

PAKISTAN-RUSSIA COLLABORATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract

Pakistan and Russia are in close collaboration for the last decade or so due to the changed regional and global geo-political scenarios. However understanding and respecting each other's interests as well as convergence of Pak-Russian interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia is the main driving force behind this development which guarantee a permanent need for each other. Both Pakistan and Russia emphasised on a negotiated settlement for Afghanistan imbroglio addressing concerns of regional states. The Russia-Central Asia-South Asia integration via Afghanistan and Pakistan is in the minds of Russia and Pakistan. Russia controls the northern corridor to the contiguous areas of Afghanistan and Central Asia while Pakistan provides an outlet in the south. The close cooperation between Pakistan and Russia has also encouraged Central Asian Republics for greater interaction with Pakistan. Sino-Russian close cooperation on Central Asia and Pak-China close liaison on Afghanistan also solidifies Pak-Russia collaboration. Thus Russia, China, Pakistan axis will be a symbol of peace and prosperity for Afghanistan and Central Asia. In post US/NATO Afghanistan, maintaining regional peace and stability will be a shared responsibility of regional states.

Key words:

Pakistan, Russia, China, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Taliban

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Introduction

The work is an effort to describe the growing cooperative relations between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the Russian Federation particularly in regional and to some extent in global context, to examine the interests, role and policies of Russian Federation in Central Asia and Afghanistan, to look into the interests, role and policies of Pakistan in Central Asia and Afghanistan, to find out fields of mutual interests/convergence of interests between Pakistan and Russia in the context of Central Asia and Afghanistan and finally to ponder upon the impact of Pak-Russia collaboration on the peace and development of Central Asia and Afghanistan. It is obvious that Pak-Russia bilateral relations have witnessed warmth and progress during the last decade or so. In the regional context Russia lost its historical influence in the decision making circles in Delhi, India while America lost the same in the decision making circles in Islamabad, Pakistan. In the changed regional geo-political orientation the American hegemonic behaviour has played role, to some extent, to push Islamabad and Moscow towards each other as is the case with Beijing-Moscow relations in post-Soviet era. Russia's changed policy goals in South Asia¹, renewed interests in Afghanistan and strategic as well as economic significance of Central Asia for Russia played roles in Russia's approach towards Pakistan. It is all about understanding and respecting each other's interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. In the global context, Russo-American intensified rivalry in post-Crimea period and thereafter Western economic sanctions also compelled Russia to look in the east and south-east direction for new strategic and economic partners.

On the other hand Pakistan became victim of American hegemonic discourse and incurred huge material and human losses in the so called American War on Terror in Afghanistan. However, America did not recognise Pakistan's efforts and sacrifices in war on terror, signed nuclear deal with India thus endangering the balance of power in South Asia and remained adamant to assign leading role to India in Afghanistan on the expense of Pakistan's strategic and security interests. All this added salt to the wounds of Pakistan. Pakistan thus started looking ways and means to forge closer relations with Russia to diversify its foreign relations. China's close strategic partnership with Russia and its time tested friendship with Pakistan might have also played role in Pak-Russia rapprochement. In the changed regional and global configuration of relations, Pakistan and Russia have made progress in strategic, political and diplomatic relations. The trade and economic relations are still fraction of its true potential but the complementarity is there in the field of energy, Eurasian Union-CPEC integration and military-hardware (defence industry). However the most

¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Russia's Changing Policy Towards South Asia: Options for Pakistan" in Central Asia No. 79, Winter 2016 (Published in April 2018)

important factor that come into play regarding Pak-Russia collaboration are mutuality of interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan which have been focused upon in this work and analysed in the above mentioned framework.

Russia's Policy, Interests and Goals in Afghanistan

The following factors have mainly shaped Russia's policy towards Afghanistan in recent years.

- i. The declining Western/US/NATO influence and interests in Afghanistan after their failure to stabilise Afghanistan militarily.
- ii. The growing roles of regional/neighbouring countries i.e. Pakistan, China and Iran.
- iii. The ISIS factor, which Russia along with other regional/neighbouring countries assume dangerous for regional security including former Soviet Central Asia Republics (CARs).
- iv. Russia considers the security of Central Asia's border with Afghanistan imperative for its own security while insecurity in Afghanistan endangers the security of Central Asia.
- v. The drug trafficking issue from instable and weak Afghanistan via Central Asia has been getting intolerable for Russia.

