



RUSSIA'S INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY: GRAND OBJECTIVES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The shift in the global balance of power from the Euro-Atlantic to the Asia-Pacific region is a geopolitical phenomenon and it has prompted Russia to adapt its foreign policy and augment its influence in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper examines Russia's evolving grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific, which is characterized by strengthened military collaboration with China, sustained engagement with India, and an intensified focus on maritime routes through the Pacific and Arctic. The paper argues that Russia's position in the Indo-Pacific is not merely reactive, but constitutes a strategic element of its multi-polar vision of a global order, aimed at countering U.S. dominance and diversifying its strategic partnerships in the region. In Pakistan, this scenario presents significant and complex challenges. While Islamabad seeks to enhance defense and energy cooperation with Moscow, it must also carefully navigate its position amidst India-Russia relations, China's regional ambitions, and the growing presence of mini-lateral groups, such as the QUAD. This study examines the strategic options available to Pakistan by analyzing military partnerships, economic connections, and diplomatic alignments. It provides policy recommendations designed to bolster Pakistan's influence and resilience in a geopolitically challenging Asia-Pacific environment.

Key words: Asia-Pacific, Russia, China, United States, Pakistan, Strategy, Geopolitics, Multipolarity



Introduction

The great power competition is once again back and after the end of the unipolar moment Russia is clearly showcasing its determination to influence control and dominate its sphere of influence. Russia's sphere of influence extends but is not limited to the countries bordering Russia, especially the countries bordering Russia and which are the former republics of Soviet Union. Russia's grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific region is built on the realist concept of maintaining balance of power in the Indo-Pacific and this strategy relies heavily on its unlimited partnership with China to counter the American influence in the region (Slodkowski & Chen, 2025). The key component of this strategy are two current and dominant Russian policy initiatives, 'Pivot to East' and the 'Great Eurasian Partnership' (Torkunov, Streltsov, & Koldunova, 2021). The core component of Russia pivot to east policy is the strategic shift in its foreign policy of having deep rooted political, economic and strategic relationship with China. This policy shift has been necessitated because of Russia's strained relations with the United States and its allies in Europe following the Ukraine War. The policy is designed to reduce Russian reliance on Europe and increase its economic footprint and economic partnerships with the countries of East Asian Region and also execute the development of its Far Eastern regions. 'The Great Eurasian Partnership' is built on the idea of creating a continent-wide structure like the African Union (AU) or the Community of Latin America and Caribbean States (CELAC) (View, 2025). Russia like any great power seems determined to project its power in the surrounding region and it is from this renewed Russian national and geopolitical aspiration that one can view its grand strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia became weak and vulnerable. The United States and its allies in Europe took advantage of the Russian weakness and started eastward expansion of NATO and included its former republics as member states (Steinberg & Gordon, 2001). In 1999 three former Warsaw Pact nations the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland joined NATO (Team , NATO member countries, 2024). This was followed by inclusion of Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 2004, Croatia and Albania in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, North Macedonia in 2020 and Sweden and Finland in 2003 and 2004 respectively (Team , What we do, NATO member countries, 2024).

The eastward enlargement of NATO and the severe economic and diplomatic sanctions that Russia faced since its 2022 invasion of Ukraine is resulting in the geopolitical encirclement and isolation of Russia and it is in light of this reality that this research paper attempts to explain the Russian grand strategy in the Asia-Pacific region. This Russian strategy is not only designed to diversify its diplomatic and economic partnerships but is also being implemented to counterbalance the Western pressure and pose a challenge to the United States led global order. China stands out as the most influential strategic partner of Russia and is helping Russia to execute this strategy as the other great power in the region. However, as the Russian partnership with the other countries in the Asia-Pacific region such as India, Vietnam and the ASEAN nations grows, the Russian reliance and overdependence on China is anticipated to recede (Rumer, Sokolsky, & Vladicic , 2020). Through this grand strategy Russia targets the fastest growing economies and their markets in the region and seeks to enlarge its trade, energy, arms export aid and investment in the region (Korolev,



