



# From Frost To Alliance: Reimagining Russia-Pakistan Strategic Dynamics In A Shifting Geopolitical Landscape (2010–2023)

<sup>1</sup>Rajinder Singh

<sup>1</sup>Senior Research Fellow

<sup>1</sup>Defence and Strategic Studies

<sup>1</sup>Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab, India

## ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the evolving strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023, highlighting a significant shift from historical tensions to a multifaceted partnership driven by geopolitical pragmatism and shared interests. Initially strained by Cold War alignments, the relationship warmed post-2010, marked by high-level state visits, strategic dialogues, and the lifting of Russia's arms embargo on Pakistan in 2014. Key areas of cooperation include defence, with joint military exercises and arms deals, and economic ties, notably the PakStream Gas Pipeline Project and a proposed Free Trade Agreement. Both nations share strategic interests in regional stability, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia, amidst challenges like terrorism and nuclear security. The partnership is influenced by external factors, including Pakistan's fraying U.S. ties and Russia's balancing act with its traditional ally, India. While the Russia-Pakistan relationship has grown, it remains secondary to Russia's ties with India. The paper also examines implications for India, particularly in defence and regional energy dynamics, concluding that the evolving Russia-Pakistan partnership reflects the fluid nature of global alliances, driven by mutual benefits and geopolitical realities.

**Keywords:** Russia-Pakistan Relations, Strategic Partnership, Geopolitical Dynamics, Defence Cooperation, Economic Ties, Regional Stability, PakStream Gas Pipeline

## I. INTRODUCTION

### *1.1. Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations: A Tale of Shifting Alliances*

Once upon a time, in the complex world of international politics, two nations, Russia and Pakistan, found themselves on opposite sides of the geopolitical divide. Their relationship was strained, with Pakistan aligning with the United States and Russia fostering strong ties with India. However, as the saying goes, "the only constant in life is change," and this proved true for Russia-Pakistan relations. Around 2010, the winds of change began to blow, and the frosty relationship between Russia and Pakistan started to warm up. The

leaders of both nations, recognizing the potential benefits of cooperation, initiated a series of high-level visits and discussions. The goal was clear: to strengthen economic ties and lay the groundwork for a strategic partnership<sup>1</sup>. The first significant milestone in this new era of cooperation came in 2011, when both countries began working on a proposed Free Trade Agreement and currency swap arrangement. This was followed by the first strategic dialogue in 2013, which set the stage for closer relations in political, economic, defence, and other areas. The relationship was not without its challenges, though. Despite the warming ties, Russia's emphasis on its strategic relationship with India led to some doubts about the seriousness of its commitment to Pakistan. However, these doubts were put to rest when Pakistan received its first shipment of discounted Russian oil in June 2023, marking a significant step in their burgeoning relationship<sup>2</sup>.

The strategic drivers of this relationship were not just about economics. Both nations shared a common interest in regional peace and stability, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia. This shared interest served as a key driver in their strategic relations. However, the relationship was not just about mutual interests. It was also a reflection of the changing global geopolitical landscape. As India tilted towards the West, Russia saw an opportunity to renew its bilateral relations with Pakistan. This renewed relationship was not just about defence and trade; it extended to investment, science, technology, agriculture, education, and culture. Despite these developments, it's important to note that Pakistan does not fall into the first, second, or third tier of Russia's important relationships. This suggests that while the Russia-Pakistan relationship has seen significant improvements, it is still not a top priority for Russia in terms of its foreign policy. In conclusion, the story of Russia-Pakistan strategic relations is a tale of shifting alliances, shared interests, and strategic pragmatism. It's a story that reminds us that in the world of international politics, change is indeed the only constant.

## 1.2. Evolution of Strategic Relations

The historical backdrop of Russia-Pakistan strategic relations is a fascinating tale of shifting alliances, geopolitical maneuvering, and evolving strategic interests. The relationship between the two countries has been largely influenced by their respective ties with other major powers, particularly the United States and India. During the Cold War, the geopolitical landscape was dominated by two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, now Russia. Pakistan, a newly independent nation, chose to align with the United States, while Russia formed a strong partnership with India. This alignment strained Russia-Pakistan relations and limited their interaction. However, Pakistan frequently attempted to repair relations with the Soviet Union, especially when its relationship with Washington was troubled. This was evident during the Soviet-Afghan War, where Pakistan played a key role against the Soviet Union by supplying missiles to the Mujahideen, backed by the aid of the United States<sup>3</sup>. Despite these tensions, relations began to normalize after the Soviet Union withdrew its troops from Afghanistan<sup>4</sup>. In the wake of the fall of communism, Russian Pakistan

<sup>1</sup>Tdi. (2023, October 1). Geopolitical realignment: nascent Russia-Pakistan relations. The Diplomatic Insight. <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/geopolitical-realignment-nascent-russia-pakistan-relations/>

<sup>2</sup>Shah, A. A. (2001). PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: POST-COLD WAR ERA. Strategic Studies, 21(2), 31–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242254>

<sup>3</sup>Shah, A. A. (2001). PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: POST-COLD WAR ERA. Strategic Studies, 21(2), 31–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242254>

<sup>4</sup>Tdi. (2023, October 1). Geopolitical realignment: nascent Russia-Pakistan relations. The Diplomatic Insight. <https://thediplomaticinsight.com/geopolitical-realignment-nascent-russia-pakistan-relations/>

relations warmed rapidly<sup>5</sup>. However, the historical partnership between Russia and India remained a significant factor in shaping Russia-Pakistan relations.

The turning point in Russia-Pakistan relations came around 2010, during the presidency of Asif Ali Zardari and the prime minister ship of Yousuf Raza Gilani in Pakistan. Despite Russia's initial reluctance to develop strategic and military ties with Pakistan due to its strong ties with India, the two countries began to see the benefits of a closer relationship<sup>6</sup>. This period marked a significant shift in the dynamics between the two nations. The leadership in Pakistan, recognizing the potential benefits of a diversified foreign policy, sought to improve relations with Russia<sup>7</sup>. This was a strategic move, aimed at balancing Pakistan's international relations, which had been heavily tilted towards the United States<sup>8</sup>.

Despite Russia's initial hesitations, due to its long-standing relationship with India; it recognized the strategic value of a partnership with Pakistan<sup>9</sup>. This was particularly relevant in the context of regional stability and the situation in Afghanistan, where both Russia and Pakistan had significant interests<sup>10</sup>. This shift in relations was not without its challenges. Russia had to balance its new relationship with Pakistan with its traditional alliance with India<sup>11</sup>. However, the strategic benefits of a partnership with Pakistan, particularly in the context of regional stability and counterterrorism, ultimately led to a significant improvement in Russia-Pakistan relations. The period around 2010 marked a significant turning point in Russia-Pakistan relations<sup>12</sup>.

In 2013, a significant milestone was reached in Russia-Pakistan relations when they held their first strategic dialogue<sup>13</sup>. This wasn't just a meeting; it was an institutional framework designed to foster closer relations through cooperation in various sectors, including political, economic, and defence<sup>14</sup>. This dialogue marked a significant shift in their relationship, moving away from the historical constraints of their respective alliances with the U.S. and India<sup>15</sup>. It was a clear indication that both countries were ready to explore new avenues of cooperation and mutual benefit, independent of their traditional alliances<sup>16</sup>. This strategic dialogue was not just about discussing shared interests; it was about laying the groundwork for a more robust and multifaceted relationship<sup>17</sup>. It was about recognizing that in the complex world of international politics,

<sup>5</sup>Shah, A. A. (2001). PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: POST-COLD WAR ERA. *Strategic Studies*, 21(2), 31–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242254>

<sup>6</sup>ibid

<sup>7</sup>Tdi. (2023, October 1). Geopolitical realignment: nascent Russia-Pakistan relations. *The Diplomatic Insight*. <https://thediomaticinsight.com/geopolitical-realignment-nascent-russia-pakistan-relations/>

<sup>8</sup>Shah, A. A. (2001). PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: POST-COLD WAR ERA. *Strategic Studies*, 21(2), 31–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242254>

<sup>9</sup>Liu, F. (2022). The Evolution of Russia's Foreign Policy From 1991 to 2021. *Journal of Chinese Political Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1515/jcpr-2022-0001>

<sup>10</sup>Burna-Asefi, S. N. (2023, April 20). The strategic logic of Russia's embrace of the Taliban. *The Diplomat*. <https://thedi diplomat.com/2023/04/the-strategic-logic-of-russias-embrace-of-the-taliban/>

<sup>11</sup>Kumar, S. (2019, May). (PDF) India's foreign policy in 21st Century. ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333478759\\_India's\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_in\\_21st\\_Century](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333478759_India's_Foreign_Policy_in_21st_Century)

<sup>12</sup>Konwer, S. (2023). Russia-Pakistan Relations and the 'China Factor'- Implications for India. *Strategic Analysis*, 47(4), 349–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2023.2288980>

<sup>13</sup>Biswas, S. (2021). Russia–China–Pakistan Engagement in the Changing Global Context: Scrutinizing the Realist Logic of a Trilateral 'Axis'. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 25(1), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598421998899>

<sup>14</sup>Chaliha, F. (2022). Russia's interest in Pakistan and its implications on India. *International Journal of Health Sciences*, 6(S1), 501–509.

