President, Vladimir Putin at Almaty and Kuala Lumpur, greatly helped in building mutual trust and confidence. Both countries also signed three agreements to enhance cultural and diplomatic ties and to resolve visa and immigration bottlenecks.<sup>31</sup> As a result of improved relations Russia also supported Pakistan's entry to the SCO as an Observer.

Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, visited Pakistan in July 2004. Also, a delegation of Russian Duma visited Pakistan the same year.<sup>32</sup> Russia and Pakistan also see prospects of collaboration in the fuel and energy sector. Russian Gazprom is interested in the construction of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.<sup>33</sup> In 2005, both countries' presidents met on the sidelines of UN General Assembly session and heads of governments met in Moscow during the SCO heads of government meeting. The high level contacts continued in 2006. Apart from high level meetings of officials, the two presidents also met on the sidelines of the SCO meeting in June 2006 and both heads of government met on the sidelines of the next SCO summit in September 2006. In November 2006, the Russian Foreign Minister visited Pakistan and held talks with his counterpart, Khurshid Kasuri on major global issues and cooperation in many fields including energy, communications, railways and information technology. During their press conference Khurshid Kasuri said, "We consider Russia as an engine for increased economic growth and a factor of peace and stability in the SCO."<sup>34</sup> During this meeting Russia also showed its keen interest in participating in construction of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.<sup>35</sup> In the light of the increasing mutual visits and contacts it appears that in the post Cold War strategic environment and after experience of realities of the 'war on terror' being fought in Afghanistan, a shift appears to have taken place in the Russian strategic perception in favour of Pakistan's future positive role in Afghanistan and the region. That is why Russia is showing keen interest in developing close relations with Pakistan.

In 2007 Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan (first visit of a Russian Prime Minister in 38 years) and held in-depth

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 133.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 133.

discussions with President Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz. The emphasis was on increasing economic cooperation.<sup>36</sup> In November 2007 Pakistan's Petroleum Minister visited Moscow and signed a MoU on joint exploration of oil.<sup>37</sup> Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Kayani's visit to Moscow in 2009 and subsequent meetings of former Prime Minister Gilani with the Russian leaders on the sidelines of SCO Summit in Dushanbe in 2010 had paved the way for presidential visits in the ensuing years.<sup>38</sup> In 2011, both countries held talks on the proposed free trade agreement and currency swap arrangement to boost bilateral trade and further strengthen their economic relations.<sup>39</sup>

#### *Quick Progress in Relations in 2010-2012*

In 2011, Russia's Prime Minister, Vladimir Putin publicly supported Pakistan's desire to attain full membership of SCO.<sup>40</sup> He further stated that in South Asia and the Muslim world Pakistan was a very important partner for Russia. He offered help in the expansion of Karachi steel mill and in the energy sector technical assistance for the Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants<sup>41</sup> as well as the development of Thar Coal Project. Russia's warming up to Pakistan can be seen in the backdrop of India's cosyng up to the US following the agreement on strategic partnership.<sup>42</sup> And now there is this three way strategic partnership – between India and Afghanistan and between the US and Afghanistan – under which US appears to favour India over Pakistan in Afghan affairs, which is drawing Pakistan and Russia closer.

President Asif Ali Zardari visited Russia in September 2011, the first visit of a Pakistani head of state in 37 years. It was basically aimed at

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<sup>36</sup> Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost Opportunities and Future Options", 84.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Nadeem Hyder, "Pakistan-Russia Geopolitical Convergence," *Pakistan Observer* (Islamabad), October 18, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> "Pakistan-Russia Relations", Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan%E2%80%93Russia\\_relations](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pakistan%E2%80%93Russia_relations) (accessed September 25, 2012).