2025). Russia also plans to tap the unexplored energy and mineral rich Russian Far East and seeks to draw labor and investment from the Asian-Pacific states such as South Korea, Japan and the ASEAN nations (Rozman, 2014). The grand design of the Russian strategy is to develop its infrastructure and use its ports, pipelines and rail roads to increase connectivity with the Asia-Pacific region. Through this strategy Russia also seeks to enlarge and project its maritime security and naval presence in the Asia-Pacific region. Russia is a global naval power and any strategy that helps its naval power projection in the Indian Ocean or western Pacific promotes its status as a great power and a regional hegemon (Muraviev A. , 2021). Russia is already projecting its naval influence in the region by carrying out joint naval exercises with many countries of the region (Muraviev A. D., 2018). The United States 'Indo-Pacific Strategy' being implemented through its foreign policy decision of pivoting to Asia -Pacific is seen by Russia as not only an attempt to contain China but also promote American influence in the region (Milot-Poulin, Sarfat, & Paquin, 2021). This American geopolitical encroachment in the region by the United States and its European allies is seen by both Russia and China as a threat to their influence in the changing global order which is fast transforming from unipolarity to multipolarity. So, Russian grand strategy in the Indo-Pacific is a strategic necessity to counterbalance and ward off western influence in the region. One of the main drivers of this Russian strategy is its defense industry and supply of arms to the Asia-Pacific countries like India, Pakistan, Iran, Vietnam, North Korea, Myanmar etc. to gain political leverage (Grossman, 2024). Another important driver of the Russian grand strategy is its energy industry. Russia is seeking to expand its oil and gas exports eastwards to countries of Asia-Pacific region and to ward off the ill effects being created by the western sanctions and its resultant isolation in the region (Fenton & Kolyandr, 2025). The Russian grand strategy in Asia-Pacific region is overall designed to achieve a reduced reliance on West and China, expand its economic footprint in the region, project its power and to secure its eastern region. This study aims to critically examine Russia's Asia-Pacific strategy within the framework of its broader foreign policy goals and to evaluate its strategic, diplomatic, and economic implications for Pakistan. It argues that Islamabad's optimal approach lies in a diversified, adaptive foreign policy that balances relationships with major powers while ensuring regional stability and national interests.

Importance of Strategic Linkage Between Russia and Pakistan in Indo-Pacific Region

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the central arena for geopolitical competition in the 21st century, prompting major powers to realign their strategic priorities in response to shifting global power dynamics. Traditionally focused on Europe and Central Asia, Russia has expanded its strategic outlook eastward, seeking a more assertive presence in this vital region. This deliberate shift reflects Moscow's broader grand strategy—grounded in the pursuit of multi polarity, enhanced regional influence, and efforts to counter U.S. and Western dominance in global affairs (Beris Jr, 2021). With its strategic maritime choke points, dynamic economies, and unresolved territorial disputes, the Indo-Pacific offers multiple challenges to all the great, medium and ordinary powers in the region. Multipolarity is the new truly recognized geopolitical and joint framework under which all powers in the region seek to address the future challenges. This is leading to buildup of



new partnerships, alliances and foreign policy alignments (Latham, 2025). This reordering in the region signals the much-anticipated transition towards a multi-polar international system, where emerging actors seek to meet collectively common challenges to establish a shared future of peace and security. Russia's foreign policy reorientation exemplifies this transition. Once centered on Europe and the post-Soviet space, Moscow has turned its gaze eastward, driven by the pursuit of strategic autonomy, economic diversification, and influence projection (Moskalenko, Yu, & Rahaman, Russia's Strategic Shift from European Integration to Eastern Alliances after the War in Ukraine: A Postcolonial Perspective, 2024).