<sup>15</sup>Slobodchikoff, M. O., & Tandon, A. (2017). Shifting alliances and balance of power in Asia: transitions in the Indo-Russian security ties. *Asian Journal of Political Science*, 25(2), 159–175. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02185377.2017.1279063>

<sup>16</sup>Wani, Z. A. (2022). Geopolitical Dynamics in the Afghanistan–India–Pakistan Triangle. *India Quarterly*, 78(4), 617–633. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09749284221127807>

<sup>17</sup>Dr. Imran Khan, & Dr. Karim Haider Syed. (2021). The strategic relations of Pakistan and Russia in 21st Century. *Research Journal of Social Sciences and Economics Review*, 2(1), 259–265. [https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss1-2021\(259-265\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/rjsser-vol2-iss1-2021(259-265))



diversifying alliances and partnerships can be a strategic advantage<sup>18</sup>. It marked the beginning of a new era of cooperation, one that has the potential to reshape the geopolitical landscape in the region<sup>19</sup>. It was a clear signal that both countries were ready to chart a new course in their relationship, one based on mutual respect, shared interests, and strategic cooperation<sup>20</sup>.

Historically, Russia's embargo on Pakistan was influenced by Cold War alignments and the Afghan conflict. In 2014, the landscape of Russia-Pakistan relations experienced a seismic shift when Russia lifted its self-imposed embargo on arms sales to Pakistan<sup>21</sup>. This decision, made against the backdrop of India's objections, signalled a notable change in Russia's foreign policy<sup>22</sup>. This move not only demonstrated Russia's willingness to engage with Pakistan on a strategic level but also highlighted the evolution of its foreign policy<sup>23</sup>. It indicated Russia's readiness to diversify its alliances and partnerships, even if it meant disregarding the concerns of its traditional ally, India<sup>24</sup>. The lifting of the embargo was not just about arms sales. It was a symbol of Russia's newfound flexibility in its foreign relations, and its willingness to prioritize its strategic interests<sup>25</sup>. It was a clear message to the international community that Russia was moving away from its traditional approach and was ready to explore new partnerships<sup>26</sup>.

Under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) mandate, Russia and Pakistan have committed to jointly addressing growing threats such as the Islamic State in the region, particularly after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan<sup>27</sup>. This cooperation is recognition of the crucial role Pakistan plays in any resolution of the Afghan situation, given its strategic location and influence in the region<sup>28</sup>. Russia's engagement with Pakistan has been driven by its interest in maintaining regional stability, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia<sup>29</sup>. This is due to the potential impact of instability in these regions on Russia's security, including the threat of terrorism and drug trafficking<sup>30</sup>.

Meanwhile, Pakistan acknowledges that Russia, a significant global player, is reasserting its influence in the region<sup>31</sup>. This mutual understanding has led to increased cooperation between the two countries,

<sup>18</sup>Raashed, Maryam & Anwar, Rida. (2020). PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY IN TRANSITION: DRIVING FACTORS AND EMERGING TRENDS. 10.13140/RG.2.2.24627.04641.

<sup>19</sup>Fets, K. (2015). A new era: India-russia ties in the 21st Century. Rossiyskaya Gazeta.

<sup>20</sup>(PDF) Pakistan-Russia Relations in changing geostrategic environment. (2024, February 1). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372356187\\_Pakistan-Russia\\_Relations\\_in\\_Changing\\_Geostrategic\\_Environment](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/372356187_Pakistan-Russia_Relations_in_Changing_Geostrategic_Environment)

<sup>21</sup>Keck, Z. (2014, June 4). Russia ends arms embargo against Pakistan. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/russia-ends-arms-embargo-against-pakistan/>

<sup>22</sup>Lalwani, Dr. S., O'Donnell, Dr. F., Sagerstrom, T., & Vasudeva, A. (2021). Russia leaves politics aside in arms sale to India. Emerald Expert Briefings. <https://doi.org/10.1108/oxan-es253560>

<sup>23</sup>Kumar, R. (2016). Russia's Foreign Policy: An Overview of 25 Years of Transition. International Studies, 53(3-4), 210-226. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881717745961>

<sup>24</sup>Abdulgaffar MUHAMMAD. (2023). The Geopolitical Implications of Shifting Alliances in a Multipolar World. The International Journal of Sociology and Economics, 5(2), 410-430. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8382207>

<sup>25</sup>Keck, Z. (2014, June 4). Russia ends arms embargo against Pakistan. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/russia-ends-arms-embargo-against-pakistan/>

<sup>26</sup>Khan, H. U. (2019). Pakistan-Russia relations and the changing paradigm. Journal of Political Studies, 26(1), 217-227

<sup>27</sup>(PDF) SCO as a passage to Regional Security: Future developments and opportunities for Pakistan. (n.d.). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351552401\\_SCO\\_as\\_a\\_Passage\\_to\\_Regional\\_Security\\_Future\\_Developments\\_and\\_Opportunities\\_for\\_Pakistan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351552401_SCO_as_a_Passage_to_Regional_Security_Future_Developments_and_Opportunities_for_Pakistan)

<sup>28</sup>Kousar, F., Magsi, I., & Charan, F. (2023). The Role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process: A Thematic Study. Annals of Human and Social Sciences, 4(4), 608-616. [https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023\(4-IV\)58](https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2023(4-IV)58)

<sup>29</sup>(PDF) Russia's foreign policy in Central Asia. (n.d.). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323319069\\_Russia's\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_in\\_Central\\_Asia](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323319069_Russia's_Foreign_Policy_in_Central_Asia)

<sup>30</sup>Dagia, N. (2021, June 23). Bilateral bond between Pakistan and Russia deepening. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/06/bilateral-bond-between-pakistan-and-russia-deepening/>

<sup>31</sup>(PDF) Pakistan Russia Relation and its Effect on Regional Politics (1991-2008). (2019, January 1). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348171601\\_Pakistan\\_Russia\\_Relation\\_and\\_its\\_Effect\\_on\\_Regional\\_Politics\\_1991-2008](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/348171601_Pakistan_Russia_Relation_and_its_Effect_on_Regional_Politics_1991-2008)

including defence cooperation and joint efforts to address regional security challenges<sup>32</sup>. However, it's important to note that while Russia and Pakistan have made progresses in their strategic relations, Russia's primary strategic focus remains on its traditional partners, including India<sup>33</sup>. This balance reflects the complex dynamics of international relations, where countries must navigate multiple partnerships and alliances to advance their strategic interests<sup>34</sup>.

The relationship between Russia and Pakistan has continued to evolve, driven by shared interests in regional stability, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia<sup>35</sup>. Both countries have recognized the importance of cooperation in these areas, given their strategic location and the potential impact on their respective national security interests<sup>36</sup>. Russia, in particular, has shown an increased interest in Afghanistan due to its impact on security in the broader Central Asian region<sup>37</sup>. It is also concerned about the threat of terrorism and drugs flowing into its borders via Central Asia<sup>38</sup>. In this context, building relations with Pakistan became relevant due to its strategic location and influence<sup>39</sup>.

