

Strategic Reorientation: The Geopolitical Implications of Pakistan's Alliances with China and Russia

Dr. Adeel Irfan¹ & Dr. Sundas Khizar²

Abstract

Currently, Pakistan serves as the gateway to Eurasia, which is becoming increasingly a reality in the context of the Russian-sponsored integration waves. This will be the component of the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI) and a land bridge to the economies of Eurasia. The South Asian security framework saw numerous significant modifications due to 9/11. The two key developments were the United States (US) decision to prioritize India and the growth of Sino-Pak collaboration. Afghanistan, often linked to the Silk Road, has remained unstable due to the tight contact between the major powers. Pakistan provides most of the landlocked states in Inner Asia with ocean access. Following the Cold War, China and Russia have protected Eurasia against US hegemony. As a result, the two countries now cooperate militarily and economically. The narrative of the South Asian Regional Security Complex, which centers on the India-Pakistan conflict, is changing as Pakistan seeks to engage China and Russia on the economic front and possibly explores the possibility of Russia joining the defense framework in the future. The development is the most effective way to give the SARSC strategic autonomy.

Keywords: BRI, Sino-Pak collaboration, India, Regional Security Dynamics

Introduction

Pakistan is referenced in several regional discourses that are layered on each other. It has been recognized as a frontline state in the Global War on Terror (GWOT), according to the meta-argument. Next, there have been trans-border security issues that have led to Pakistan and Afghanistan being referred to as Afghan-Pak. After shifting its focus to China and forming a new economic alliance via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistan became much more important. Pakistan was portrayed as the economic entry point to Eurasia. Additionally, given that Pakistan is a part of the Eurasian Economic Region, it was not unreasonable to anticipate an engagement between Russia and Pakistan. Pakistan's geostrategic location is also important because current events bring in multiple theaters of engagement on its surroundings, most remarkably from China and Iran. The withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan raised security concerns for the region, and

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and IR, University of Sargodha.

² Independent Researcher (Corresponding author), Email: sundas.khizar@yahoo.com

Pakistan's role became crucial for negotiating with the radical forces. China is worried about the security condition in Afghanistan as part of its arrangement policy, but it must rely on Pakistan for long-term developments, and the Afghanistan conflict will continue to be a challenge for the region in the long-run. The US's anticipated New Silk Road invites Pakistan-based initiatives that would join the Road-Belt initiative from South (Muzaffar, Shah, & Yaseen, 2018). Potential changes to the South Asian Regional Security Complex are another area where this trilateral partnership will have an impact. During the Cold War, the US-Pakistan relationship was historically pitted against Indo-Soviet relations. Since 9/11, there has been a significant amount of change. With its newfound ties to China, Pakistan is no longer an isolated state, and the US has reframed its South Asian interests with India as a key ally. This resulted in a rational thaw between Pakistanis and Russians to investigate prospects for collaboration in a more modern setting. Although it may take time, Russia and Pakistan's defense cooperation will significantly alter the stability of power in the South Asian region (Muzaffar & Khan, 2016).

Cross-Regional Strategic Dynamics

Global politics are accelerating, and Pakistan can only adapt by making significant winds of transformation. However, as Pakistan might have a greater impact on regional results, regional developments are of greater interest. Consequently, including Russia in more coordinated measures are required in light of Pakistan's Central Asia policy. Additionally, there is a significant pan-regional Eurasian order, towards which Pakistan has only made the first moves by joining Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and looking into becoming a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. The history of collaborating with superpowers like the US has provided Pakistan with sufficient expertise to interact with the new Russian coalition and China's efforts to undermine the unipolar world. Pakistan benefits from a multipolar world since it only serves to limit US regional aspirations, which are now of very limited use in advancing Pakistan's geopolitical objectives (Bharti, 2023). China and Russia have long favored a multipolar global order over US-led Western domination. This struggle for supremacy cannot be separated from Asian regional orders. The South Asian region is significant because it can influence the regional orders of Southeast Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia. Since World War II, the area has been under the influence of great powers. Russia's ascent under Putin has resulted in a rebalancing of power between Europe and Asia. Russia's conflict with the West has resulted in collaborations throughout Asia and increased influence.