Pakistan's strategic importance and relevance in the region stands out from the point of view of regional security, the access it provides to the Indian ocean and the functioning of the future international system under the order of multipolarity (Moskalenko, Yu, & Rahaman, 2024). Pakistan shares a history of bitter past with Russia. Pakistan also views with suspicion the defense and strategic partnership between Russia and India. The strategic link between Russia and Pakistan is further affected by the Russian concern that over the decades Pakistan has not been able to balance its foreign policy and has continued to remain part of the American bloc. The importance of strategic linkage between Russia and Pakistan can be viewed in the light of some historical facts and it is in the understanding of these facts that the two states can find a reason for their strategic engagement and enduring partnership. Russia's relationship with West is driven by mistrust, hostility and enmity and so is the case of Pakistan's relation with India. Russian dismemberment as Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War is considered by Russia as a great national tragedy and Pakistan also lost half of its country at the hands of Indians in the 1971 Indo-Pak War. Both Russia and Pakistan are also victims of asymmetric warfare. Russia faces geopolitical threats like NATO's eastwards encroachment and is under severe western sanctions. Indian policy towards Pakistan also follows the same western lead. The use of non-kinetic and kinetic military actions by West against Russia and India's support for the Baluch separatist movement to create similar problems for Pakistan makes both countries victims of external interference and exploitation. The strategic linkage with Russia also becomes significant for Pakistan considering the change in its national security policy which emphasizes a shift from geopolitical to geoeconomics domain. Partnering with Russia will help Pakistan industrialize and also make up for the lack of energy that will run its industry. That both countries realize the importance of this strategic linkage was demonstrated on 11 July 2025 when Russia signed an agreement with Pakistan to revive and expand Pakistan Steel Mills, a project that was originally built in 1973 with soviet assistance (Ahmed, 2025). At the heart of its Indo-Pacific strategy are strengthened ties with China, renewed engagement with India, and increasing involvement in ASEAN and regional multilateral forums. Moscow is also prioritizing secure maritime routes across the Pacific and Arctic, especially through the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which offers a shorter and less politically vulnerable access to Asian markets (Humpert, 2011).

Expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific through military exercises, energy diplomacy, arms exports, and strategic dialogues signals a deliberate effort by Russia to reshape regional power



dynamics. Russia's Naval modernization, enhanced port infrastructure, and coordinated military drills in the Indian Ocean underscore long-term maritime ambitions. In parallel, Russia's participation in non-Western platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS+, and ASEAN-led mechanisms aims to promote alternative governance structures and challenge the Western-led security order. In response, the United States has intensified its Indo-Pacific engagement through mini-lateral initiatives like QUAD, AUKUS, and IPEF, seeking to contain rivals and reinforce its regional primacy (Verma, 2025).

For Pakistan, situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean, Russia's Indo-Pacific strategy presents both emerging opportunities and strategic dilemmas. While Islamabad's engagement in the Indo-Pacific has historically been limited, its geographic significance and shifting regional partnerships are expanding its role. Russia's increasing involvement in SCO and BRICS+ resonates with Pakistan's search for alternatives to Western-centric systems. Over time, bilateral ties between Islamabad and Moscow have cautiously evolved—moving from Cold War antagonism to pragmatic cooperation in defense, energy, and diplomacy.

As Islamabad expands its foreign policy beyond traditional alliances—particularly with China and the United States—it increasingly turns to Moscow for diversification. However, this shift must be managed delicately, considering the enduring Russia-India defense relationship, China's growing assertiveness, and Pakistan's financial and security ties to the U.S. and China. The rise of multilateralism and regional power blocs further complicates the strategic landscape.

To navigate this complex environment, Pakistan must adopt a flexible and balanced foreign policy. This includes deepening economic integration through CPEC, modernizing maritime capabilities, and diversifying diplomatic alignments to avoid bloc dependency. Simultaneously, Islamabad must remain alert to evolving great power rivalries to safeguard its sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