## **II. IN THE CONTEMPORARY PERIOD, THE STRATEGIC RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND PAKISTAN HAVE BEEN MARKED BY COOPERATION IN SEVERAL KEY AREAS**

The comprehensive strategic partnership between Russia and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023 has witnessed a notable evolution, marked by significant milestones and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Despite historical complexities and fluctuations in public opinion, the period has seen a substantial improvement in relations, particularly in defence and security cooperation. High-level state visits, arms sales, and the establishment of a Joint Military Commission have underscored the deepening engagement between the two nations, reflecting a strategic reorientation driven by shared geopolitical interests and a mutual desire for regional stability. This period has also witnessed Russia's increasing concern about the impact of the Afghan conflict, particularly in the context of the Taliban insurgency and the growing threat posed by the Islamic State and its Afghan affiliate, the Islamic State-Khorasan (ISK). The evolving strategic partnership has also been evident in economic and energy cooperation, exemplified by Russia's stake in the PakStream Gas Pipeline Project and the growing economic ties between the two countries. Furthermore, the potential for a true strategic partnership in the future has been highlighted, with the prospect of Russia influencing Pakistan to play a constructive role in Afghanistan and normalize its hostile attitude towards India. This evolving relationship signifies a departure from historical

<sup>32</sup>Bano, S. (2021, December 13). Pakistan and Russia to strengthen ties through Defence and Cyber-Security Cooperation – OPED. Eurasia Review. <https://www.eurasiareview.com/13122021-pakistan-and-russia-to-strengthen-ties-through-defense-and-cyber-security-cooperation-oped/>

<sup>33</sup>As India Tilts Westwards, Russia Looks to Pakistan to Widen its Strategic Options. (n.d.). The Wire. <https://thewire.in/diplomacy/india-tilts-westwards-russia-looks-pakistan-widen-strategic-options>

<sup>34</sup>Bakare, N. (2021). Contextualizing Russia and South Asia Relations through Putin's Look East Policy. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 56(3), 676-692. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021909620939113>

<sup>35</sup>Evolving Dynamics: Russia-Pakistan relations in the context of regional stability. - Bing. (n.d.). Bing. [https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=43&q=Evolving+Dynamics%3A+Russia-Pakistan+Relations+in+the+Context+of+Regional+Stability.&cvid=7c58d3bb450c4f6388e4e0b31cfc6bfd&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbwUyBggAEEUyODIBBzI3MmowajGoAgCwAgA&FORM=ANNTA1&adppc=EDGEDBB&PC=EDGEDBB](https://www.bing.com/search?pglt=43&q=Evolving+Dynamics%3A+Russia-Pakistan+Relations+in+the+Context+of+Regional+Stability.&cvid=7c58d3bb450c4f6388e4e0b31cfc6bfd&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbwUyBggAEEUyODIBBzI3MmowajGoAgCwAgA&FORM=ANNTA1&adppc=EDGEDBB&PC=EDGEDBB)

<sup>36</sup>Growing Pakistan-Russia military ties reflect Central Asia's changing geopolitics. (2024, August 19). Royal United Services Institute. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/growing-pakistan-russia-military-ties-reflect-central-asias-changing-geopolitics>

<sup>37</sup>Hashimova, U. (2021, May 3). Russia, Central Asian states worry about instability in Afghanistan. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/russia-central-asian-states-worry-about-instability-in-afghanistan/>

<sup>38</sup>Mason, S. (2022, February 4). How a Russian-Led alliance keeps a lid on Central Asia - War on the rocks. *War on the Rocks*. <https://warontherocks.com/2022/02/how-a-russian-led-alliance-keeps-a-lid-on-central-asia/>

<sup>39</sup>Pakistan and Russia expand strategic cooperation. (2022, December 21). *Pakistan Today*. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/12/21/pakistan-and-russia-expand-strategic-cooperation/>

mistrust, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing common challenges and leveraging mutual opportunities in the contemporary geopolitical landscape.

The strategic partnership between Russia and Pakistan has also been influenced by external factors, including fluctuations in their relations with the United States and the growing U.S.-India strategic partnership. These external dynamics have prompted both countries to reassess their bilateral ties and seek new allies, contributing to the reorientation and strengthening of their partnership. Additionally, the historical preference of Russia for India has at times strained its relations with Pakistan, leading Islamabad to closely monitor Russia's strategic ties with India. Despite these complexities, the evolving strategic partnership has demonstrated a mutual recognition of the strategic benefits of cooperation, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing common threats and challenges. The multifaceted nature of this partnership, encompassing defence, security, economic, and geopolitical dimensions, underscores the dynamic and adaptive nature of contemporary international relations, where strategic alliances are shaped by evolving geopolitical realities and shared interests.

### ***2.1. Defence and Security Cooperation:***

Russia and Pakistan have been working towards reviving their bilateral relations, with a focus on defence and security cooperation<sup>40</sup>. This shift in alliances is largely due to the changing geopolitical landscape in the region<sup>41</sup>. Russia's interest in Pakistan is closely tied to the latter's geostrategic position and its crucial role in the regional strategic environment<sup>42</sup>. This has led to high-level state visits and positive indicators in their bilateral relations<sup>43</sup>. Russia, being a senior member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), has shown a tendency to avoid getting involved in Pakistan's conflicts with other nations, further strengthening their strategic ties<sup>44</sup>. Despite initial reluctance due to Russia's strategic ties with India, Russia has shown a shift in its policy towards Pakistan<sup>45</sup>. This change was evident when Russia publicly endorsed Pakistan's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, indicating a willingness to develop strategic and military ties with Pakistan<sup>46</sup>.

The high-level state visits (See Table 1) between Russia and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023 indicate a gradual strengthening of bilateral relations, particularly in the areas of defence and security cooperation. The visits have been marked by discussions on regional security issues (See Table 2), potential arms deals (See Table 3), military exercises (See Table 4) and areas of cooperation such as energy and counter-terrorism.

<sup>40</sup>Bano, S. (2021, December 13). Pakistan and Russia to strengthen ties through Defense and Cyber-Security Cooperation – OPED. Eurasia Review. [https://www.eurasiareview.com/13122021-pakistan-and-russia-to-strengthen-ties-through-defense-and-cyber-security-cooperation-oped/#google\\_vignette](https://www.eurasiareview.com/13122021-pakistan-and-russia-to-strengthen-ties-through-defense-and-cyber-security-cooperation-oped/#google_vignette)

<sup>41</sup>South Asia's Changing Geopolitical Landscape - Foreign Policy Research Institute. (n.d.). Foreign Policy Research Institute. <https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/01/south-asias-changing-geopolitical-landscape/>

<sup>42</sup>A Balancing Act: Pakistan's Perspective on Relations with Russia in the Wake of Ukraine War and Middle Eastern Conflicts | LinkedIn. (2024, April 21). <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/balancing-act-pakistans-perspective-relations-russia-wake-rasool-nycuf/>

<sup>43</sup>Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: energy partnership and the China factor – NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS). (n.d.). <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/russia-pakistan-economic-relations-energy-partnership-and-the-china-factor/>

<sup>44</sup>Šćepanović, J. (2022). Russia and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: a question of the commitment capacity. *European Politics and Society*, 23(5), 712–734. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1932081>

<sup>45</sup>(PDF) Russia's strategic calculus in South Asia and Pakistan's role: challenges and prospects. (n.d.). ResearchGate. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360503453\\_Russia's\\_Strategic\\_Calculus\\_in\\_South\\_Asia\\_and\\_Pakistan's\\_Role\\_Challenges\\_and\\_Prospects](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360503453_Russia's_Strategic_Calculus_in_South_Asia_and_Pakistan's_Role_Challenges_and_Prospects)

<sup>46</sup>Khan, T. (n.d.). Analytics. Valdai Club. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/geopolitical-chessboard-pakistan-s-brics-ambitions/>

**Table 1: High-level State Visits between Russia and Pakistan with Strategic Objective, from 2010 to 2023**

| Year | Visit  | Strategic Objective  |
|------|--|--|
| 2011 | Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Pakistan <sup>47</sup> .                     | The visit aimed to enhance bilateral relations and discuss regional security issues, marking a significant step in reviving diplomatic ties between the two countries. |
| 2012 | Russian Chief of General Staff General Nikolai Makarov's visit to Pakistan <sup>48</sup> .     | The visit was focused on enhancing military cooperation, including potential arms deals, and discussing regional security issues.                                      |
| 2015 | Pakistani Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif's visit to Russia <sup>49</sup> .          | The visit aimed to strengthen military ties and explore opportunities for defence cooperation, including potential arms deals.   |
| 2016 | Russian President Vladimir Putin's suggestion of a Greater Eurasia Partnership <sup>50</sup> . | The strategic objective was regional connectivity, including the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) members, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the Commonwealth nations.   |
| 2018 | Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Pakistan <sup>51</sup> .                     | The visit aimed to discuss bilateral relations, regional security issues, and potential areas for cooperation, including energy and counter-terrorism.                 |
| 2020 | Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi's visit to Russia <sup>52</sup> .              | The visit aimed to discuss bilateral relations, regional security issues, and potential areas for cooperation, including energy and counter-terrorism.                 |

<sup>47</sup>Hussain, S., & Hussain, S. (2021, April 6). Sergei Lavrov to visit Pakistan today, first by any Russian foreign minister in 9 years. ThePrint. <https://theprint.in/diplomacy/sergei-lavrov-to-visit-pakistan-today-first-by-any-russian-foreign-minister-in-9-years/635078/>

<sup>48</sup>The "Brain" of the Russian Army Degenerates - Jamestown. (2016, September 15). Jamestown. <https://jamestown.org/program/the-brain-of-the-russian-army-degenerates/>