<sup>40</sup> "From Chicago to Shangri La and Beijing", <http://politact.com/analysis-of-perception-and-perspective/from-chicago-to-shangri-la-and-beijing.html>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Nivedita Das Kundu, "Russia – Pakistan Relations in the Post- Cold War Era", *Russia-India Report*, January 16, 2012, [http://indrus.in/articles/2012/07/02/russia-pakistan\\_relations\\_in\\_the\\_post-cold\\_war\\_era\\_16104.html](http://indrus.in/articles/2012/07/02/russia-pakistan_relations_in_the_post-cold_war_era_16104.html) (accessed September 15, 2012).

assuring Russian leaders that Pakistan was ready to forget the legacy of their bitter past and wanted to forge a new relationship for the good of their people and for the benefit of the region. During this visit the two countries signed MoUs in energy, investment, air services and agriculture<sup>43</sup> Pakistan's Foreign Minister visited the Russian Federation in March 2012 and met the Russian Foreign Minister. As stated by Stephen Blank of Strategic Studies Institute, "Pakistan and Russia has covertly developed geopolitical and strategic relations behind the scenes of the world politics since Russia has concluded that in the wake of withdrawal of NATO led ISAF and US forces by 2014, Pakistan will be a crucial player in Afghanistan and hence speeded up advancement of relations with this country."<sup>44</sup>

In this build-up of cordiality the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, was scheduled to make a landmark visit to Pakistan in October 2012 but it was suddenly postponed. It was said by the Russian authorities that the visit had been temporarily put off due to technical hitches related to holding of quadrilateral summit in Pakistan. This explanation suggested that the cancellation was not a rebuff and mutual relations would move on. However the media speculation was that the cancellation was probably due to Pakistan's reluctance to award the \$1.2 billion contract of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline to Russia's energy giant, Gazprom, without bidding as Russia wanted. Some said Indian pressure was behind that.<sup>45</sup> In his recent article, Sandeep Dikshit has stated that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh had asked the visiting Russian Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin, in July 2012: "Could Russian President Vladimir Putin, put off his visit to Pakistan in October 2012 so that optics of the India-Russia summit meeting scheduled in November 2012 could remain unimpaired."<sup>46</sup> In reply, Mr. Rogozin demurred. However, an accompanying diplomat privately explained that earlier the Russian side had informed New Delhi that Mr. Putin's proposed

<sup>43</sup> Nadeem Hyder, "Pakistan-Russia Geopolitical Convergence".

<sup>44</sup> Stephen Blank, "Russia's Quiet Rapprochement with Pakistan," *The Jamestown Foundation*, June 6, 2012, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39462](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39462) (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> Sadhavi Chauhan, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Beyond Putin's Cancelled Trip to Islamabad", <http://www.opendemocracy.net/sadhavi-chauhan/russia-pakistan-relations-beyond-putin%E2%80%99s-cancelled-trip-to-islamabad>

<sup>46</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, "Growing Russia- Pakistan Ties a Reality that India Will Have to Live With," *Hindu (New Delhi)*, October 8, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/growing-russiapakistan-ties-a-reality-that-india-will-have-to-live-with/article3975260.ece>

visit to Pakistan was related to Afghanistan where future settlement of the issue depended on its neighbours' actions.<sup>47</sup>

However, three important mutual visits of Pakistani and Russian officials which took place immediately after the cancellation of the Russian President's visit helped in allaying any misperceptions in this regard. First, a Russian high-powered delegation visited Pakistan and signed three important MoUs on expansion and modernization of Pakistan Steel Mills, cooperation in Railways development and in the energy sector. Then, Pakistan Chief of Army Staff, General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani, visited Russia as per his schedule in the first week of October 2012 and held meetings with Russian Army top brass and the ruling politicians on ways to develop defence ties between the two countries.<sup>48</sup> Also, to dispel any doubts being aired in the Pakistani media about cancellation of Putin's visit, the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov, visited Pakistan in the first week of October 2012 and held meetings with Pakistan's Foreign Minister and also called on the Prime Minister. During his visit he made some significant statements. In response to a question regarding the cancellation of President Putin's visit, Lavrov stated that the visit was cancelled due to serious rescheduling problems.