Russian Concerns on United States Shift from Euro-Atlantic to Indo-Pacific

The transatlantic partnership built in the post-World War Two international environment is giving signs of breaking up. Russia realizes that any American grand strategy without Europe is incomplete (Wallander, *Beware the Europe You Wish For; The Downsides and Dangers of Allied Independence*, 2025). So, drawing a wedge between this transatlantic partnership for Russia will enable it to dominate the strategic space of Indo-Pacific. U.S. officials face a dilemma. They can spurn Europe and face a more dangerous world alone and depleted or they can forge a new, more accommodating transatlantic relationship (Wallander, 2025). If the United States can maintain its partnership with Europe, it will have an advantage not available to China or Russia in a multipolar world. Neither Beijing nor Moscow has an alliance of such economic heft, diplomatic might, and global reach (Wallander, 2025). Washington has been giving mixed signals to Europe since the second Trump administration came to power. In February 2025, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth told European officials in Brussels that “the United States will no longer tolerate an imbalanced



relationship which encourages dependency” (Reuters , 2025). In a speech in Munich the same month, Vice President JD Vance said that when he looked “at Europe today, it’s sometimes not so clear what happened to some of the Cold War’s winners” (Iyengar & Johnson, 2025). Secretary of State Marco Rubio, meanwhile, told reporters that Washington had “incredible opportunities” to partner with Russia (McHugh, 2025). The reason for current disconnect in the transatlantic partnership can be viewed in the context of how Washington sees Beijing as the primary challenge to American security, so U.S. officials want to prioritize it over Moscow whereas Europeans view Russia as the geopolitical threat that they need to deter (Wallander, 2025). There is, of course, another force splitting Washington and Europe: President Trump. In 2017, Europe could comfort itself with the thought that American voters didn’t really know what they were getting when they elected him. But in 2024, Americans had already watched Trump bully U.S. allies, toy with leaving NATO, and cozy up to Russia. They voted for him anyway (Wallander, 2025). One other factor contributing to transatlantic partnership being viewed as standing on thin ice is the contribution of NATO members states towards NATO. United States has been consistently asking NATO member countries to increase their contribution on the defense expenditures of NATO. In 2014, European NATO members spent an average of 1.5 percent of their GDP on defense, procurement included, compared with 3.7 for the United States. In 2024, however, European members spent an average of 2.2 percent of GDP on defense, whereas the United States spent just under 3.4 percent (Wallander, 2025). Belgium, Italy, and Spain have all announced that they will reach NATO’s two percent goal in 2025. Other European countries have announced defense budget increases, as well but it will take a substantial effort by the European countries to come up to the demand of increasing their contribution to 5% of their GDP. Europe holds two-thirds of the \$330 billion of the Russian assets that U.S. allies agreed to freeze in 2022 and it is used by the European countries to finance war in Ukraine but Russia knows well that as stalemate continues in war in Ukraine, given the conditions Europe will not be able to do both finance the war in Ukraine and contribute to NATO as per the American expectations (Conner & Wessel , What is the status of Russia’s frozen sovereign assets?, 2025).

NATO has inducted Finland and Sweden as its new members and this helps NATO to deter both Russia and China in the Arctic (Kauranen & Ahlander, 2023). To counter Russia’s use of the Black Sea as a platform for striking Ukraine, NATO’s European members are developing new coastal defense forces and autonomous vehicles that can enhance U.S. operations in the Mediterranean (Conner & Wessel , 2025). Europe is also home to SWIFT, the payments mechanism that is keeping Russian banks from gaining access to the global financial system. Even if United States loosens sanctions on Moscow, Europe retains leverage to reduce the effect of such an American favor for the Kremlin (Conner & Wessel , 2025). So, on one hand the current Trump administration wishes to end war in Ukraine to complete its pivot Asia-Pacific policy to contain China but on the other hand its European allies are determined to continue supporting Ukraine. America’s European allies disagree with United States that Russia should be able to dictate whether Ukraine can become member of NATO. Russia knows that without the European partnership any United State military offensive in Indo-Pacific or Arctic region will either have to be executed from far-off bases in



United States or from the bases of its partners in Middle East. This entire development of fissures in the transatlantic partnership suits Russian designs of implementing the 'Great Eurasian Partnership' and as much as the United States wants to end war in Ukraine to concentrate its resources in containing China, Russia will be too happy to see any future breakup of transatlantic partnership to pivot East Asia and dominate Indo-Pacific region against a weak United States without its European partners.

