

Russian Foreign Policy Orientation Under Putin in Relation to Pakistan and Its Implications on India

Apala Ghosh ^{a*}^aPhD Research Scholar, Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.**Corresponding Author:**

Apala Ghosh

PhD Research Scholar, Department
of International Relations, Jadavpur
University, Kolkata, India.

Email: apala.ghosh@gmail.com

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article/view/58](https://ijpmonline.com/index.php/ojs/article/view/58)**Abstract**

This research explores the orientation of Russia's foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin, focusing specifically on its evolving relationship with Pakistan and the implications this has for India. Historically, Russia has maintained close ties with India, while Pakistan has leaned toward alliances with the United States and China. However, since the 2010s, there has been a perceptible shift in Russia-Pakistan relations, including increased defence cooperation and economic engagements, raising concerns in New Delhi. This paper examines the strategic factors driving Moscow's outreach to Pakistan, the implications for South Asian security dynamics, and how India is adjusting its foreign policy in response to these changes.

The Russian Federation's foreign policy under Vladimir Putin has witnessed significant shifts in its orientation towards various global actors, particularly in South Asia. Russia's relations with Pakistan, historically marked by Cold War-era rivalries and limited engagements, have evolved considerably under Putin's leadership, raising important questions about its strategic calculations and the broader geopolitical ramifications. This paper examines the transformation in Russia-Pakistan relations under Putin, focusing on military, economic, and diplomatic interactions. It also explores how this evolving partnership affects India's strategic interests, given its historical ties with Russia and ongoing tensions with Pakistan. By analysing the underlying factors driving Russian foreign policy shifts, the paper sheds light on the complex triangular dynamics between Russia, Pakistan, and India, offering insights into the regional security architecture and future trends in South Asian geopolitics.

1. Introduction

The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has historically been shaped by the interplay between global powers like Russia, China, and the United States, each vying for influence in the region. For decades, India and Russia shared a close relationship, rooted in Cold War alliances and mutual economic and military interests. Pakistan, conversely, enjoyed stronger ties with the United States and later with China, positioning itself as a key player in the West's Cold War and post-Cold War strategy. However, recent years have seen a recalibration of these relationships, particularly as Russia under President Vladimir Putin seeks to expand its influence globally, diversify its strategic partnerships, and reduce its reliance on traditional allies.

Since the early 2010s, Russia has begun forging closer ties with Pakistan, particularly in defence cooperation and energy projects. This shift raises important questions about the long-term trajectory of Russia-Pakistan relations and its potential to alter the balance of power in South Asia. For India, Russia's growing closeness with Pakistan represents a potential strategic challenge. As India has strengthened its ties with the United States and entered into military and economic partnerships with other Western nations, Russia's pivot towards Pakistan is seen as both a response to India's

foreign policy diversification and as part of Russia's broader global strategy.

Russia's foreign policy under President Vladimir Putin has consistently emphasized the restoration of Russian influence on the global stage, following a period of post-Soviet economic and political instability. As part of this broader strategy, Moscow has sought to recalibrate its relationships with various global powers, including a notable shift in its approach toward South Asia. The historical context of Russia's foreign policy in South Asia has been heavily influenced by its Cold War-era alliance with India, and, by contrast, a distant and often antagonistic relationship with Pakistan. However, under Putin, Moscow has increasingly diversified its foreign policy engagements in the region, developing a closer relationship with Islamabad.

This shift in orientation has been driven by several factors, including Russia's evolving strategic interests, regional security dynamics, and changing global power structures. Notably, the strengthening of Russia-Pakistan relations has significant implications for India, a country that has traditionally enjoyed a close partnership with Moscow. The emergence of a Russia-Pakistan nexus raises critical questions about the future of India-Russia ties, regional security, and the balance of power in South Asia. This paper

seeks to explore the motivations behind Russia's growing engagement with Pakistan under Putin's leadership and assess the impact of this development on India.

The paper is organized as follows: first, it provides a historical overview of Russia's foreign policy in South Asia, focusing on its relations with India and Pakistan. Next, it examines the key drivers behind Russia's foreign policy shift toward Pakistan under Putin. The paper then analyses the implications of this evolving relationship for India, particularly in the context of regional security and geopolitical dynamics. Finally, the paper concludes with an assessment of the future trajectory of Russia's relations with India and Pakistan and its broader implications for South Asian geopolitics.

2. Historical Context of Russia's Foreign Policy Under Putin

This section explores Russia's foreign policy since Vladimir Putin's ascent to power in 2000. Putin has largely pursued a strategy of restoring Russia's status as a global power, reinvigorating its economy, and projecting influence in key regions like the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. For much of the post-Cold War period, Russia's foreign policy in South Asia was defined by its historically strong ties with India, forged during the Soviet era when the USSR provided military and economic assistance to India, particularly in the context of its rivalry with Pakistan, which was a U.S. ally.

Under Vladimir Putin's leadership, Russia has pursued a multifaceted foreign policy aimed at reasserting its global influence, balancing its relations with major powers, and ensuring its strategic interests in various regions. In South Asia, Russia's foreign policy towards India and Pakistan has evolved in line with its broader global ambitions, energy interests, defence cooperation, and the dynamics of regional security. As Russia seeks to diversify its alliances beyond the traditional Western partners and manage the shifting balance of power in Asia, its relationships with India and Pakistan reflect nuanced strategies that are deeply rooted in historical ties, pragmatic economic interests, and strategic imperatives.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union maintained a robust alliance with India, which was rooted in mutual strategic interests and ideological alignments. India's policy of non-alignment allowed it to maintain cordial relations with both superpowers, but it leaned toward the Soviet Union for economic and military support. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, signed in 1971, solidified this partnership, particularly as the Soviet Union provided critical diplomatic and military assistance to India during its conflict with Pakistan in the same year, leading to the creation of Bangladesh.