The mere fact that Lavrov planned his visit to Pakistan, after cancellation of the Presidential visit, just at two days' notice after rescheduling his planned visit to India on October 4, 2012 and his cabinet colleague, Anatoliy Serdyukov, the Defence Minister, postponed his planned visit to India to be able to meet General Kayani, who was to visit Moscow on the same dates, indicates that the cancellation was not meant to undermine the improving Pakistan-Russia relations.<sup>49</sup> Supporting Pakistan's stance on drone attacks, Mr Lavrov declared that they violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of any state and were unacceptable. His statement that Russia favoured the solution of the Afghan issue which is home grown also coincides with Pakistan's position on the issue.<sup>50</sup> Mr Lavrov also stated that Russia attached great importance to consultations with Pakistan and was looking forward to Pakistan's participation in the next SCO Summit, scheduled to be held in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>51</sup> The mutual visits of officials of both countries which have been discussed and the strong

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "Pak-Russia Relations", *Nation* (Lahore), October 3, 2012.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> "Pak-Russia Relations", *Nation* (Lahore), October 6, 2012.

<sup>51</sup> "Pakistan-Russia Relation should be further Strengthened", *Dawn*, October 4, 2012.

statements of the Russian Foreign Minister in favour of Pakistan indicate the significance which Russia is according to Pakistan in the obtaining regional geo-strategic scenario. Analysts also believe that since Russia realizes that any successful resolution of the issues associated with Afghanistan must involve Pakistan, cancellation of President Putin's visit to Pakistan cannot change the relevance of this argument or of Russia's objective of advancing relations with Pakistan.<sup>52</sup> Even some Indian scholars are convinced that Pakistan-Russia relations will progress because being a close neighbour to Afghanistan, Pakistan is being considered by Russian leaders as a strategic pivot in the region.<sup>53</sup> The officials in Russia, Pakistan and even India are also of the view that despite the sudden cancellation of President Putin's visit, Russia-Pakistan relations will grow. Moreover, even President Putin's visit to India in November 2012 gave no indication of any Indian pressure that may have inclined him to relegate the development of Russia-Pakistan relations. In the overall context the on-going improvement in bilateral relations of Pakistan and Russia is because of various factors such as post Cold War geopolitical realignment by Russia, its worries about Afghanistan's post-withdrawal stability for which Russia considers Pakistan as a key player, Pakistan's regional tilt in the wake of its strained relations with the US, and India's growing geo-strategic and military ties with the US.<sup>54</sup> All of these factors strengthen the hope that Pakistan-Russia relations will continue to move forward<sup>55</sup> in the coming years.

### **Prospects of Developing Closer Bilateral Relations**

#### *Opportunities for Russia in Pakistan*

Pakistan and Russia find it mutually advantageous to cooperate in the economic, military and regional politico-strategic and security areas. Prospects are bright for promoting trade, investment and joint ventures in the fields of energy, infrastructure development, metal industry and agriculture sectors.<sup>56</sup> Russia wants to invest in mega projects in Pakistan like construction of Iran- Pakistan gas pipeline, expansion of steel mill at Karachi, improvement of heavy mechanical complex in Taxilla, expansion of Guddu and Muzaffargarh power plants, development of Thar coal

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Aurobinda Mahapatra, "Vladimir Putin's Pakistan Visit and India",

<sup>55</sup> "Fearing Afghanistan, Russia Gets Closer to Pakistan",  
<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/66040>

<sup>56</sup> Nivedita Das Kundu, "Russia – Pakistan Relations in the Post- Cold War Era".

project, partial funding of the CASA (Central Asia- South Asia) 1000 electric transmission project<sup>57</sup> from Tajikistan and construction of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline.<sup>58</sup> Russia sees Pakistan as a big market for its engineering exports and Pakistan is interested in Russia's energy projects due to its urgent needs in the sector.<sup>59</sup> This was reiterated by the Russian Premier at the last SCO Summit where he announced support for Pakistan's proposed trade and energy projects.<sup>60</sup> Indian diplomats also think that Russia wants better relations with Pakistan for its economic interests and securing CARs from religious extremism in cooperation with Pakistan.<sup>61</sup>

In the military field also, Russia has offered counter-terrorism equipment to Pakistan and cooperation in fighting terrorism and radicalism. In view of the US and West's reluctance to sell military equipment to Pakistan, the latter may conveniently turn to Russia for its military supplies which will also help in maintaining production in its defence industry. As earlier suggested, Russia recognizes Pakistan's strategic significance in the region particularly with respect to final settlement of Afghanistan<sup>62</sup> where instability can have negative impact on the security of CARs and North Caucasus. Pakistan can also be helpful in dealing with drug trafficking emanating from Afghanistan to Russia through CARs.