The Importance of Indo-Pacific and Why Russia is Pivoting East

The international system is undergoing a profound transformation as the era of U.S.-led unipolarity fades it gives rise to a multipolar world increasingly shaped by the assertiveness of rising powers—particularly Russia and China. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States maintained global dominance, positioning itself as the anchor of liberal internationalism. However, growing international skepticism, strategic military overreach, and internal economic turbulence have revealed cracks in its hegemony. The chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan and the protracted consequences of interventions in Iraq and the Middle East have further diminished American credibility, leaving behind strategic vacuums that other powers are increasingly eager to fill. This erosion of U.S. primacy has catalyzed a global realignment—one no longer centered around the Euro-Atlantic but pivoting decisively toward the Indo-Pacific (Bray, 2025).

This shift in the global power locus—from the Euro-Atlantic core to the Indo-Pacific periphery—marks a structural recalibration in international politics. Historically, institutions like NATO and the European Union served as the bedrock of Western strategic influence. However, the accelerating growth of Asian economies, the maritime centrality of global trade, and the declining strategic dividends from Euro-Atlantic engagements have redirected global attention. Today, the Indo-Pacific—spanning both the Indian and Pacific Oceans—is home to over half of the global population and generates nearly 60% of global GDP (Team, 2021). Crucial Sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea have become vital arteries of international commerce and energy transport. Far from being a mere geographical term, the Indo-Pacific has become a vibrant theatre of geoeconomics competition and ideological contestation. The proliferation of frameworks like the Quad, AUKUS, the East Asia Summit (EAS), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) reflect the region's complex and evolving institutional landscape (Valockova, 2025).

Parallel to this regional dynamism is the global emergence of multipolarity—a concept long championed by Russia and China as a counterweight to American unipolarity. Unlike the binary Cold War or the brief unipolar moment that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union, the current international system features an expanding constellation of coequal powers. These actors seek to reshape the rules and norms governing global politics. Platforms such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Eurasian Economic Union symbolize this transition to pluralistic global governance. For Russia, multipolarity is not merely a descriptive term but a guiding strategic imperative. President Vladimir Putin's assertion that "true sovereignty is an



absolutely necessary condition of our existence” (Kaufman, 2015) reflects Moscow’s ambition to reclaim geopolitical agency in an increasingly fragmented world order. What once seemed theoretical—such as Charles Krauthammer’s prediction that emerging powers would eventually dilute U.S. dominance—is now visibly unfolding, with Russia positioning itself as a principal force in reshaping international relations (Sears, 2016).

Russia’s eastward pivot, in this context, is far more than a geographical adjustment—it signifies a deeper strategic transformation. The 2014 annexation of Crimea and the ensuing Western sanctions accelerated Russia’s isolation from the Euro-Atlantic framework, pushing Moscow to reorient toward Asia. Yet unlike past episodic gestures, this pivot is systemic and multidimensional. It encompasses increased military-technical cooperation, energy diplomacy, the development of the Northern Sea Route, and active participation in regional economic and security architectures. Moscow’s growing alignment with China—manifested through joint statements and parallel engagement in institutions—reflects a shared commitment to upending the unipolar order. However, this alignment is not exclusive. Russia has simultaneously sustained strategic ties with India and broadened its outreach to Southeast Asian states. This flexible approach reflects the fluid, issue-based nature of Indo-Pacific politics, contrasting sharply with the bloc-driven dynamics of the Cold War era.

Russia’s Indo-Pacific Strategy

Russia’s Indo-Pacific strategy represents a deliberate recalibration of its foreign policy, grounded in a long-term vision of multipolarity, strategic autonomy, and ideological resistance to Western liberalism. Far from being a reactive response to Western sanctions or diplomatic isolation, this eastward pivot reflects Moscow’s ambition to reassert its global influence, bypass Western-dominated institutions, and establish itself as a consequential actor in maritime Asia. As the unipolar moment recedes, Russia seeks to play the role of a “third pole” in an increasingly fragmented global order.