After a hand-off approach in post-Soviet period, Russia's diplomatic initiatives regarding Afghanistan include the Moscow format for regional consultation by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since December 2016 and reviving the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Contact Group on Afghanistan.² The first consultation took place in December 2016 between Russia, China and Pakistan, the second consultation included six parties i.e. Afghanistan, Iran and India besides the former three Russia, China and Pakistan in February 2017. These consultations led towards Conference on Afghanistan in which ten regional countries including five CARs participated on 14 April 2017.³ Russia emphasised on a negotiated settlement for Afghanistan's imbroglio while at the same time recognised the need for addressing the concerns of regional states. Though Russia's role and influence in Afghanistan is limited, Russia's efforts demonstrate the capability of playing a neutral and positive role while emphasising regional

² Ekaterina Stepanova, "Russia's Afghan Policy in the Regional and Russia-West Context", May 2018, retrieved from https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/rnr_23_stepanova_russia_afpak_2018.pdf, and also from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/325156987_Russia's_Afghan_Policy_in_the_Regional_and_Russia-West_Contexts accessed 27/05/2019

³ Ibid.

approach. After US/NATO withdrawal and limited Western military presence forced Russia to think that US is no longer the external security provider to Afghanistan and started cooperation with regional states over Afghanistan. Russia prudently foresee that only a regionally inclusive settlement can eventually stabilise Afghanistan.⁴

Narcotics, heroin of Afghan origin trafficking through northern route i.e. Central Asia to Russia is a major concern for Russia and therefore Russia supports the stabilisation of Afghanistan to control and discourage narco-economy and its trafficking. There are around 1 to 2 million drug/heroin addicts in Russia and on average 40000 drug addicts every year. In 2005 Putin accused the coalition forces in Afghanistan for encouraging drug supply to former Soviet states and Europe as the heroin production increased by more than 40 times since the US occupation.⁵ The Islamic State (IS) Vilayat Khorasan, though debilitated to a great extent now, also raised Russia's concerns because several thousand ethnic Russians joined IS while segments in Caucasus and micro-cells across Russia comprised mainly of ethnic Russians threatened Russia's state and society. Russia views IS as an international phenomenon while Taliban as Afghan national movement and logically supported Taliban to extricate the IS in Afghanistan. Russia also acknowledged the fact that Taliban cannot be defeated militarily and therefore started contacts with them since December 2014 or early 2015. Some observers believe that Russia's bonhomie with Taliban played important role in Russia's rapprochement with Pakistan⁶ but to me it appears the other way round i.e. Pakistan's rapprochement with Russia paved the way for increased Russia-Taliban contacts.

In post-Crimea period, Russia undermines USA's interests in Afghanistan. Russia believes that American permanent presence in Afghanistan aims to penetrate Central Asia and ultimately establish its control over Eurasia on the expense and to the detriment of Russia's interests.⁷ Russia supported the stance of Taliban for complete withdrawal of foreign forces during a conference on Afghanistan in Moscow on 27 and 28

⁴ Barnett Rubin, "Its Much Bigger than Afghanistan: US Strategy for A Transformed Region", War on the Rocks, April 25, 2017, retrieved from <https://warontherocks.com/2017/04/its-much-bigger-than-afghanistan-u-s-strategy-for-a-transformed-region/> accessed 29/03/2019

⁵ Kaneshko Sangar, "Afghanistan's Significance for Russia in the 21st Century: Interests, Perceptions and Perspectives", *Politics in Central Europe*, Vol. 12, No. 1, retrieved from <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/pce.2016.12.issue-1/pce-2016-0004/pce-2016-0004.pdf>, accessed 27/03/2019

⁶ Ekaterina Stepanova, op. cited.