### *Incentives for Pakistan to Advance Its Relations with Russia*

As far as Pakistan is concerned, in the wake of many geo-political and geo-strategic changes taking place in its neighbourhood and to focus on its internal issues, it has felt the strategic need to strengthen its relations with all major regional players including Russia. Pakistan believes that a sustainable political settlement of Afghanistan before completion of the withdrawal<sup>63</sup> will greatly help in achieving internal stability in Pakistan

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<sup>57</sup> "From Chicago to Shangre La and Beijing", <http://politact.com/analysis-of-perception-and-perspective/from-chicago-to-shangri-la-and-beijing.html>

<sup>58</sup> Nadeem Hyder, "Pakistan-Russia Geopolitical Convergence", *Pakistan Observer* (Islamabad), May 21, 2011.

<sup>59</sup> Interview of M. K. Bhadrakumar, "Russia-India Relationship is based on Bedrock of great Trust and Confidence", <http://valdaiclub.com/asia/46581.html>

<sup>60</sup> "From Chicago to Shangre La and Beijing".

<sup>61</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, "Growing Russia-Pakistan ties a reality that India will have to live with".

<sup>62</sup> Nivedita Das Kundu, "Russia – Pakistan Relations in the Post- Cold War Era".

<sup>63</sup> Interview of M. K. Bhadrakumar, "Russia-India Relationship is based on Bedrock of great Trust and Confidence".

which has been adversely affected by the conflict in Afghanistan. Since the major regional players also want to bring peace in Afghanistan as soon as possible,<sup>64</sup> it is necessary that Pakistan coordinates its efforts with Russia. Russia is a former superpower and currently a major regional and world power as a permanent member of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) having the veto right. It is a leading member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).<sup>65</sup> In view of these strong credentials Pakistan needs stronger ties with Russia particularly when the US seems inclined to giving India a major role in the post- 2014 Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, constraints of strategic partnership with India, congressional activism that insists on linking assistance to Pakistan to performance in the 'war on terror'<sup>67</sup> and economic slump at home, that are purportedly behind America's coldness towards Pakistan, a non-ally not so long ago, also drive the latter to diversify its sources of assistance by befriending Russia that too appears willing to help Pakistan in many ways. In the region, China is already assisting Pakistan in various strategic, military and economic areas. In this age of globalization, Pakistan's thinking of developing good relations with all important regional and world heavy weights, is in consonance with the world trend of developing good relations with every country, even ignoring mutual disputes for the sake of mutual advantage. In a world where geo-economics dominates politics, Pakistan had better develop and maintain good relations with China, the US, EU, the Muslim world, Russia, all neighbours and the CARs. With Russia as a new friend, Pakistan stands to gain in all areas: Connecting Russia and CARs to Gwadar Port and developing the new Silk Road as proposed by the US<sup>68</sup> will result in an economic turn around for Pakistan. Moreover Russian ties can help in achieving better relations with India<sup>69</sup> through resolution of disputes. In that respect one recalls Moscow's role in brokering the Tashkent Pact which ended the 1965 war impasse between the contenders.

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<sup>64</sup> Nivedita Das Kundu, "Russia – Pakistan Relations in the Post- Cold War Era".

<sup>65</sup> Momina Ashier, "Fortifying Pak-Russia Relations," *Daily Times* (Lahore), June 30, 2012.

<sup>66</sup> Manish Chand, "India's Role In Afghanistan: Is US Speaking in Many Voices?", <http://www.indiawrites.org/diplomacy/indias-role-afghanistan-speaking-voices/>

<sup>67</sup> Susan B. Epstein and K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance," *CRS Report for Congress* (2012,) <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41856.pdf>

<sup>68</sup> Joshua Kucera, "The New Silk Road?", *The Diplomat*, <http://thediplomat.com/2011/11/11/the-new-silk-road/> (accessed November 27, 2012).