At the heart of this strategy lies Moscow’s intent to counterbalance both U.S. hegemony and overdependence on China by cultivating flexible alignments. While maintaining a robust strategic partnership with Beijing—exemplified by the \$400 billion post-Crimea energy deal and joint military exercises—Russia simultaneously nurtures strategic relations with other regional powers such as India and Vietnam (Anishchuk, 2014). This hedging posture enables Moscow to retain strategic agency, navigate complex regional dynamics, and promote its vision of a pluralistic, rules-diverse order, rather than rigid bloc politics.

Diplomatically, Russia has elevated its regional presence through consistent engagement in multilateral forums including the East Asia Summit, ASEAN-led dialogues, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and BRICS+. These platforms amplify Russia’s normative agenda centered on sovereignty, non-interference, and the rejection of liberal interventionism—principles that form the ideological foundation of its multipolar narrative. The 2021 launch of the



"Greater Eurasian Partnership" reflects Moscow's ambition to construct a Eurasia-centric order by integrating the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and offering a civilizational counterweight to Western-led liberal norms (Paikin, 2020).

Militarily, Russia remains a formidable player. As the world's second-largest arms exporter—accounting for over 20% of global exports in 2023—it has leveraged defense diplomacy to solidify ties with key Indo-Pacific states (Abbasova, 2021). Joint naval exercises in the Sea of Japan and the Indian Ocean, bilateral defense agreements with India, Myanmar, and Vietnam, and port visits signal Russia's intent to project deterrent capability and strategic reliability. Despite sanctions and technological embargoes, Russia has pushed forward with defense indigenization to maintain credibility as a security partner for states seeking alternatives to Western suppliers.

Energy geopolitics serves as both a foundation and a lever of Moscow's Indo-Pacific strategy. As the world's largest natural gas exporter, Russia has strategically used energy diplomacy to deepen ties with China, Pakistan, India, and even Japan. A flagship initiative is the development of the Northern Sea Route (NSR)—a shorter Arctic maritime corridor that bypasses U.S.-influenced chokepoints like the Suez Canal and the Strait of Malacca. This not only enhances Russia's maritime relevance but also facilitates hydrocarbon exports to Asian markets. Projects in Sakhalin, Yamal, and Siberia embed Russia into the regional energy architecture, even as Western firms divest in response to the Ukraine conflict.

Economically, Russia is expanding its presence in multilateral frameworks to challenge the dominance of Western financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. Platforms like BRICS+, the SCO, and the AIIB serve as instruments of financial autonomy and geopolitical influence. Through bilateral trade in local currencies, energy deals bypassing the U.S. dollar, and initiatives that promote alternative development models, Russia aims to institutionalize multipolarity and build resilience against sanctions-driven economic coercion.

In essence, Russia's Indo-Pacific grand strategy is not a regional detour but a pillar of its post-Western global doctrine. By combining diplomatic outreach, military assertion, energy leverage, and economic realignment, Moscow seeks to reshape the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific and beyond. Despite enduring constraints—ranging from limited soft power to Western containment—Russia has demonstrated strategic persistence and adaptability. For smaller and middle powers in the Indo-Pacific, this presents both opportunities for diversification and risks of entanglement in intensifying great power rivalries—underscoring Russia's enduring relevance in the region's evolving security and economic architecture.

Russia's Pivot East and Policy Implications for Pakistan

The Russian reorientation towards Asia encompasses strategic, economic, political and security related dimensions for Pakistan. This Russian turn to East as already described is necessitated because of the western sanctions and creates strategic space and opportunity for both Russia and



Pakistan to engage in a mutually benefitting partnership. Pakistan's policy against Russia should be based on a broader strategy with a view to diversify its relationship with the great powers, ensure energy security, manage industrial and infrastructural development and enhance its regional standing in a multipolar world. Pakistan can also utilize this partnership to strengthen its role and seek opportunities in Central Asia and also counter the threat that India poses to its national security.