China and Russia are trading partners, and their successful roles in regional security and diplomacy have been fueled by investments in gas and oil. The first and second phases of the East Siberia–Pacific Ocean (ESPO) oil pipeline were completed in 2009 and 2012, respectively, increasing Russia's oil exports to Asia to approximately 30 million tons annually. Thus, the globe is becoming multipolar as a result of Russia's involvement in Asia, conflict with the West, and involvement in

numerous organizations including BRICS, SCO, and G-20 (Mankoff, 2015). According to offensive realists, the global order will push Russia and China to increase their power and dominance, which will lead to an expansion of their territories and animosity. The defensive realists also assert that anarchy will boost China and Russia's security, either for upcoming conflicts or to counter other nations. This will not simply limit the actions of other states or promote moderation in state behavior. For Russia, the situation in Afghanistan presents both a threat and an opportunity. Russia can use neighborhood meddling as a shield for its purposes. Russia views Central Asia as a vulnerable region that needs to be stabilized for the sake of regional security. Central Asia is protected from Afghan Islamist militants by the blockade of Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) by former Soviet republics. China and Russia oppose Islamic terrorism and "color revolutions" in addition to US threats in the Asia-Pacific region (Kim, Blank, & Ordabek, 2015).

India's inclination toward the United States has put Russia's long-standing South Asian cooperation with India on a weaker note. The 2007 visit by Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov to Pakistan strengthened ties between the two countries. They both share Afghanistan as a neighbor and are very concerned about regional and local peace and stability. Pakistan views Russia as a significant global force, a development partner, and a huge silent contributor to regional peace and stability. The relationship between China and the United States is linked to the relationship between the Soviet Union and Pakistan. In terms of relations, the Indian component is also quite important. Pakistan benefited from the breakup of the USSR and established a strong cultural and geographic presence in Central Asia, but Afghan development partners and significant world powers were able to make that happen (Fazal & Khan, 2023).

Multilateralism is emphasized as a fundamental tenet of Russian foreign policy, which is consistent with its goals of becoming a great power and its methods for negotiating the global order. One strategy to increase Russia's influence while reducing its vulnerabilities is multilateralism. Despite this emphasis, multilateralism is rarely used by observers to frame Russian foreign policy. Russia interacts with multilateral organizations in a variety of ways. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, it plays a crucial role, even if it frequently opposes NATO's expansion. Additionally, it spearheads post-Soviet cooperative frameworks and is occasionally perceived as a danger by regional blocs such as Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova (GUAM). Russia has aimed for increased inclusion in international economic systems like the World Trade Organization (WTO), but its involvement in groups like the G8 has frequently been surface-level (Legvold, 2008).

Core Aspects of Collaborative Engagement

It is necessary to look at the macro-level dimensions of the Russia-China-Pakistan trilateral relationship that emphasize its significance. The rapprochement between China and Russia has been one of the most significant post-cold war

readjustments. Together, these countries have improved Eurasia and greatly influenced Central Asian nations and their multi-sectoral strategy. Due to their mutual trust, China has been able to make significant investments in Central Asia and Eurasia. Dramatic transformation is the second component of South Asia's geopolitical landscape following 9/11. Actually, one can say in a single line that 9/11 severely damaged Pakistan's strategic depth because of the current challenging ties with the Afghan government. Pakistan has thus been in a difficult position because it has also suffered greatly in the War on Terror. To remain geopolitically relevant, it is imperative to look beyond the traditional South Asian narrative of the Indo-Pak rivalry. The connection between China and Pakistan is crucial to giving Pakistan its strategic independence. Similar improvements can be observed as soon as the Russia-Pakistan relationship improves. With the turn of the twenty-first century, the intellectuals had pointed out that Pakistan would miss the development potential by becoming mired in the traditional discourse of South Asian security challenges (Gul, 2024). However, with the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), that anxiety has vanished. Through the integration of large Asian regions, Pakistan can offer an alternate paradigm of regional growth. It is feasible for CPEC to be connected to the One Belt and One Road (OBOR) framework. It would be a true north-south route that would connect not just the states of Inner Asia but also Europe and Maritime Asia (Kaura, 2021).