<sup>69</sup> Aurobina Mahapatra, "Vladimir Putin', Pakistan Visit and India".



### **Likely Impact of Russia- US Relations and Pakistan's Position in this Equation on Pakistan-Russia Relations**

For some years now Russia – US relations have been under strains. Their policies with respect to various issues in the world are not in consonance. Their major differences are over US plan of deploying the anti nuclear missile defence in Eastern Europe in the face of Russia's opposition. Currently there are also differences on dealing with the Syrian crises and Iran's nuclear programme. While the US favours unilateral military action in Syria in support of the opposition groups there and harsher sanctions against Iran, Russia wants both issues to be resolved through bilateral or multilateral negotiations under UN auspices. In response to the US State Department spokesperson Victoria Nuland's announcement that the US was still set to act in circumvention of the United Nations Security Council's decision on Syria, Russia and China jointly called for other nations to strictly observe the UN charter and the international law.<sup>70</sup> Russia also strongly differed over the development of the US global missile defence system. Russia's Chief of Staff, Valery Gerasimov warned "If the US continues with a global ABM system, Moscow may exit the new START treaty signed in 2010."<sup>71</sup> He added, "We make no secret that we have military means to neutralizing the possible negative impact of the US global missile defence system on the Russian nuclear forces potential."<sup>72</sup>

In March 2009 when Hillary Clinton and Russian Foreign Minister announced a 'reset' in relations, the future looked quite bright. But in the past three years the relations have deteriorated sharply. Except for the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty signed in 2010 there has been no major improvement in the relations<sup>73</sup> though both sides maintain active diplomatic contacts in view of the looming threat of another global financial crises, tensions in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia Pacific regions.

This tense state of Russia – US relations places Pakistan, with its geo-strategic importance, in a position of interest for both Moscow and Washington. For Russia, Pakistan has significance for providing access to the Arabian Sea and the Gulf; serving as a back door to Iran; as the route of the pipeline projects; and as a counterweight to the nearby powers of India,

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<sup>70</sup> "Russia, China Say Bypassing UN Rules is Impossible",  
<http://rt.com/politics/russia-bypassing-un-inadmissible-189/>

<sup>71</sup> "Obama, Putin Exchange Letters Amid Troubled US-Russia Relations",  
<http://rt.com/politics/putin-obama-message-patrushev-669/>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

China and Russia.<sup>74</sup> Pakistan could also be useful in helping the US maintain a foothold if not a strong hold in the region.<sup>75</sup> The former US Defence Secretary Robert Gates is reported to have hinted at Pakistan's strategic importance when he said: "We (US and Pakistan) need each other more than just in the context of Afghanistan".<sup>76</sup> On its part Russia wants to deepen its economic and strategic relations with Pakistan since it wants to work with Pakistan in stabilizing Afghanistan and the Central Asian region. During his visit to Pakistan in October 2012 he had said that the inter-governmental commission between the two countries had been working to promote economic cooperation between the two countries and that Russia attached great importance to consultations with Pakistan and was looking forward to Pakistan's participation in the next SCO Summit scheduled to be held in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>77</sup> It is being perceived in Russia that in case Pakistan-US friendship fell apart due to US undue pressure on Pakistan to do more in fighting the 'war on terror', Russia's close cooperation with Pakistan will give it a chance to gain a real foothold in South and Central Asia.<sup>78</sup> Russia will also gain access to the India Ocean through the Arabian Sea and to the Straits of Hormuz bypassing Iran. Russia should also endeavour to make Pakistan a permanent member of the SCO since Pakistan can greatly help it in controlling terrorist activities in Central Asia. And if Iran, Afghanistan and India also ultimately acquire SCO membership the balance of power in the region will greatly tilt in favour of China and Russia.<sup>79</sup> These factors bode well for Pakistan-Russia relations in the future. However due to its old strategic links with Pakistan the US may not like the advancement of this relationship.