⁷ Kaneshko Sangar, "Afghanistan's Significance for Russia in the 21st Century: Interests, Perceptions and Perspectives", *Politics in Central Europe*, Vol. 12, No. 1, retrieved from <https://www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/pce.2016.12.issue-1/pce-2016-0004/pce-2016-0004.pdf>, accessed 27/03/2019

May, 2019.⁸ Importantly Russia desires to have a strong and effective government in Afghanistan which could control the drug-trafficking as well as could maintain peace for the sake of stable and peaceful Afghan-Central Asian border. Russia also foresees a political role for Afghan Taliban in their country and therefore it becomes imperative for Russia to be in contact with the Taliban to eliminate any chances of US manoeuvring of Taliban against Russia in case of US-Taliban deal. There are reports that Russia has been supplying arms to the Taliban. NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe Curtis Scaparotti at a hearing with the Senate Armed Services Committee revealed that Russian influence in Afghanistan has increased and even supply to Taliban.⁹ However there is no solid evidence of Russia arming the Taliban. The CNN footage of 2017 showed Taliban with Russian arms but there are many channels, means and ways by which Taliban can indirectly access Russian arms and not necessarily supplied by Russia.¹⁰ Nevertheless Russia's support to Taliban can be a decisive factor in either way. It can pressurise Taliban to negotiate while as another patron, Russia can at the same time embolden them to continue fighting.

Historically Russia remained a hegemonic power in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This historical legacy of Russia's domination has left indelible mark on the perceptions and attitude of Russia towards the region.¹¹ So to be a great power in the region is one of the primary identities in its main interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Russia's official rhetoric has been that unlike the 1990s when Russia was on its knees, it is now a rising great power and need to encounter any attempt by its rivals to gain influence in a region which traditionally remained Russia's sphere of influence.

In the realm of economic interests, instable Afghanistan can be a threat to Russia's developing Eurasian Union which can be extended only in eastern and south-eastern direction. The Siberian-Central Asian-South Asian integration via Afghanistan is in the minds of Russians and can be instrumental in regional peace and prosperity. Afghanistan also possesses mineral resources worth trillion of dollars and Russia has shown interest to invest in this field as 80 percent of Afghanistan's large-scale industry projects were initiated by Soviet Russia. In this regard the example of Aynak Copper mine can be quoted as it were the Russians who conducted massive

⁸ Dawn, 29 May, 2019

⁹ Nicholas Trikett, "Making Sense of Russia's Involvement in Afghanistan", *The Diplomat*, August 2, 2018, retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2018/08/making-sense-of-russias-involvement-in-afghanistan/> accessed 27/03/2019

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Maria y. Omelicheva, "Central Asia" in *Routledge Handbook of Russian Foreign Policy*, ed. Andrei P. Tsygankov (Routledge, 2018), pp: 325-327

exploration work resulting in the creation of 1300 maps of the area which contain more \$100 b worth copper.¹²

Pakistan's Interests, Policy and Goals in Afghanistan

Regional security complex makes happenings in some states particularly in neighbouring one more important for a given state than in other countries. Pakistan's security and political interests are inseparably linked to Afghanistan and therefore Pakistan pays special attention to its relations with Afghanistan. However Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan is something more than a bilateral matter. The relations are beyond bilateral issue because policies of both the countries are primarily shaped by the influences and interests of major powers involved in both the countries particularly for the last four decades. Though before 1980 Afghanistan remained hostile and aggressive towards Pakistan, did not vote for Pakistan in the UN (1947), raised the issue of Pukhtoonistan, Pakistan neither requested the Soviet Union to invade Afghanistan nor did invite the US/NATO to occupy Afghanistan. Contrary to that, it was on the appeal of Afghans (Islamists) that Pakistan extended assistance to Afghans. In post 9/11 period, Pakistan supported the coalition forces for the sake of peaceful Afghanistan. However according to the nature of Afghans i.e. struggle against the foreign occupation plus US/NATO's own made mistakes by indiscriminate bombings of wedding and funeral ceremonies, hospitals, civilians, violating sanctity of houses and by not respecting local values and traditions, US/NATO created more enemies than friends and gave impetus to the Afghan resistance in the form of Afghan Taliban.

Pakistan's divergence of interests with US on Afghanistan started since 2005 when US-India nuclear deal talks initiated. US payed little attention to what bothered Pakistan vis-à-vis Afghanistan and India.¹³ One of the main interests of Pakistan is to mitigate the influence and role of India in Afghanistan at the cost of Pakistan's human and material sacrifices in the two wars, Soviet-Afghan and US/NATO war. In the realm of trade and economics, Pakistan's interests in Afghanistan revolves around integration with and access to the energy rich Central Asia. Pakistan always desired a peaceful and stable Afghanistan that can be used as an energy and trade conduit with Central Asia. The materialization of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline and Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) 1000 electricity import projects are closely linked to the security and stability of Afghanistan. Pakistan's goal is to effectively manage Pak-Afghan border to check the illegal border crossing and flow of goods, as well as to counter terrorist activities. Pakistan believes that

¹² Kaneshko Sangar, op. cited

¹³ Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan's Afghan Problem" the express TRIBUNE, November 5, 2017, retrieved from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1550078/6-pakistans-afghan-problem/>, accessed 29/03/2019

insurgency in Baluchistan is supported by India from within Afghanistan and effective border management will help stabilizing and developing Baluchistan and ultimately CPEC which India considers detrimental to its geo-political aims in the region.