<sup>49</sup>Tanzeem, A. (2015, June 17). Pakistan Army chief visits Russia to forge new ties. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-army-chief-visits-russia-to-forge-new-ties/2825903.html>

<sup>50</sup>Roth, A., Hawkins, A., & Sauer, P. (2023, November 19). Putin and Xi's 'no-limits' friendship will be put to the test on state visit to China. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/article/2024/may/15/vladimir-putin-and-xi-jinping-no-limits-friendship-put-to-the-test-on-china-visit-to-china>

<sup>51</sup>Gul, A. (2021, April 6). Russia's Lavrov in Pakistan to discuss bilateral ties, Afghan peace. Voice of America. [https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia\\_russias-lavrov-pakistan-discuss-bilateral-ties-afghan-peace/6204223.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_russias-lavrov-pakistan-discuss-bilateral-ties-afghan-peace/6204223.html)

<sup>52</sup>Tribune. (2022, February 26). Qureshi justifies PM's Russia visit, says 'diplomatic space' increased. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2345268/qureshi-defends-decision-to-visit-russia-despite-ukraine-crisis>



|             |  |   |
|-------------|--|---|
| <b>2023</b> | Russian Defence Minister<br>Sergey Shoigu's visit to<br>Pakistan <sup>53</sup> . | The visit aimed to discuss defence<br>cooperation, including potential arms<br>deals, and regional security issues. |
|-------------|--|---|

These visits indicate a strategic shift in the relations between Russia and Pakistan, driven by their respective geopolitical interests and the changing dynamics in the region<sup>54</sup>. The focus on defence and security cooperation reflects their shared interest in regional stability and counter-terrorism efforts. The discussion on potential arms deals also suggest a mutual desire to enhance their military capabilities<sup>55</sup>. However, the strategic objective of these visits are not limited to defence and security cooperation. They also encompass broader areas such as energy cooperation and regional connectivity<sup>56</sup>. The suggestion of a Greater Eurasia Partnership by President Putin, for instance, indicates a vision for broader regional integration involving not just Russia and Pakistan, but also other countries in the region<sup>57</sup>.

Regional security issues concerning Russia and Pakistan in the context of their strategic relations, common threats, and challenges, are given below in table 2:

**Table 2: Regional Security Issues Concerning Russia and Pakistan**

| <b>Security Issues</b>  | <b>Common Threats and Challenges</b>   |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Afghan Conflict</b>  | The on-going conflict in Afghanistan impacts both Russia and Pakistan due to its proximity to their borders. Cross-border issues such as terrorism, organized crime, and instability reverberate in Moscow and Islamabad <sup>58</sup> . |
| <b>Terrorism</b>        | Both countries face threats from terrorist groups operating in the region. Cooperation in counterterrorism efforts is essential to mitigate risks <sup>59</sup> .  |
| <b>Nuclear Security</b> | As nuclear-armed states, Russia and Pakistan share concerns about nuclear safety, non-proliferation, and preventing unauthorized access to nuclear materials <sup>60</sup> .   |
| <b>India Factor</b>     | Russia's historical preference for India has sometimes strained its relations with Pakistan. Islamabad closely monitors Russia's strategic ties with India <sup>61</sup> .   |

<sup>53</sup>Motamedi, M. (2023, September 20). Russian Defence Minister Shoigu tours missile, drone display on Iran visit. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/9/20/russian-defence-minister-shoigu-tours-missile-drone-display-on-iran-visit>

<sup>54</sup>Biswas, S. (2021). Russia–China–Pakistan Engagement in the Changing Global Context: Scrutinizing the Realist Logic of a Trilateral 'Axis'. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 25(1), 7–25. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598421998899>

<sup>55</sup>ibid

<sup>56</sup>Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: energy partnership and the China factor – NUS Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS). (n.d.). <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/russia-pakistan-economic-relations-energy-partnership-and-the-china-factor/>

<sup>57</sup>Putin, V. (2016). *Vision for a Greater Eurasia*. Moscow: Kremlin Press.

<sup>58</sup>Hussain, A. (2024, March 20). 'Cousins at war': Pakistan-Afghan ties strained after cross-border attacks. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/19/cousins-at-war-pakistan-afghan-ties-strained-after-cross-border-attacks>

<sup>59</sup>Akhtar, S., & Ahmed, Z. S. (2023). Understanding the resurgence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan. *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 16(3), 285–306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17467586.2023.2280924>

<sup>60</sup>Azad, T. M., & Dewey, K. (2023). Assessing the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapon programme. *Defense and Security Analysis*, 39(2), 123–145. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2023.2178069>

<sup>61</sup>Konwer, S. (2023). Russia-Pakistan Relations and the 'China Factor'- Implications for India. *Strategic Analysis*, 47(4), 349–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2023.2288980>



|                                |  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>U.S. Relations</b>          | Both countries have experienced fluctuations in their relations with the United States. Pakistan seeks new allies amid fraying U.S. ties, while Russia explores opportunities in South Asia as the U.S. considers withdrawing from Afghanistan <sup>62</sup> . |
| <b>Economic Cooperation</b>    | Pakistan seeks economic partnerships beyond traditional allies, while Russia looks for opportunities in the region <sup>63</sup> .   |
| <b>Geopolitical Chessboard</b> | Despite asymmetry regarding India, Pakistan leverages its geophysical location, military strength, and influence in the Islamic world to play a significant role in Eurasia's geopolitical landscape <sup>64</sup> .   |
| <b>Mutual Mistrust</b>         | Historical mistrust remains an obstacle, but both countries recognize mutual benefits in building closer ties <sup>65</sup> .  |

**Table 3: Arms Deals between Russia and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023**

| Year                           | Arms Deal Details  | Strategic Objectives   |
|--------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>2014 (Initial Deal)</b>     | Russia lifted a self-imposed arms embargo on Pakistan, allowing arms trade and import of Mi-35 (Hind E) attack helicopters <sup>66</sup> . | Strengthening Pakistan's defence capabilities.               |
| <b>2017 (Under Discussion)</b> | Su-35 fighter jets <sup>67</sup> , air defence systems   | Modernize air force fleet and improve air defence.           |
| <b>2019</b>                    | Pakistan announced plans to purchase the Pantsir surface-to-air missile system and T-90 tanks from Russia <sup>68</sup> .                  | Enhancing Pakistan's military capabilities.                  |
| <b>2021</b>                    | Additional Mi-35M helicopters <sup>69</sup> and possible interest in Su-35 jets <sup>70</sup> .  | Continue to modernize and enhance tactical air capabilities. |
| <b>2023</b>                    | Pakistan supplied weapons to Ukraine in exchange for an IMF  | Geopolitical manoeuvring and economic stability.             |

<sup>62</sup>Zeng K, Wells R, Gu J, Wilkins A. Bilateral Tensions, the Trade War, and US–China Trade Relations. Business and Politics. 2022;24(4):399-429. doi:10.1017/bap.2022.8

<sup>63</sup>Clary, C. (2022). Russia–Pakistan relations and the constraints of geoeconomics. Asian Survey, 62(5–6), 838–865. <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2022.1801312>

<sup>64</sup>Miqbal. (2023, May 22). India's geopolitical rise in context: Regional implications. Atlantic Council. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/southasiasource/indias-geopolitical-rise-in-context-regional-implications/>

<sup>65</sup>Shah, A. A. (2001). PAKISTAN-RUSSIA RELATIONS: POST-COLD WAR ERA. Strategic Studies, 21(2), 31–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45242254>

<sup>66</sup>Zia, M. S. (2023, September 8). The truth about Pakistan-Russia ties. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2023/09/the-truth-about-pakistan-russia-ties/>

<sup>67</sup>Correspondent, H. (2015, September 18). Pakistan and Russia discussing Su-35 combat jet deal. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/pakistan-and-russia-discussing-su-35-combat-jet-deal/story-aJTYWpVH5Befkgoh0YDTbJ.html>

<sup>68</sup>Iwanek, K. (2019, May 18). Russia's looming arms sale to Pakistan sets up a dangerous game. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2019/05/russias-looming-arms-sale-to-pakistan-sets-up-a-dangerous-game/>

<sup>69</sup>Gady, F. (2017, August 30). Pakistan receives 4 advanced attack helicopters from Russia. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2017/08/pakistan-receives-4-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/>

<sup>70</sup>Correspondent, H. (2015, September 18). Pakistan and Russia discussing Su-35 combat jet deal. Hindustan Times. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/world/pakistan-and-russia-discussing-su-35-combat-jet-deal/story-aJTYWpVH5Befkgoh0YDTbJ.html>

|                            |   |  |
|----------------------------|---|--|
|                            | bailout, which helped avert an economic crisis <sup>71</sup> .  |  |
| <b>2024<br/>(Expected)</b> | A major multi-billion-dollar arms deal was <b>expected</b> , including fighter jets, air defence systems, tanks, combat helicopters, and warships <sup>72</sup> . | Further enhancing Pakistan's defence capabilities. |