Redefining Pakistan's Role in Regional Security Dynamics

One of the main causes of the shifting dynamics in the region is the the interference of major powers in the South Asia Regional Security Complex, which also draws attention to the legacy of the Cold War. Initiatives like OBOR and CPEC, which also explain India's position in the region, are crucial for comprehending regional dynamics and upcoming scenarios. Russia-Pakistan relations are seeking for such a platform, while China-Pakistan relations are firmly rooted in history. It's also concerning how much of an obstructionist role India plays. Another possibility is that the Great Powers may eventually have a shared plan for South Asia, with Pakistan serving as a key player in its implementation. We must investigate each of these options (Hudson, McLeary, & Luce, 2016). Russia stayed in the area for a long time, but China made moves related to the Afghanistan conflict and the bigger issue of maintaining order. Over the past three years, there has been a growing interest in the relationship between China and Russia as partnership has seems to escalate on a wide variety of topics. Strategic Before one can look away, and even before nations comprehend, reality take a shift. Important changes take place that shape the years' future. That seems to be the situation with Russia and Pakistan, two former Cold War rivals, have recently witnessed stable warming of the bonds. The relationship between Russia and Pakistan is undergoing normalizing. This is now proceeding slowly and will require some time to reach a level. when a partnership may seem normal.

The consistent nature of high-level interactions between two nations' leaders and officials have been enhanced to the next at the same level. Additionally, Pakistan's self-imposed arms ban had previously been eased by Russia. A military cooperation agreement was also signed by Russia in 2014, marking a significant advancement in the connections with Pakistan. This also applied to the military and political switching statistics. issues, enhancing collaboration in the fields of defense and anti-terrorism. The two States had similar views about Afghanistan's development and progress. Russia and Pakistan and Pakistan agreed on commercial advances and economic partnership (Pradhan, 2020). In their 2003 work "Regions & Powers: The Structure of International Security," professors Ole Waever of the University of Copenhagen and Barry Busan, who teaches international politics at the London School of Economics, developed the notion of the Regional Security Complex. They define a security complex as one in which national security and primary security issues are inextricably connected. There are numerous internal conflicts in the complicated region of South Asia that must be resolved. The region became the center of many problems as a result of these internal tensions and inconsistencies that have not been resolved. The current discourse surrounding the framework of South Asian Regional Security (SARS) is predicated on the binary of strategic balance and power conflict, which is characterized by smaller states' battle for strategic autonomy. The purpose of the paper is to examine the characteristics of variables and how they change when great powers are interpolated within the SARS Complex (SARSC). Pakistan's expanding significance as a transportation hub for Eurasian trade lines is correlated with its relevance in the South Asian RSC. Pakistan's geopolitical location presents a wide range of opportunities with both political and economic facets. The nation supported foreign forces and the US-led coalition in the War on Terror. However, there is still a lot of room to stabilize the entire area, and Pakistan is a key ally for China and Russia in this regard (Munir & Iqbal, 2022).

Although it doesn't suggest it, it offers Pakistan the chance to break out from the Indo-Pak narrative binary and develop a more comprehensive identity that encompasses Inner Asia and the Middle East. This identity may be one Pakistan develops independently, rather than under the pressure of Cold War hegemonies. Numerous shifts in regional politics and extra-regional powers including the US, China, and Russia have occurred since 9/11. Barry Buzan introduced the novel idea of macro-securitization in 2009, which discusses the macro security framework of big powers. The US's goal of making India a part of its core security interest is still merely a theoretical idea since it is too ambitious and the macro-securitization strategy is hampered by South Asian regional security concerns. Both potential and challenges impact the new trilateralism between China, Russia, and Pakistan in the regional order. Although the goal of China's investments in Pakistan, especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is to improve economic relations, these efforts have been tainted by discontent at home. This collaboration is complicated by issues including the asymmetry in economic relations, the lack of prospects for local

businesses, and security concerns like attacks on Chinese personnel. Russia's ability to participate in significant business endeavors is restricted by its economic limitations brought on by Western sanctions and poor financial performance. Similar to this, Pakistan faces persistent budget deficits and a heavy external debt load, which makes it dependent on outside funding to participate in trilateral projects. Notwithstanding these obstacles, regional connectivity may be redefined by the possible integration of CPEC with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). The implementation of a coherent trilateral framework, however, would be hampered by Pakistani domestic skepticism and the precarious economic situations of both Russia and Pakistan. In the changing regional order, maintaining a balance between these forces will be essential to promoting long-term collaboration amid these three states (Chia & Haiqi, 2021).