Pakistan also desires Afghanistan to respect the sovereignty of Pakistan by respecting the Durand Line as a permanent international border. Almost all the states in Central and South Asia including Afghanistan are the products of imperialists. Afghanistan's all borders were determined and demarcated by Tsarist Russia and Britain during the 19th Century. It does not carry any logic for Afghanistan to question only its border with Pakistan which Pakistan inherited from Britain while Britain had captured this area from Sikhs not Afghanistan. As Hafizulla Amin explicitly declared Kabul's aspirations for a greater Afghanistan by stating that the Durand Line tore us apart.¹⁴ In fact Pakhtoons on Pakistan's side of Pak-Afghan border are more developed, educated and disciplined. More than 45 percent residents of Islamabad are Pakhtoons.

US policy and goals in Afghanistan as they stand in 2019 are different from its goals during immediate post 9/11. US is no more interested in nation building or developing Afghanistan as stated by Trump.¹⁵ Afghanistan houses the interests of Pakistan, Russia, China and Iran also. For Pakistan surrendering its interests and security to the US hegemonic discourse and its interests would be tantamount to flow against the regional tide. Pakistan also remembers how America left the region in mess after fulfilling its desires in the aftermath of Soviet withdrawal. Pakistan therefore supports a regionally inclusive political settlement to the Afghan imbroglio and welcomes Russia's initiatives in this regard. It is worth mentioning that Afghan refugees almost 3 million in number remained calm and peaceful during their stay in Pakistan. Most of the Afghans will remain friendly to Pakistan. Even the Afghan government never exploited Pakistan's vulnerabilities during Pak-India wars. It is the competing and conflicting interests of major powers that impede both the countries from becoming allies not only friends.

¹⁴ Umair Jamal and Yaqoob Khan Bangash, "Understanding Pakistan's Strategic Interests in Afghanistan", The News, January 17, 2016, retrieved from <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/understanding-pakistans-strategic-interests-afghanistan/#.XLMBCOgzbcc> accessed 14/04/2019

¹⁵ Yaseen Aftab Ali, "Pakistan's Suggested Afghan Policy", Pakistan Today, January 23, 2018, retrieved from <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2018/01/23/pakistans-suggested-afghan-policy/> accessed 14/4/019

Russia's Interests, Policy and Goals in Central Asia

Central Asian Republics' (CARs) pivotal geographical location, hydrocarbon resources and Russia's security vulnerabilities are central to Russia's policy and interests in Central Asia.¹⁶ Though during the 1990s, Russia could not pay attention to the region due to her own transitional related issues and economic difficulties. Russia also never expected that the world would be so closely engaged in Central Asia. US/NATO physical presence in Central Asia made the region a priority in the Russian foreign policy realm. Security concerns from the US/NATO presence and Islamic fundamentalists in the Muslim region decisively shapes Russia's policy towards the region. Russia has institutionalised its relations with CARs by establishing Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and a Collective Rapid Deployment Force under the CSTO. It has 7500 Russian military personnel guarding the Tajik-Afghan border.¹⁷ The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO's) Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) has been established since 2004. In the defence, military and security sectors, the region remains firmly attached to Russia. Russian is still the lingua franca in Central Asia. Russia is still heavily engaged in the production and transportation of oil and gas in the region though China has recently dented its monopoly in the energy sector of Central Asia.