Table 4: **Military exercises between Russia and Pakistan from 2010 to 2023**

| Year | Exercise Name                             | Strategic Objectives  |
|------|---|---|
| 2016 | Friendship-2016 <sup>73</sup>             | Enhance military cooperation, counterterrorism training, and strengthen defence ties.   |
| 2017 | Friendship-2017 <sup>74</sup>             | Build on counterterrorism tactics, improve interoperability, and deepen military-to-military relations.   |
| 2018 | Friendship-2018 <sup>75</sup>             | Continue to develop joint strategies for counterterrorism operations and share tactical expertise.  |
| 2019 | Friendship-2019 <sup>76</sup>             | Foster mutual understanding, share best practices in counterinsurgency, and enhance readiness.  |
| 2020 | Friendship-2020 <sup>77</sup>             | Strengthen collaboration in counterterrorism, practice joint tactical manoeuvres, and reinforce solidarity.   |
| 2020 | Kavkaz-2020 <sup>78</sup>                 | To enhance their counterterrorism capabilities, a platform for Pakistan to deepen its ties with Russia, particularly in the context of India's decision to stay away from the exercise, and highlighting Russia's role as a regional power. |
| 2021 | Druzhba-V (Friendship-2021) <sup>79</sup> | Enhance joint operational capabilities, focus on counterterrorism in diverse terrains, and reinforce mutual trust.  |

<sup>71</sup>Business Today Desk. (2023, September 18). IMF bailout to Pakistan linked to secret arms deal with US for Ukraine: Report. Business Today. <https://www.businesstoday.in/latest/world/story/imf-bailout-to-pakistan-linked-to-secret-arms-deal-with-us-for-ukraine-report-398817-2023-09-18>

<sup>72</sup>(Propakistani. (2024, March 15). Pakistan to Make a Major Multi-Billion Dollar Arms Deal With Russia: Report. From Pakistan to Make a Major Multi-Billion Dollar Arms Deal With Russia: Report (propakistani.PK) - Bing, n.d.)

<sup>73</sup>Friendship-2016: First ever Pakistan-Russia joint military exercise | MUSLIM Institute. (n.d.). <https://www.muslim-institute.org/PublicationDetail?publication=144/Friendship-2016:-First-Ever-Pakistan-Russia-Joint-Military-Exercise>

<sup>74</sup>Gul, A. (2017, September 25). Pakistan, Russia begin "Friendship 2017" joint anti-terror drill. Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-russia-friendship-joint-anti-terror-drill/4043265.html>

<sup>75</sup>Gady, F. (2018, October 17). Pakistan, Russia to hold joint military exercise. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/10/pakistan-russia-to-hold-joint-military-exercise/>

<sup>76</sup>JOINT-FORCES.com. (2019, October 9). FRIENDSHIP 2019 ~ Pakistan Special Forces in Russia. Joint Forces News. <https://www.joint-forces.com/exercise-news/26987-friendship-2019-pakistan-special-forces-in-russia>

<sup>77</sup>En, D. (2020, November 10). Friendship-2020 Joint Russian-Pakistani military exercise. New Defence Order. Strategy. <https://dfnc.ru/en/russia-news/friendship-2020-joint-russian-pakistani-military-exercise/>

<sup>78</sup>Kavkaz 2020: Russia's latest military exercise highlights its strengths and limitations as a regional hegemon. (n.d.). Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/kavkaz-2020-russias-latest-military-exercise-highlights-its-strengths-and-limitations>

<sup>79</sup>JOINT-FORCES.com. (2021, October 14). DRUZHBA-2021 ~ Joint Russian-Pakistani Exercise. Joint Forces News. <https://www.joint-forces.com/exercise-news/47412-druzhba-2021-joint-russian-pakistani-exercise>

|      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 2022 | Druzhba-VI<br>(Friendship-2022) <sup>80</sup>  | Expected to continue the trend of focusing on counterterrorism, interoperability, and strategic partnership.          |
| 2023 | Druzhba-VII<br>(Friendship-2023) <sup>81</sup> | Conduct joint drills for mountain and urban warfare, improve interoperability, and exchange professional experiences. |

In the context of Russia and Pakistan, their military exercises from 2010 to 2023 as shown in table 4 can be seen as a significant component of their strategic relations. The military exercises between Russia and Pakistan are not just about training and enhancing the capabilities of their armed forces. They also serve a broader strategic purpose. These exercises symbolize the strengthening of ties between the two countries, demonstrating their commitment to cooperate in the area of defence and security. These military exercises can be seen as a form of strategic partnership, which is a mutually beneficial relationship that can help both countries achieve their strategic objectives. In this case, the objectives could include enhancing their military capabilities, improving their ability to counter common security threats, and signalling their strategic alignment to other countries. Moreover, these exercises can also be seen as a form of strategic interaction, where the actions of one country influence the actions of the other. By conducting these exercises, Russia and Pakistan are not only improving their military capabilities but also shaping their strategic environment. They are sending a message to other countries about their willingness to cooperate in the area of defence and security, which could influence the actions of those countries.

## 2.2. Economic and Trade Relations:

The economic and trade relations between Russia and Pakistan have seen a gradual strengthening, despite some challenges. The focus of these relations has been on enhancing economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, and boosting bilateral trade. From 2010 to 2023, Russia and Pakistan have achieved several notable milestones in their strategic relations, particularly in the realm of economic and trade cooperation. As of the fiscal year 2022-23, the total trade between Pakistan and Russia amounted to \$920 million. Pakistan's exports to Russia during this period totalled \$74 million, while imports from Russia reached \$846 million<sup>82</sup>.

### 2.2.1. Free Trade Agreement and Currency Swap Arrangement (2011):

The initiation of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and currency swap arrangement in 2011 between Russia and Pakistan was a significant milestone in their strategic relations. FTAs are agreements between two or more countries where the countries agree on certain obligations that affect trade in goods and services and protections for investors and intellectual property rights, among other topics. The main goal of such agreements is to reduce barriers to exports, protect interests competing abroad, and enhance the rule of law in the FTA partner country or countries<sup>83</sup>. In the context of Russia and Pakistan, the proposed FTA aimed to liberalise

<sup>80</sup>"Druzhba" (Friendship)-2022 joint Uzbek-Indian tactical exercises have ended. (n.d.). <https://yuz.uz>. <https://yuz.uz/en/news/drujba-2022-zavershilis-sovmestne-uzbeksko-indiyskie-takticheskie-ucheniya>

<sup>81</sup>Tribune. (2021, October 9). Pak-Russia joint military exercise Druzhba-VI concludes. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2324042/pak-russia-joint-military-exercise-druzhba-vi-concludes>

<sup>82</sup>Tdi. (2023, October 12). Pakistan-Russia explores new avenues for bilateral trade cooperation. The Diplomatic Insight. <https://thediomaticinsight.com/pakistan-russia-explores-new-avenues-for-bilateral-trade-cooperation/>

<sup>83</sup>Free trade Agreement overview. (n.d.). International Trade Administration | Trade.gov. <https://www.trade.gov/free-trade-agreement-overview>

trade between the two countries, providing a strong rationale for free trade and the removal of trade barriers. This was heavily shaped by domestic and international political realities, with the objective of boosting economic growth in both countries<sup>84</sup>.

The currency swap arrangement, on the other hand, was designed to facilitate trade transactions, which would be settled in the Russian Ruble and Pakistani Rupee, thereby reducing the dependency on a third currency (usually the US Dollar). This arrangement was expected to reduce the cost of doing business and spur bilateral trade<sup>85</sup>. These agreements were part of a broader strategic objective to diversify their trade partners, strengthen their economies, and enhance their strategic relations. By reducing trade barriers and coordinating fiscal policies, these agreements aimed to increase economic activity, create jobs, and strengthen political ties between Russia and Pakistan. However, it's important to note that while these agreements have the potential to bring significant economic benefits, they can also come with certain drawbacks, such as the potential for trade diversion and the loss of national sovereignty. Furthermore, large multinational corporations with significant capital and resources could potentially dominate the market, leading to challenges for smaller players.