Leveraging BRI-CPEC for Regional Economic Integration

The development of CPEC offers Central Asia a much easier and more affordable path. The region's future is more promising because of the Gwadar port's importance to trade and the economy. Ports are becoming hubs for international and regional trade thanks to CPEC. Wide-ranging trading potential could capture the global market, which is a game-changer for the region.

The quickest route to Central Asia passes through Saindak as part of the Gwadar project, which involves extensive development plans. The other important project for the Central Asian region is the construction of a highway that would cut the route by about 500 kilometers by passing through Afghanistan (Khizar & Ahmad, 2021).

The Central Asian nations of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan produce cargoes and dry products. For them, the quickest route to hot water is via Gwadar Port. It will lower expenses and increase the value of commerce. The Central Asian states are abundant in gas and oil. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are Central Asian nations that use the quickest route, the Gwadar port, to ship their liquid goods. The Gwadar route cuts the trip down to 1400 km, a significant reduction from the 1800 km Mediterranean Sea route. Compared to other nearby facilities, the cost of shipping liquid cargo via pipeline via the Gwadar route is significantly lower. While the alternative route via the Caspian will cost 3.3 billion dollars, Gwadar will cost about 2 to 2.5 billion dollars. The estimated cost of the route from China is \$35 billion, which is more profit capacity (Hussain & Jamali, 2019). For landlocked Central Asia, Gwadar is a boon. It will open up a lot of prospects for the area. These days, with the world changing daily and globalization turning the world into a little village, regional integration is crucial. Gwadar, an essential component of regional integration, is the port and CPEC project. Gwadar will assist. Both globally and in emerging nations. The noteworthy characteristics that are the following are mentioned under Gwadar: Energy and oil resources in the Central Asian region; South Asian labor force and its impact on regional development and West Asian oil resources and their commerce (Khizar & Ahmad, 2021).

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) breakthroughs in regional integration and emphasizes the significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). When India tried to designate Pakistan as a nation "promoting state-sponsored terrorism" during a BRICS conference in Goa in 2016, both China and Russia opposed the proposal, further inciting animosity toward Pakistan. In the meantime, India and China's bilateral ties have lacked coordination, which occasionally affects how they engage inside the BRICS framework. BRICS Plus can strengthen prospects for collaboration in several areas within a bigger group of nations if viewed through the lens of Neo-Functionalism and its idea of "spillover." At the regional level, interest groups will start growing, and they will advocate for more integration with their governments at home. For BRICS to consistently participate in the global order as a multilateral forum, this will be crucial overall. Additionally, because of its strategic location and CPEC, it demonstrates how governments in the region, and Pakistan in particular, have an inherent ability to support the transregional agenda of BRICS and BRICS Plus. Members must abandon bilateralism and let the peripheral nations fulfill their roles if BRICS is to continue to grow (Sultan & Mehmood, 2020).

With the advent of hybrid and overlapping membership structures brought about by China-led regionalism, the dynamics of alliance politics have changed. China-led regionalism complicates geopolitical alignments by involving countries in several blocs, in contrast to traditional alliances that clearly distinguish between friends and opponents. The boundaries between allies and enemies are blurred, for instance, when countries like Russia and India interact with China in organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) or BRICS while keeping ties with the United States. China-led regionalism is exclusive, especially when it comes to security, notwithstanding its hybridity. It mainly encourages cooperation between nations that are allies of China, thus keeping adversaries like the US out. Its ability to incorporate competing frameworks or address more general security issues is limited by this exclusivity. For example, there is minimal opportunity for interaction between the two powers because the U.S. is not included in security talks headed by China that concentrate on counterterrorism and regional stability.