Geopolitically, Pakistan can use its partnership with Russia to ease and calm down militarism that it faces from both its eastern and western borders with India and Afghanistan respectively. Russia enjoys leverage over both countries as India is a key defense partner of Russia and in July 2025 Russia became the first country to recognize the Taliban government in Afghanistan (Drury & Wilson, 2025). This showcases a Russian desire to help Afghanistan government to determine a better future and to do that Russia can play a very meaningful role in helping to improve the currently not so friendly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Economically, Pakistan offers Russia a medium size market for its goods that are under western sanctions. Both countries may explore direct banking and barter arrangements to circumvent western sanctions and improve trade relations. Pakistan must also expedite the completion and operation of Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline being built with Russian help to connect Karachi with Lahore (Bhutta, 2023). Russia also supplied Pakistan with discounted oil in 2023 (Shahzad, 2023). The ministry of Petroleum in Pakistan may take a lead from Moscow's growing sales to India and China and may increase the import of discounted oil from Russia to help its growing energy needs. Pakistan may also seek Russian help in institutional and infrastructural development. The Russian decision and agreement to revive Pakistan Steel Mills can be viewed as a bright prospect in growing and reinforcing Russia-Pakistan partnership in this sector.

Diplomatically, Pakistan's partnership with Russia provides close collaboration with the third great power and pole in the great-power diplomacy in the multipolar world. This growth of this partnership will help Pakistan hedge between the Chinese and American influence. Growing partnership with Russia will facilitate Pakistan in drawing favourable Russian nod on matters such as trade, security and counterterrorism in regional institutions of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) of which both countries are member states. Pakistan can use Russian influence in regional organizations to enhance its overall diplomatic and economic engagement in the region. The security dimension of Russia-Pakistan partnership is bounded by the joint commitment of both states to fight against the menace of transnational terrorism. Already, Pakistan and Russian militaries are carrying out a series of bilateral joint counter terrorism military exercises like 'Druzhba', of which the seventh exercise of the series was carried out in October 2024 in Pakistan (Team , 2024). Russia provides Pakistan military a great opportunity to enhance its defense diversification beyond its historic and traditional defense partners, the United States and China. Enduring defense partnership with Russia and the access that Pakistan military can have to the Russian hardware and training is likely to add to diversifying and increasing Pakistani military



professionalism.

Policy makers in Pakistan must also take notice of the counter argument and the opposing view point that highlights the vulnerabilities of such a partnership. Russia's tilt towards India is absolute and robust defined by their treaty of friendship. Pakistan must understand this Russian limitation and should desist viewing its partnership with Russia from an Indian prism. However, constant monitoring of Indo-Russian Defense ties and keeping a closely observing the military developments between the two countries especially in the context of Indian deterrence and defense posture against Pakistan will remain for Pakistan an absolute essentiality.

Russia's recognition of Afghanistan may provide Pakistan with cooperation opportunities but it will not be easy as India also has deep rooted interests in Afghanistan and strategically uses its relationship with Afghanistan to balance against Pakistan. Dealing with Russia while it is under western sanctions may also pose diplomatic and economic risks for Pakistan. Thus, it is imperative that Pakistan may strengthen ties with Russia but should also manage its relationship with the United States and European Union carefully.

Conclusion

Russia's Indo-Pacific strategy unlike the other major powers is designed to reassert itself in the great power competition in the region. As a key power player, it wants to expand its strategic and economic footprint in the region under the changing environment of multipolarity. To counter the western influence Russia is already engaged in seeking partnerships with countries in the region especially in areas related to energy and defense cooperation. For Pakistan the big challenge lies in moving beyond its traditional partners and allies such as China and the United States and developing a meaningful and strategically rewarding partnership with Russia. Pakistan will have to be careful in balancing the transition of its foreign policy to become more non-aligned and independent and not hooked to one particular bloc.

Russia's Indo-Pacific strategy offers Pakistan opportunities in areas of its shared regional interests such as promotion of regional order and peace, stability in Afghanistan, counterterrorism and utilizing the regional institutions for increased political, diplomatic and economic cooperation. It is up to Pakistan to realize how best it can benefit from Russia's pivot East policy and its eastward orientation. The strategic and economic opportunities in economic and energy domains are there and Pakistan will have to cautiously navigate its relationship with Russia given Russia's deep and enduring ties with India.



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