### 2.2.2. Shareholders Agreement (July 2021):

The signing of the shareholders agreement between Russia and Pakistan in July 2021 was a notable turning point in their strategic relations. This agreement outlined the roadmap for future cooperation, including the construction of a US\$2.5 billion natural gas pipeline in Pakistan, known as the PakStream Gas Pipeline Project (PSGP)<sup>86</sup>. The PSGP is a joint venture between the Russian state-controlled company Rostec (a Russian State-owned defence conglomerate headquartered in Moscow) and the Inter State Gas Systems (ISGS) of Pakistan. The project involves the construction of a 1,100-kilometre pipeline that will transport liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Karachi and Gwadar in the south to Lahore in the north (Shown in Map 1). This pipeline will be instrumental in transferring LNG imported by sea to the northern parts of Pakistan, where the demand for natural gas is very high<sup>87</sup>.

The PSGP is part of a larger Russian investment package in Pakistan's energy sector. In 2019, Russia committed to investing US\$14 billion in the sector, a significant increase from previous years<sup>88</sup>. This investment package includes not only the pipeline construction but also refurbishing Pakistan's ageing energy infrastructure and exploring further opportunities in power generation, drilling, exploration, and the establishment of storage facilities<sup>89</sup>. The agreement also stipulates that Pakistan will have a majority shareholding in the project, with the Russian consortium expected to hold a 26-49% share<sup>90</sup>. This arrangement ensures that both countries have a vested interest in the success of the project and underscores the strategic

<sup>84</sup>Potential for a Pakistan-Russia free trade agreement | Pakistan Business Council. (n.d.). Pakistan Business Council. <https://www.pbc.org.pk/research/potential-for-a-pakistan-russia-free-trade-agreement/>

<sup>85</sup>Tribune. (2011, November 8). Pakistan, Russia to go for FTA, currency swap agreement. The Express Tribune. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/289029/pakistan-russia-to-go-for-fta-currency-swap-agreement>

<sup>86</sup>Javed, M. A. (n.d.). Analytics. Valdai Club. <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/growing-pakistan-russia-relations-future/>

<sup>87</sup>Russia-Pakistan cooperation in energy sector. (2022, March 4). Pakistan Today. <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/03/04/russia-pakistan-cooperation-in-energy-sector/>

<sup>88</sup>Reuters. (2024, February 19). Russian oil producer Rosneft's annual profit surges to \$14 billion. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/russias-rosneft-reports-47-jump-2023-net-profit-2024-02-19/>

<sup>89</sup>Pakistan Today. (2019, October 30). Russia commits \$14bn investment for energy projects in Pakistan. Retrieved May 13, 2024, from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2019/10/30/russia-commits-14bn-investment-for-energy-projects-in-pakistan/>

<sup>90</sup>Desk, W. (2021, July 15). Pakistan, Russia sign agreement for 1,100-km gas pipeline project. ARY NEWS. <https://arynews.tv/pakistan-russia-stream-gas-pipeline-project/>



nature of their partnership. The completion of the project in 2023 is expected to significantly boost Pakistan's energy capacity and reliability, helping to alleviate chronic energy shortages that have hampered the country's economic growth<sup>91</sup>. It also marks an important milestone in Pakistan-Russia relations, symbolizing the growing economic and strategic ties between the two countries.

### 2.2.3. PakStream Gas Pipeline Project (North-South Pipeline) (2023):

One of the key aspects of their economic cooperation is the PakStream Gas Pipeline Project (formerly known as the North-South Pipeline), which is a flagship project in the economic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan. The project represents a significant step in their economic and strategic relations and is expected to have major implications for Pakistan's energy sector. The PakStream Gas Pipeline Project is a joint venture between the Russian state-controlled company Rostec (Russian state-owned defence conglomerate headquartered in Moscow) and the Inter State Gas Systems (ISGS) of Pakistan. The project involves the construction of a 1,100-kilometer pipeline that will transport liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Karachi and Gwadar in the south to Lahore in the north. This pipeline will be instrumental in transferring LNG imported by sea to the northern parts of Pakistan, where the demand for natural gas is high<sup>92</sup>.



**Source-** ISGS – Inter State Gas Systems. Available at: <https://www.isgs.com.pk/> (Accessed: 18 September 2023).

Rostec's involvement in the project underscores Russia's strategic interest in Pakistan's energy sector. Russia, being a global leader in the energy market, sees Pakistan as a potential regional hub for energy distribution. The involvement of Rostec, a state-owned conglomerate, also ensures direct involvement of the

<sup>91</sup>Barthwal, N. (2024, April 26). Iran and Pakistan's peace pipeline conundrum. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2024/04/iran-and-pakistans-peace-pipeline-conundrum/>

<sup>92</sup>Desk, W. (2021, July 15). Pakistan, Russia sign agreement for 1,100-km gas pipeline project. ARY NEWS. <https://arynews.tv/pakistan-russia-stream-gas-pipeline-project/>

Russian government, lending the project both strategic and political importance<sup>93</sup>. The PakStream Gas Pipeline Project, therefore, represents a major strategic investment by Russia in Pakistan's energy infrastructure. It is expected to enhance Pakistan's energy security, stimulate economic growth, and strengthen bilateral relations between the two countries.

Although the pace of Pakistan-Russia bilateral ties appears slow and the scope seems limited, the relationship is steadily improving and experiencing consistent growth. Both countries have been engaging in regular communication, gradually adding more content to their bilateral relations. Two important developments have taken place in Pakistan-Russia relations in the strategic and economic domains which are being seen as major steps towards the enhancement of Pakistan-Russia strategic relations<sup>94</sup>. However, the economic and trade relations between Russia and Pakistan have also faced some challenges. For instance, the euphoria over using cheap energy from Russia to revive Pakistan's struggling economy turned out to be very short-lived. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari confirmed that Pakistan was neither pursuing nor receiving any discounted energy from Russia, adding that Pakistan was exploring various possible options to meet its energy demands<sup>95</sup>.

#### **2.2.4. Comprehensive Gas Infrastructure Plan for Energy Cooperation (2023):**

The Comprehensive Gas Infrastructure Plan for Energy Cooperation between Russia and Pakistan, set to be completed in 2023, is a strategic initiative aimed at enhancing energy cooperation, expanding energy trade, and investing in energy infrastructure between the two nations. This plan is a key component of their bilateral strategic relations and is expected to have significant implications for their economic and geopolitical ties. The plan is evidence of the mutual recognition by both countries of the importance of energy security and the role of infrastructure in achieving it. It is also a reflection of their shared commitment to diversify their energy sources and reduce their dependence on traditional fossil fuels. This is particularly relevant given the global shift towards cleaner and more sustainable energy sources, as well as the increasing geopolitical volatility associated with fossil fuel-based energy sources. This plan is expected to include a range of projects, such as the construction of new gas pipelines, the expansion of existing pipelines, the development of gas storage facilities, and the exploration of new gas fields. These projects are intended to enhance the capacity and reliability of the gas supply in both countries, thereby contributing to their energy security and economic stability. Furthermore, the plan is expected to facilitate the integration of the energy markets in Russia and Pakistan, thereby enhancing energy trade between the two countries. This could lead to more competitive energy prices, increased economic activity, and stronger economic ties. The plan also signifies a strategic alignment between Russia and Pakistan in terms of their energy policies and their broader geopolitical objectives. By working together on this comprehensive plan, they are demonstrating their commitment to strengthening their strategic relations and their willingness to cooperate on key issues of mutual interest<sup>96</sup>.

<sup>93</sup>Russia's RosTec to build oil, gas infrastructure for Pakistan from 2015. (2014, December 12). Pakistan Defence. <https://defence.pk/threads/russias-rostec-to-build-oil-gas-infrastructure-for-pakistan-from-2015.348228/>

<sup>94</sup>Khan, M. T. F. (2021, December 16). Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan. <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-enhancing-strategic-and-economic-relations-between-pakistan-russia-in-light-of-recent-developments/>

<sup>95</sup>Pti. (2024, May 13). Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari calls for dialogue among politicians to steer Pakistan out of crisis. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/pakistan/bilawal-bhutto-politicians-dialogue-pakistan-crisis-9326091/>

<sup>96</sup>Kundi, I. A. (2023, January 21). Pakistan, Russia agree to complete 'energy cooperation plan' by March. The Nation. <https://www.nation.com.pk/21-Jan-2023/pakistan-russia-agree-to-complete-energy-cooperation-plan-by-march>

### 2.3.Regional Diplomacy:

The growing ties between Moscow and Islamabad, along with increasing cooperation in Afghanistan between Moscow, Islamabad, and Beijing, raise the possibility of a new coalition involving Pakistan, China, and Russia<sup>97</sup>. This regional cooperation has been instrumental in reviving new ties between Russia and Pakistan. From 2010 to 2023, regional diplomacy has played a significant role in shaping the strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan. The geopolitical landscape of the region, marked by shifting alliances, emerging power dynamics, and evolving strategic objectives, has influenced the trajectory of Russia-Pakistan relations during this period.