Importantly, regionalism led by China does not provide strategies for handling the growing rivalry between the United States and China. By strengthening China's power and alienating the United States and its allies, these frameworks exacerbate differences rather than foster communication. The West views projects like the Belt and Road Initiative with distrust, which exacerbates rather than lessens geopolitical rivalry. In short, China-led regionalism makes traditional alliance structures more difficult by generating overlapping memberships, but it is less successful at managing great power competition because it is exclusive to security issues. Due to this dualism, the international system lacks appropriate forums for addressing the growing rivalry between the United States and China and runs the risk of deepening existing global rivalries (He, 2020).

Conclusion

Buzan claims that the India-Pakistan conflict is no longer the only option for the South Asian Regional Security Complex. Pakistan is regaining its ancient heritage and serving as a bridge between South Asia and Eurasia. Pakistan can now handle the financial challenges to the regional geopolitical order as its comparatively smaller economy becomes integrated with China's massive economy. China needs Pakistan more than anything else, despite the fact that its economy is shaky.

If Pakistan does not cooperate in the effective completion of this economic corridor, China would never be able to realize its dream of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The US no longer controls the conversation around the defense and security concerns arising from Afghanistan. Pakistan can now maintain its economic structure by cooperating with China, Russia, and Turkey. As new Great Powers balance the Indo-US cooperation with the Russia-China-Pakistan partnership, South Asia is no longer just focused on India. Neo-realistic assumptions about full dynamics are not necessary.

Once major nations take constructive action in the region, the very concept of South Asia might conceivably change. On important problems, such as the Kashmir dispute, Pakistan and India have not seen much progress. The new alignments might provide some welcome changes in the direction of a workable solution. In addition to strengthening Pakistan's economy, the economic corridors provide other smaller South Asian states opportunity. As a result, Pakistan's government must decide how to take advantage of the CPEC rather than making it a regional burden. Pakistan has abandoned its apologia-based approach to international policymaking and has been acting pro-actively. However, Pakistan's economic corridor can be jeopardized by internal political unrest.

As regional objectives and possibilities change, so do the dynamics of the trilateral relationship between China, Russia, and Pakistan. China is now a major force in South and Central Asia thanks to its growing economic presence in the region, especially through programs like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Nonetheless, both Russia and Pakistan are demonstrating an increasing desire to diversify their alliances in order to lessen their reliance on China economically. Russia's attempts to increase its very little economic influence in Asia are demonstrated by its eastward pivot, which is typified by its free trade agreements with Vietnam (2016) and Singapore (2019). Russia offers a wealth of natural and human resources, making it a promising partner for economic cooperation. This gives Pakistan a strategic chance to draw in Russian investments in technology, infrastructure, and energy while lessening its dependency on China. Their readiness to investigate new trade and investment projects, as demonstrated by organizations like the Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC), which will have its seventh session in Moscow later this year, highlights the growing bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. Russia gains a strategic presence in South Asia, Pakistan expands

its economic and geopolitical options, and China benefits from stable regional trade lines as a result of this trilateral interaction. The trend of closer relations between the three countries is not expected to stop, even though it might take some time for Pakistan to emerge as a significant economic partner for Russia.

Recommendations

The changing geopolitical environment of South Asia can be better understood by studying the changing trilateral dynamics between China, Russia, and Pakistan. The following are some recommendations:

- The emphasis should be on how China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) facilitates regional connectivity and allows Pakistan to operate as a link between South Asia and Eurasia could be one of the main areas of focus.
- Russia's eastward shift, which is evidenced by its free trade agreements with Singapore and Vietnam, as well as its attempts to increase its economic clout in South Asia, will help Pakistan how to draw in Russian investments in infrastructure, technology, and energy.
- The effects of Pakistan's assertive foreign policy and expanding collaboration with China and Russia may reveal strategic mechanisms that subvert established power systems, such Indo-US cooperation couldn't be neglected for stable regional order.
- The role that economic corridors like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) play in promoting regional integration and providing smaller South Asian states with economic prospects is another topic of attention.
- Analysis of the effects of internal political unrest on Pakistan's capacity to capitalize on these alliances is also necessary, as is the possibility of new regional alliances to resolve enduring disputes like the Kashmir problem. Last but not least, the emphasis should be on how positive involvement by superpowers might reshape South Asia's identity and security framework may provide new prospects for cooperation and regional growth.

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