Russia enjoys soft power in Central Asia because the socio-economic development that CARs achieved during the Soviet era is unprecedented in the history of imperialists and colonised states. Russia's influence in Central Asia will be long lasting as the region is extensively tied to Russia in diverse fields i.e. from security and energy to trade and investment and from geo-political loyalty to identical and common views on governance and development. Russia considers Central Asia vital for furthering its interests in rest of Asia. Currently Eurasianism is the focus of Russia's foreign policy aims while Central Asia has to play important role in Russia's Eurasian Union. It is worth mentioning that the importance of Central Asia for Russia has grown since 2001 and it will keep growing for the next decades and beyond.¹⁸ If America, in a polycentric world, reduced to a Western Power that holds influence in the WEST only and China over EAST, Russia believes to be influential over Eurasia which makes Central Asia Central to Russia. Russia considers the region as her traditional sphere of influence for a privileged role and believes that it has the capacity and also the 'right' to channel and shape others' interaction with CARs.¹⁹

¹⁶ Maria Y. Omelicheva, *op. cited*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bobo Lo, "Frontiers New and Old: Russia's Policy in Central Asia", Russia/NIS Centre, *Russie.Nei.Visions* No. 82, Paris 2015, retrieved from https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_rnv_82_central_asia_bobolo_eng_january_2015_0.pdf accessed 13/04/2019

¹⁹ *Ibid*

Pakistan's Interests, Policy and Goals in Central Asia

Pakistan realises the geographical and economic significance of Central Asian, region's location vis-à-vis Pakistan and therefore has been trying to forge closer economic and political relations with CARs since 1991. Pakistan's interests in Central Asia ranges from having access to the energy as well consumer markets while serving as an outlet for the region to South Asia, Indian Ocean and beyond. Pakistan also aims to counter Indian influence in the region. Pakistan initially tried to revive the historical cultural links while also using the religious card and ideological bonds for having close relations with CARs. Pakistan successfully lobbied for CARs' membership in Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1992. Pakistan also extended credit of \$10 million to each of the republic and institutionalised its relations through the establishment of inter-governmental commissions with these republics. In 1995 quadrilateral transit trade agreement was signed between Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to utilise Karakoram Highway for trade with Central Asia.²⁰ However, economic and political relations with CARs are still limited due to a number of reasons. The shortest route for Pakistan to Central Asia is via instable Afghanistan. During the 1990s there was clash of interests in Afghanistan amongst the regional states while Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan was mainly a struggle for a stable government there so that Afghanistan can serve as trade conduit with Central Asia.²¹ Trade with CARs is just a fraction of its true potential and the energy projects like TAPI and CASA 1000 are still far from materialisation due to instability in Afghanistan. On the other hand CARs were also looking towards West for transfer of capital and technology during their economic transition. Pakistan's limited resources could not offer a kind of investment and trade CARs needed. ECO suffered due to internal competition amongst the founding members Pakistan, Iran and Turkey for influence in the region. Pakistan at the same time could not formulate a coherent policy towards the region due to internal political and economic instability as a number of governments changed in Pakistan during 1990s.

Nevertheless Pakistan always sustained hope that it will become a gateway to landlocked Central Asia and Xinjiang one day. A positive change has occurred recently in the relations between Pakistan and CARs in lieu of integrations projects initiated by major powers particularly China's Belt and

²⁰ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Pakistan's Policy Towards Central Asia since 1991: An Evaluation" pp: 111-126 in Central Asia No. 65, Winter 2009 (Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar) : 117

²¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Pak-Uzbek Relations: Hopes and Hurdles", pp: 121-134 in Central Asia No. 53 (Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Winter 2003) p: 25

Road Initiative (BRI) and Russia's Eurasian Union. For Pakistan, CPEC, a flagship project of BRI, bypasses the instable Afghanistan for access to Central Asia. The warming up ties between Pakistan and Russia have also encouraged CARs to increase interaction with Pakistan. Hopefully CPEC will be supplemented by Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia corridor. Pakistan, in the contending discourses of either to adhere to the principle of uni-polarity and subordinate its interests and security to that of USA's hegemonic discourse of which Pakistan already became a victim or to follow and pursue a course of multipolarity and diversify its foreign policy by developing close relations with Russia, has chosen the later. Since 2005, Pakistan's image has improved in Central Asia particularly due to the America's policy of regime change in former Soviet space through colour revolutions and America's blaming of Pakistan for its policy failure in Afghanistan. Pakistan, Russia and CARs are now on same page regarding the peace process and a negotiated political settlement for Afghanistan.