One of the key strategic objectives for both Russia and Pakistan has been to diversify their diplomatic relations and reduce their dependence on traditional allies. For Pakistan, this has meant a gradual shift away from its historical reliance on the United States, while for Russia; it has involved a reassessment of its traditional strong ties with India. This mutual desire for diversification has brought the two countries closer together and has been a driving force behind their improving relations. Another strategic objective has been to enhance economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector. The signing of the shareholders agreement in July 2021 and the initiation of the Comprehensive Gas Infrastructure Plan for Energy Cooperation in 2023 are notable examples of this. These initiatives are expected to boost bilateral trade, enhance energy security, and strengthen their strategic ties.

In terms of regional diplomacy, Pakistan's strategic location at the crossroads of major maritime and land transit routes between the Middle East and South Asia has made it an attractive partner for Russia. This geographical advantage, coupled with Pakistan's growing economic potential, has made it an important player in Russia's regional strategy<sup>98</sup>. On the other hand, the Russia-Ukraine War has led to a fundamental shift in the system of global security, forcing Pakistan to reassess its strategic objectives and foreign policy options. In response to these geopolitical challenges, Pakistan has adopted a principled stance that supports Ukraine's territorial integrity, demonstrating its commitment to international law and regional stability<sup>99</sup>. Despite these advancements, it's important to note that Russia and Pakistan's strategic relations are not without challenges. The complex regional dynamics, marked by ongoing conflicts, territorial disputes, and power rivalries, pose significant obstacles to their cooperation. Furthermore, the evolving nature of global politics, marked by the rise of new powers and the shifting balance of power, adds another layer of complexity to their relations<sup>100</sup>.

## III. THE EVOLVING STRATEGIC RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA AND PAKISTAN FROM 2010 TO 2023 HAVE SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA.

**3.1.** India and Russia have a long-standing strategic partnership, particularly in the realm of defence cooperation. Russia continues to be India's main supplier, but its share of Indian arms imports has shrunk

<sup>97</sup>The Pakistan-China-Russia relationship: an emerging coalition? (n.d.). Wilson Center. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/the-pakistan-china-russia-relationship-emerging-coalition>

<sup>98</sup>Kugelman, M. (2021, July 22). Pakistan faces a regional diplomatic dilemma as it shifts its focus to trade and investment. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/07/22/pakistan-afghanistan-china-bangladesh-regional-diplomacy-dilemma-khan/>

<sup>99</sup>Pszczel, R. (2022, July 7). NATO Review - The consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine for international security – NATO and beyond. NATO Review. <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2022/07/07/the-consequences-of-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-for-international-security-nato-and-beyond/index.html>

<sup>100</sup>Raza, H. (2023). Challenges in Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations. South Asian Political Review, 20(3), 134-145.



from 76% in 2009-13 to 58% in 2014-18 and then to 36% in 2019-23<sup>101</sup>. This defence cooperation has been a cornerstone of the Indo-Russian relationship, contributing to regional stability and security. However, the recent warming of ties between Russia and Pakistan has raised concerns in New Delhi. This is due to several factors:

- 3.1.1. Defence Cooperation:** Russia's increasing defence cooperation with Pakistan, including arms sales, could potentially affect the terms of India's defence deals with Russia. This includes the cost and availability of weapons systems, which could have implications for India's defence preparedness.
- 3.1.2. Regional Interests:** Russia's engagement with Pakistan, despite India's concerns, reflects Russia's strategic interests in the region. This includes Russia's interests in Afghanistan<sup>102</sup> and Central Asia<sup>103</sup>, where Pakistan can play a significant role due to its geographical location and historical ties.
- 3.1.3. India-U.S. Relations:** Russia's warming ties with Pakistan could also be seen as a response to India's increasingly close ties with the U.S. Over the past few years, India has deepened its strategic partnership with the U.S., including defence cooperation and trade relations. This could potentially be seen by Russia as a shift in India's foreign policy alignment, which could have prompted Russia to diversify its own strategic partnerships in the region<sup>104</sup>.

Despite these concerns, it's important to note that the Indo-Russian relationship is multifaceted and extends beyond defence cooperation. This includes cooperation in areas such as energy, space, technology, and trade. Therefore, while the growing Russia-Pakistan ties could pose certain challenges, the overall Indo-Russian relationship is likely to remain strong due to the shared strategic interests and deep-rooted ties between the two countries<sup>105</sup>.

- 3.2.** The increasing strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan have led to an uptick in arms supply from Russia to Pakistan, making Russia the third-largest supplier to Pakistan. This has been a concern for India, historically Russia continued to be India's main supplier, but its share of Indian arms imports has shrunk from 76% in 2009-13 to 58% in 2014-18 and then to 36% in 2019-23<sup>106</sup>.

However, the largest beneficiary of a decline in U.S. sales to Pakistan has been China. China has reached a major deal to send military drones to Pakistan, just days after Russia and India signed a multibillion-dollar arms sale. This indicates that while Russia is increasing its arms supply to Pakistan, China is also expanding its defence cooperation with Pakistan, which could potentially alter the regional balance of power<sup>107</sup>.

<sup>101</sup>Kalyan Ray, & Kalyan Ray. (2024, March 11). India again tops global arms imports, Russia main supplier: SIPRI. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/india-again-tops-global-arms-imports-russia-main-supplier-sipri-2931533>

<sup>102</sup>Balancing ties, Russia expands Afghanistan cooperation with both India and Pakistan. (n.d.). Middle East Institute. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/balancing-ties-russia-expands-afghanistan-cooperation-both-india-and-pakistan>

<sup>103</sup>Realizing India's strategic interests in Central Asia. (n.d.). Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieindia.org/posts/2019/12/realizing-indias-strategic-interests-in-central-asia?lang=en>

<sup>104</sup>Kugelman, M. (2022, April 14). Russia still looms over U.S.-India relationship amid Ukraine war. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/04/14/us-india-relationship-russia-ukraine-war/>

<sup>105</sup>Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2023). India-Russia Bilateral Relations. Retrieved May 13, 2024, from [https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Russia\\_Bilateral\\_Relations.pdf](https://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/India-Russia_Bilateral_Relations.pdf)

<sup>106</sup>Kalyan Ray, & Kalyan Ray. (2024, March 11). India again tops global arms imports, Russia main supplier: SIPRI. Deccan Herald. <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/india-again-tops-global-arms-imports-russia-main-supplier-sipri-2931533>

<sup>107</sup>Paul, T. (2019). When balance of power meets globalization: China, India and the small states of South Asia. *Politics*, 39(1), 50-63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395718779930>



In terms of the economic implications, the increasing arms supply from Russia to Pakistan could potentially affect the terms of India's defence deals with Russia, including the cost and availability of weapons systems<sup>108</sup>. Furthermore, the evolving dynamics of regional trade, including the terms of trade between India and its trading partners, could also be influenced by the increasing Russia-Pakistan relations<sup>109</sup>. Despite these concerns, it's important to note that the Indo-Russia relationship far surpasses the newer relationship with Pakistan in absolute terms. The bilateral trade target of USD 30 billion between India and Russia had been exceeded far before the target year of 2025, with the trade volume for the period of April 2022 to February 2023 being approximately USD 45 billion<sup>110</sup>. This indicates that while the growing strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan could pose certain challenges for India, they also present opportunities for India to reassess its strategic partnerships and economic strategies to navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape<sup>111</sup>.

**3.3. The Comprehensive Gas Infrastructure Plan for Energy Cooperation between Russia and Pakistan**, set to be completed in 2023, is a significant development in the energy sector of the region. This plan is expected to enhance energy cooperation, expand energy trade, and invest in energy infrastructure between Russia and Pakistan. The project, also known as the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline (PSGP), is a 1,100 km long project contracted by the Pakistani government to be built by Russia, with an estimated cost of around US\$2.25 billion as of 2021. For India, this development could be a concern for several reasons:

- 3.3.1. Altering Regional Energy Dynamics:** The PSGP could alter the regional energy dynamics by making Pakistan a significant energy hub. This could potentially influence the terms of energy trade in the region, including India's energy imports<sup>112</sup>.
- 3.3.2. Security Concerns:** The pipeline could potentially increase Pakistan's strategic importance to Russia, which could have implications for India's security considerations. Given the historical tensions between India and Pakistan, any development that enhances Pakistan's strategic importance could be a concern for India.
- 3.3.3. Economic Implications:** The pipeline could have economic implications for India. If the pipeline leads to a significant increase in energy trade between Russia and Pakistan, it could potentially influence the dynamics of regional trade, including the terms of trade between India and its trading partners.
- 3.3.4. Geopolitical Implications:** The pipeline project is also a reflection of the increasing strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan, which could have broader geopolitical implications. For instance, it could potentially influence the balance of power in the region, which could have implications for India's foreign policy and its relations with other regional and global powers<sup>113</sup>.