Russian foreign policy favours a modern system of collective security evolved through supporting sustainable social and economic development of all countries. It also wants to assist economic development of less developed regions and countries to eliminate imbalances in development.<sup>80</sup> Towards this end, Russia is pursuing a liberal economic

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<sup>74</sup> Xiao Ling, "The Strategic Importance of Pakistan", *New York Times*, June 20, 2011, [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/opinion/21iht-edlet21.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/opinion/21iht-edlet21.html?_r=0)

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> "Russian Foreign Minister, Pakistan PM Discuss Bilateral Matters, Regional Issues", <http://www.nihao-salam.com/news-detail.php?id=Mjc3OA==>

<sup>78</sup> "Pakistan Can Make Russia Queen of Asia", [http://english.pravda.ru/russia/politics/28-08-2012/122006-pakistan\\_russia-0/](http://english.pravda.ru/russia/politics/28-08-2012/122006-pakistan_russia-0/)

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation,

policy without giving much consideration to any geo-political constraints. It is using its donor potential to pursue active and targeted policies in the area of international development at bilateral and multilateral levels.<sup>81</sup> It wants to increase its trade and investment relations with all the countries. It will therefore be easier for Pakistan to develop economic and trade relations with Russia without any difficulty.

### **Likely Constraints to the Development of Relations**

The current geo-political and regional environment appears to be quite favourable to the advancement of Pakistan-Russia relations. Over the years, China has also developed friendly relations with Russia and therefore it will not disapprove the growth of Pakistan-Russia relations. On the other hand, in all likelihood it would support such a development as a helping hand in bailing out Pakistan from its current economic difficulties.<sup>82</sup>

Although opportunities for advancing Pakistan-Russia relations are many, there can be some hurdles and constraints as well in carrying forward the process since India, some Muslim countries and the US may not feel comfortable over this evolving partnership and therefore may like to constrain the progress through hurdles that one might like to explore.

#### *India*

Kashmir and other unresolved disputes continue to mar prospects of improvement in Pakistan India ties. The tendency to treat each other as adversaries suffers no diminishment. Both envy each other's relations with the major powers of the world. In the post Cold War scenario while US-India relations have greatly improved and transformed into the strategic partnership, Pakistan-US relations have suffered a decline after ups and downs over a period. The long-time friendship between India and Russia is still very strong. This is because Russia is the successor state of the former Soviet Union which was the main supplier of defence equipment to India for many decades. Both countries also share some perceptions on Islamic extremism and regional stability in Central Asia.<sup>83</sup> Their geopolitical ties

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[http://www.mid.ru/brp\\_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D](http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/76389FEC168189ED44257B2E0039B16D)

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Liza Curtis, "The Reorientation of Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards its Region", *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 20, no. 2, (2012): 257.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Weitz, "The Maturing of Russia-India Defence Relations", *Journal of Defence Studies*, vol. 6, no.3, (July 2012), [http://www.idsa.in/6\\_3\\_2012\\_TheMaturingofRussiaIndiaDefenceRelations\\_RichardWeitz](http://www.idsa.in/6_3_2012_TheMaturingofRussiaIndiaDefenceRelations_RichardWeitz)

are also very strong since 2011 when they upgraded their friendship to the level of 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.<sup>84</sup> The Russian Government has supported India's efforts for becoming a permanent member of United Nation Security Council (UNSC) with full veto power and also full member of SCO. To quote President Putin's remarks made during his visit to India in 2010 when he was Russia's Premier, "India is our candidate number one in terms of enlarging the geographical representation of the Security Council."<sup>85</sup> Such a strong statement was made to probably sustain India's old friendship that was under threat from the US nuclear deal and the agreement for strategic partnership.<sup>86</sup>