Pakistan-Russia Collaboration: Implications for Afghanistan and Central Asia

In rapidly changing regional and global geo-political scenarios, allies have become aliens while aliens became partners. Changing regional orientation compels both Pakistan and Russia to develop closer strategic and economic collaboration which will have far reaching implications on the peace and economic development of a contiguous area comprising Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia controls northern corridor to this contiguous area while Pakistan provides an outlet to this landlocked contiguous area in the south. In other words Afghanistan and Central Asia links Russia and Pakistan. All this means Russia, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan are natural partners. Both Russia and Pakistan have convergence of interests as well as security concerns in the region.²² Both the countries have common stance of regional approach to address Afghanistan's problem. Importantly Sino-Pak close strategic and economic alliance also enforces and solidifies Pak-Russia collaboration particularly regarding Afghanistan and Central Asia. Pakistan, Russia and China are the real stake holders in peace and development of Afghanistan and Central Asia. All the three countries can decisively shape the outcome of Afghan conundrum if effectively coordinate their policies.

Russia's desire to have control over the Central Asian-South Asian integration via Afghanistan and Pakistan is in line with the interests of Pakistan i.e. to provide an outlet to the landlocked region. Many Russian analysts value Pakistan's geographical location vis-à-vis Afghanistan and

²² Faiza Bashir and Noreen Naseer, "New Cold War: Rebuilding Pakistan and Russia Relations" pp: 89-112 in *Central Asia* No. 82, Summer 2018 (Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, January 2019), 91

Central Asia. According to Andrew Korybko, a Russian analyst, Pakistan is a natural gateway of Eurasian Union to South Asia, Indian Ocean and beyond.²³ Similarly according to Vladimir Moskalkenko and Petr Topychkanov “Pakistan’s natural resource is its advantageous strategic location which makes it an important link between Middle East, Central Asia and South Asia”.²⁴ In post America Afghanistan, no regional country will be in a position to bring and maintain peace in Afghanistan unilaterally. Bringing peace to Afghanistan will be shared responsibility of all regional states importantly through accommodating each other’s’ views, interests and concerns. Therefore Pak-Russia cooperation along with other regional states i.e. CARs, Iran and China, as real stakeholders in peace of Afghanistan will be instrumental and conclusive in bringing peace to Afghanistan. CARs would welcome Pak-Russia collaboration as they will be the ultimate beneficiary of such collaboration. Unfortunately the phenomenon of ‘layover’ has limited the roles of regional states in regional security politics for the last many decades. Layover occurs when extra regional power or powers directly enter into a regional security complex effectively suppressing the regional dynamics and thus regional politics are absorbed by politics at global level.

There is an unprecedented Pak-Russia convergence on Afghanistan which earlier was a hallmark of Soviet–India relations. The Kremlin has already given credibility to the counter terrorism efforts of Pakistan and has declared Pakistan a close counter terrorism partner.²⁵ Russia is also satisfied with the Pak-China close involvement on Afghanistan. It is also possible that if regional security is jeopardised by coalition forces in Afghanistan, Russia can intervene with the support from Pakistan. Currently the Russia, China Pakistan axis seems a symbol and guarantee of security and prosperity for Afghanistan and Central Asia. According to Buzan’s regional security complex theory, regional security is closely linked to a grouping of regional states due to security interdependence. In this case the grouping of Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan can be instrumental in bringing peace and prosperity to Afghanistan and to entire region at large. Instability in

²³ Andrew Korybko, “Pakistan Is The “Zipper” Of Pan-Eurasian Integration”, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, Moscow, 15/09/2015, retrieved from <https://en.riss.ru/analysis/18882/> accessed 30/05/2019

²⁴ Vladimir Moskalkenko and Petr Topychkanov, “Pakistan and Russia: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities”, Carnegie Centre Moscow, May 2014, retrieved from https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Brief-Russia_Pakistan2014.pdf accessed 23/04/2019

²⁵ Samuel Ramani, “What Driving Russia-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan”, The Diplomat, May 09, 2017, retrieved from <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/whats-driving-russia-pakistan-cooperation-on-afghanistan/> accessed 30/05/2019

Afghanistan is damaging the peace and development process of regional/neighbouring countries the most. So peace in Afghanistan will definitely benefit the regional/neighbouring the most.

Thus the economic development and security of Central Asia and Afghanistan, the drug-trafficking issue, the ongoing conflict and future integration of Siberia, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan to South Asia, Indian Ocean and beyond all guarantee long term engagement between Pakistan and Russia. Pakistan's close relations with Russia must not be as response to the US-India proximity or otherwise, rather it is must be based on a conscious realisation of mutual interests independent of their relationship with other countries. The same rule applies to Russia as India has been trying its most to halt this Pak-Russia growing partnership and offset Pakistan's position.

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