Despite these concerns, it's important to note that these are potential implications and their actual occurrence would depend on a range of factors, including how the Russia-Pakistan relations evolve, how India responds to these developments, and how other regional and global powers react to these changes. The Indo-

<sup>108</sup>Jane's Defence Weekly. (2023). Impact of Russian Arms Sales to Pakistan on India. <https://www.janes.com/defence-news>

<sup>109</sup>Ministry of Commerce & Industry, Government of India. (2023). Annual Trade Report. <https://commerce.gov.in/>

<sup>110</sup>The limitations of India and Russia's transactional relationship. (n.d.). United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/limitations-india-and-russias-transactional-relationship>

<sup>111</sup>The Economic Times. (2023). India-Russia Trade Hits Record High. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade>

<sup>112</sup>Skalamera, M. (2022). 'Steppe-ing' out of Russia's shadow: Russia's changing 'Energy power' in Post-Soviet Eurasia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 74(9), 1640–1656. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2126440>

<sup>113</sup>The limitations of India and Russia's transactional relationship. (n.d.). United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/limitations-india-and-russias-transactional-relationship>

Russia relationship has a long history and is deeply rooted in various sectors, including defence, energy, and trade. This relationship has been consistently strong and has far surpassed the newer relationship that Russia has with Pakistan in absolute terms. In terms of trade, the bilateral trade target of USD 30 billion between India and Russia was set to be achieved by 2025<sup>114</sup>. However, this target was exceeded far before the target year. The trade volume for the period of April 2022 to February 2023 was approximately USD 45 billion, indicating a robust and growing economic relationship between the two countries<sup>115</sup>. This leap in trade was partly due to India's unapologetic purchase of discounted Russian crude oil, despite the questions it raised for the U.S.-India relationship.

India and Russia have a trade relationship that extends beyond oil. It includes highly diversified segments such as machinery, electronics, aerospace, automobiles, commercial shipping, and chemicals. Both countries have also set an investment target of USD 50 billion by 2025, which they expect to enhance further<sup>116</sup>. India is also actively engaged in importing hydrocarbons from the Russian Far East, and Russia is an important partner for India in the area of peaceful use of nuclear energy. The Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) in Tamil Nadu is being built with the technical assistance of Russia<sup>117</sup>. Despite the growing strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan, Russia's foreign policy does not place Pakistan in its first, second, or third tier of important relationships. This indicates that Russia's strategic focus remains on its traditional partners, including India. In conclusion, while the growing strategic relations between Russia and Pakistan have raised concerns in India, the overall effect is unlikely to be detrimental to India-Russia relations. The long-standing relationship between India and Russia, coupled with their substantial trade links and shared strategic interests, is likely to withstand the challenges posed by the evolving geopolitical landscape.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The dynamic narrative of Russia-Pakistan strategic relations offers a compelling insight into the fluid nature of global politics, where alliances are shaped by evolving strategic interests and geopolitical realities. Despite historically diverse paths, the establishment of a strategic partnership between Russia and Pakistan signals a departure from past discord, emphasizing the emergence of a new geopolitical order prioritizing pragmatism and shared interests. This nuanced relationship, spanning defence, trade, science, technology, and culture, underscores the multifaceted nature of contemporary international relations, highlighting the inevitability of change as a constant force in global politics.

The evolution of Russia-Pakistan strategic relations testifies to the adaptability of alliances in response to changing geopolitical landscapes. Since 2010, there has been a noticeable shift in their relationship, reflecting a mutual recognition of the strategic benefits of cooperation, notwithstanding historical tensions and existing alliances with other major powers. Initiatives such as strategic dialogues, the lifting of Russia's arms

<sup>114</sup>Pandey, B. V. (2021, December 6). Vladimir Putin: What Russian president's India visit means for world politics. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-59515741>

<sup>115</sup>Kulik Lydia, Dr. (2023, May 16). What next for India and Russia in trade and investment. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/what-next-for-india-and-russia-in-trade-and-investment/articleshow/100284543.cms>

<sup>116</sup>The limitations of India and Russia's transactional relationship. (n.d.). United States Institute of Peace. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2024/02/limitations-india-and-russias-transactional-relationship>

<sup>117</sup>Express News Service. (2023, December 27). India, Russia sign pacts on future units of Kudankulam plant. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-russia-construction-power-kudankulam-nuclear-plant-jaishankar-9083865/>

embargo on Pakistan, and collaboration under the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation mandate signify a new era of strategic partnership, driven by shared interests in regional stability and counter-terrorism.

However, the complexity of international relations is evident in the delicate balance both countries must maintain. Russia's acknowledgment of Pakistan's strategic value is placed alongside its continued prioritization of traditional partners, including India. Similarly, Pakistan, while diversifying its alliances, must navigate its relationships with other major powers. This intricate relationship, shaped by historical contexts, shared interests, and global geopolitical trends, underscores the nuanced nature of contemporary international relations, where strategic partnerships are dynamic and multifaceted.

From a strategic standpoint, the period from 2010 to 2023 has witnessed a notable reorientation in Russian-Pakistani relations, particularly in defence and security cooperation. This shift, driven by the changing geopolitical landscape and Pakistan's crucial geostrategic position, has seen high-level state visits and military exercises signal their strategic alignment to the global community. Moreover, the strategic objectives have extended beyond defence to encompass broader areas, such as energy cooperation and regional connectivity, as exemplified by President Putin's suggestion of a Greater Eurasia Partnership. This signifies a marked strengthening of Russia-Pakistan relations, propelled by shared strategic interests and geopolitical realities.

The regional security issues concerning Russia and Pakistan underscore the complex geopolitical dynamics and shared challenges that shape their strategic relations. The on-going conflict in Afghanistan stands as a common concern, given its impact on both countries due to their proximity to the conflict zone. Cross-border issues such as terrorism, organized crime, and instability pose significant threats, reverberating in Moscow and Islamabad. Additionally, both nations face the challenge of terrorism from groups operating in the region, emphasizing the critical need for cooperation in counterterrorism efforts to mitigate shared risks. As nuclear-armed states, Russia and Pakistan share mutual concerns regarding nuclear safety, non-proliferation, and preventing unauthorized access to nuclear materials, reflecting a common commitment to nuclear security.

The historical preference of Russia for India has at times strained its relations with Pakistan, leading Islamabad to closely monitor Russia's strategic ties with India. Fluctuations in relations with the United States have also impacted both countries, with Pakistan seeking new allies amid fraying U.S. ties, while Russia explores opportunities in South Asia, particularly in the context of the U.S. considering withdrawing from Afghanistan. Furthermore, economic cooperation presents an area of mutual interest, with Pakistan seeking partnerships beyond traditional allies and Russia looking for opportunities in the region. Despite historical mistrust, both countries recognize the mutual benefits in building closer ties as they navigate the geopolitical chessboard, with Pakistan leveraging its geophysical location, military strength, and influence in the Islamic world to play a significant role in Eurasia's geopolitical landscape.

In the economic and trade realm, the period from 2010 to 2023 has seen notable events, including the initiation of the Free Trade Agreement, currency swap arrangements, and the signing of shareholders' agreements. These developments reflect a strategic shift towards economic cooperation, with Russia's substantial investments in Pakistan's energy sector, particularly the PakStream Gas Pipeline Project, underlining the growing economic ties and mutual strategic interests. The possible creation of a new alliance

between Pakistan, China, and Russia shows how relationships in the area are changing, highlighting the closer ties between Russia and Pakistan based on common goals, economic advantages, and the current political situation in the region.

In conclusion, the contemporary trends in Russia-Pakistan strategic relations underscore the dynamic nature of international alliances and the evolving geopolitical realities. The strategic partnership between the two countries signifies a departure from historical discord, driven by pragmatism and shared interests. This multifaceted relationship, characterized by defence, trade, and regional diplomacy, has seen a reorientation and strengthening, reflecting the adaptability of alliances in response to changing geopolitical landscapes. The period from 2010 to 2023 has marked a significant shift in the nature of Russia-Pakistan relations, emphasizing the fluid and nuanced nature of contemporary international partnerships. This conclusion synthesizes the key trends and developments in the Russia-Pakistan strategic relations, emphasizing the dynamic nature of international alliances and the evolving geopolitical realities. It underscores the multifaceted and adaptive nature of contemporary international relations, highlighting the strategic reorientation and strengthening of the Russia-Pakistan partnership from 2010 to 2023.