India's earlier massive purchases and lease of Soviet military equipment included 1000 T-90 tanks, two Akula-11 nuclear submarines, INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier programme, four Tu-22M3 bombers, US \$900 million up-gradation of MiG-29, 80 Mi-17 helicopters, and six Ilyushin IL-76 Candid to fit Israeli Phalcon radar in addition to agreements signed for joint production of BrahMos cruise missile system, 5<sup>th</sup> generation fighter jet programme, Sukhoi Su-30MK1 programme, and Ilyushin/HAL Tactical Transport Aircraft which would need modernization, upgrading and replacement.<sup>87</sup> The two comprehensive arms sales agreements signed between Russia and India in January 1993 and February 1996<sup>88</sup> remain the bedrock of both countries' strong military relationship though due to India's much changed geopolitical orientation towards the West, particularly the US, Russia's status of being the main supplier of defence equipment is likely to be lowered in the coming years.<sup>89</sup> By the end of Yeltsin's presidency, procurement of Russian weapons by India had reached 1.5 billion dollars a year.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, despite the attraction of buying Western military hardware India's arsenal is replete with an array of Russian hardware that would retain Russia as India's largest defence partner for years to come. Both countries have been cooperating in energy and space programme also. This comprises joint exploration of oil and gas, provision of two units of 1000 MW nuclear power plants at Kudankulam and collaboration in outer space for peaceful purposes which can be used for

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>85</sup> "Putin Backs India's UN Seat Bid", December 4, 2004, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south\\_asia/4069453.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4069453.stm). (accessed May 5, 2013).

<sup>86</sup> Richard Weitz, "The Maturing of Russia-India Defence Relations".

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 78.

development of intercontinental ballistic missiles. An agreement to jointly launch a proposed lunar exploration mission in 2013 was signed.<sup>91</sup>

India and Russia have taken some major steps to promote trade and economic cooperation as well. The India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC) with six Joint Working Groups is functioning and is co-chaired by the Indian External Affairs Minister and Russian Deputy Prime Minister. The two countries have also set up India-Russia Forum on trade and investment at the level of two Commerce Ministers to promote trade, investment and economic cooperation. Both countries are aiming at boosting mutual trade and achieving a target of \$20 billion by 2015.<sup>92</sup>

With this robust strategic and military relationship with Russia, India is in a position to influence the development of closer relations between Pakistan and Russia, particularly progress in the military field in the short term perspective. However, in view of India's growing relations with the US and interest in purchasing its military hardware, India may not succeed in this effort. Russia may argue since it has accepted India's agreement of strategic partnership with the US it should also not object to Russia's evolving friendship with Pakistan. Some Indian scholars are of the view that India will have to live with Russia's growing relations with Pakistan.<sup>93</sup> Even India might have to contend with Russia providing military hardware to Pakistan at some stage as it would be looking for other markets to compensate for curtailed Indian demand. This was commented by a Russian diplomat during the visit of the Russian Deputy Prime Minister, Dmitry Rogozin to India in July 2012.<sup>94</sup> In this context Ruslan Pukhov, Director of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies of Russia and an analyst well connected to the Russian Ministry of Defence, in an interview with *Kommersant* said, "Delhi's attempts to diversify its supplies of new weapons- increasingly from Western countries-are making Russia flinch. Moscow has explained to Delhi in no uncertain terms that it can also diversify its military-technical ties by means of a rapprochement with Pakistan."<sup>95</sup> This implies that despite India's opposition, it is more

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<sup>91</sup> *India Space Programs and Exploration Handbook*, (Washington, DC: International Business Publications, 2011), 123.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Weitz, "The Maturing of Russia-India Defence Relations".

<sup>93</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, "Growing Russia- Pakistan Ties a Reality that India Will Have to Live With".

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Joshua Kucera, "Fearing Afghanistan, Russia Gets Closer to Pakistan".

likely that Pakistan-Russia relations will progress though gradually expanding from economic cooperation to military collaboration.

### *The US*

In view of the earlier stated US-Russia differences it seems the US might like Pakistan to take its side in these conflicts rather than going to the other side. As such Pakistan's close relations with Russia may not be to the liking of the US. Already Putin's clear support for Pakistan's membership of SCO is being viewed with doubts in the US about the likelihood of Pakistan's slipping away from the US sphere of influence. Therefore, with no other apparent reason but the strategic America may like to see a slow down in the growth speed of this relationship.

### *China*

Pakistan and China are very close friends with strategic cooperation in the many micro and macro level economic projects and military related fields. China has been steadfast in supporting Pakistan's role in the 'war on terror'. It has firmly supported Pakistan in all matters in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). To assist Pakistan in withstanding US pressures for 'doing more' in the 'war on terror', China's support for Pakistan's stance has been strong. They have successfully resolved their border disputes and for the last many years they have had close politico-economic and strategic cooperation. In the recent times both have displayed very close coordination and cooperation on the Syrian domestic conflict and Iran's nuclear programme. In the light of their very warm relations China is likely to welcome the development of close relations between Pakistan and Russia barring the possibility of China and Russia's clash of economic interests in Pakistan which the latter will have to guard against by being cognizant of China's sensitivities regarding its commercial and strategic interests.

### *Saudi Arabia and Other Gulf States*

Pakistan has very good long term relations with Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and other Gulf states, all currently worried and concerned about violence in Syria and the Asad regime's future. While the US, EU, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states are supporting the Syrian opposition and want regime change; Iran, Russia and China are favouring a negotiated settlement in Syria. Therefore Russia and China together have vetoed three resolutions of the UNSC aimed at clamping sanctions and taking other

harder actions against Syria. On the other side, Saudi Arabia and GCC countries are worried about Iran's suspected nuclear ambitions and are supporting the US and EU on sanctions policy which, Russia and China oppose. This regional tussle may have strained Arab ties with Russia. Though the Arabs are not likely to obstruct Pakistan- Russia relations but being Pakistan's strategic allies it behoves Pakistan to take these countries into confidence on the necessity of getting closer to Russia.

### **Recommendations**

The foregoing analysis shows that both Pakistan and Russia are convinced and determined to better their relations despite constraints that are nonetheless manageable. In this context the following recommendations may be of interest to policy makers:

- Pakistan should discuss with Russia on what role should both countries play and coordinate their efforts to achieve early peace in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan should accord high priority to getting the Russian President's visit to Pakistan rescheduled to an early date.
- Provide incentives to Russia to attract its investment in energy producing and import projects, steel mill, infrastructure development and agriculture including water management.
- Pakistan should aim at making Russia a long-term trading partner and supplier of military hardware.
- At an appropriate stage Pakistan should initiate a dialogue with Russia to develop strategic partnership.
- In this pursuit Pakistan should remain mindful of China and Saudi Arabia's strategic and economic interests.
- Pakistan may also extend assurance to the US its relations with Russia will not hurt its strategic interests in the region.
- Pakistan's relations with Russia should not be seen against any third country.

### **Conclusion**

After the Soviet disintegration in 1991 and in the post Cold War era both Pakistan and Russia realized their past mistakes and initiated a process of forging closer relations based on new strategic realities. However in the post 9/11 scenario, with Pakistan becoming part of the 'global war on terror' and abandoning its support for the Taliban rule, mutual trust between Pakistan

and Russia improved and bilateral high level contacts picked up frequency. Both sides saw their regional strategic and economic interests converging. This convergence further crystallized after both countries' experience of the 'war on terror' and the announcement of withdrawal of foreign force by 2014. Hence, the period from 2010 to 2012 saw very quick progress in Pakistan- Russia understanding of the strategic need to get closer and work for resolving the Afghan and other regional issues. Both states were also attracted by the prospects of mutual economic cooperation after withdrawal.

During 2010-2012 frequent ministerial level visits were conducted and strong desire of deepening bilateral ties was affirmed. Russian leaders declared Pakistan as a key player in resolving Afghan conflict and expressed keen interest in investing in various economic and energy projects in Pakistan. Similarly Pakistan saw Russia as a strong regional partner and source of future economic investment being the world's eighth largest economy and the third major holder of foreign reserves in the Asia Pacific region after China and Japan.<sup>96</sup> Despite cancellation of Russian President Putin's planned landmark visit to this country in October 2012 at short notice, the immediate follow up visits of General Kayani to Russia and Russian Foreign Minister to Pakistan strongly endorsed that the cancellation did not have any negative implication on the progress of Pakistan-Russia relations. Many political leaders, officials, scholars and former diplomats in Russia, Pakistan and even in India believe that in the post withdrawal days, Pakistan-Russia relations would grow more even in face of Indo-US tacit opposition. ■

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<sup>96</sup> Roy Sultan Khan Bhatti and Nazima Shaheen, "Russia: Indispensable for Central Asia", *Pakistan Horizon*, vol. 64, no. 2, (April 2011): 56.