Conversely, Pakistan, as a member of Western alliance such as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), positioned itself as a staunch ally of the United States and a counterbalance to Soviet influence in the region. The Soviet Union's military intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 further strained relations with Pakistan, which became a

key player in supporting the Afghan Mujahideen, backed by the United States. This period entrenched a deep sense of mutual distrust between the Soviet Union and Pakistan.

However, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the geopolitical calculus has shifted. As Russia sought to redefine its global role, particularly under Putin, there was a growing need to diversify its partnerships, including a re-evaluation of its approach toward Pakistan. This need was driven by several factors: Russia's desire to counterbalance growing U.S. influence in Asia, its strategic alignment with China through forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and its economic and energy interests in Pakistan.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia inherited much of the Soviet Union's foreign policy legacy, including its close relationship with India. However, the economic and political turmoil of the 1990s under President Boris Yeltsin led to a period of relative disengagement from South Asia, as Russia focused on internal consolidation and improving ties with Western powers. Nonetheless, India remained an important partner for Russia, particularly in the defence sector, with continued arms sales and technological cooperation. (Andrei 2019) In contrast, Russia-Pakistan relations remained largely dormant during this period, with minimal diplomatic or economic engagement. Pakistan's continued alignment with the United States, particularly during the Afghan conflict, contributed to this lack of interaction. However, the post-9/11 geopolitical environment and Russia's growing disillusionment with Western policies, particularly NATO's expansion, laid the groundwork for a re-evaluation of its South Asia policy under Vladimir Putin.

Russia's ties with India are deeply rooted in the Soviet era, when the USSR was India's main supplier of military hardware and a key ally in the geopolitical rivalry against the U.S.-backed Pakistan. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union supported India's non-aligned stance and helped it build its defence capabilities, while Pakistan, aligned with the United States, pursued closer ties with Western powers. This Cold War dynamic set the foundation for Russia's post-Soviet foreign policy in the region, where India remained a long-standing partner. Under Putin, Russia has sought to not only preserve but also deepen this relationship, while simultaneously expanding its outreach to Pakistan, reflecting a shift towards a more balanced approach.

A cornerstone of Russia's foreign policy towards India is defence cooperation. Russia remains one of India's largest suppliers of arms, with significant deals such as the S-400 missile defence system, advanced fighter jets, and submarines. India's growing security concerns, particularly regarding China and Pakistan, have made Russian defence technology crucial for its military modernization efforts. Despite India's increasing defence collaborations with the U.S., Russia has maintained its position as a trusted and reliable partner, with defence trade exceeding \$13 billion in recent years. The bilateral defence relationship is underpinned by India's reliance on Russian equipment and Moscow's willingness to provide cutting-edge technology without restrictive conditions. While Russia's relationship with India has remained robust, its engagement with Pakistan has evolved, especially in the defence sector. Traditionally, Pakistan has

been dependent on U.S. and Chinese military supplies, but in recent years, Russia has started to supply military hardware to Pakistan as part of a broader strategy to expand its influence in South Asia. Russia has sold Pakistan helicopters, air defence systems, and other military equipment, while also conducting joint military exercises such as the Druzhba series of drills. These developments reflect a strategic recalibration of Russia's foreign policy, acknowledging Pakistan's importance in the regional security architecture, particularly in relation to Afghanistan.

Russia's energy strategy in its relationship with India is pivotal to its broader foreign policy goals. As one of the world's leading energy producers, Russia has sought to position itself as a major supplier of oil and natural gas to energy-hungry India. The countries have undertaken numerous joint ventures in oil exploration and development, with Russian companies such as Rosneft actively investing in Indian energy projects. Moreover, Russia is a key partner in India's nuclear energy sector, contributing to the construction of nuclear reactors under the 2010 civil nuclear cooperation agreement. Energy cooperation enhances Russia's leverage in its relationship with India and supports its goal of diversifying its energy markets away from Europe. Economic relations between Russia and Pakistan are gradually expanding, particularly in the energy sector. In 2015, Russia and Pakistan signed deal for the construction of the North-South Gas Pipeline to transport gas from Karachi to Lahore. (Stephen 2020) Although the project has faced delays, it symbolizes Russia's intention to invest in Pakistan's energy infrastructure. In addition to the pipeline, Russia has expressed interest in expanding bilateral trade, particularly in the areas of agriculture and technology. Although the scale of economic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan is relatively small compared to its ties with India, Moscow views Islamabad as a potential partner in its efforts to increase trade and investment in the broader South Asian market.

At a strategic level, Russia and India share a common vision of a multipolar world order that reduces the dominance of any single power, particularly the United States. This shared outlook has driven cooperation in international forums like BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Both countries have used these platforms to promote their views on global governance, economic cooperation, and security. Russia values India's independent foreign policy, which, despite New Delhi's closer ties with Washington in recent years, continues to emphasize strategic autonomy, aligning well with Moscow's objective of countering Western hegemony. (Ramesh 2017) Russia's growing engagement with Pakistan does not signify a pivot away from India but rather reflects a nuanced approach to managing its relationships in South Asia. By cultivating ties with both India and Pakistan, Russia seeks to maintain a balance in the region that aligns with its broader strategic interests. This approach is also influenced by Russia's deepening relations with China, a key ally of Pakistan. While India has expressed concerns over Russia's military cooperation with Pakistan, Moscow

has been careful to reassure New Delhi that its strategic partnership with India remains a priority. (Andrew 2018) The balance Russia seeks to achieve in its relations with India and Pakistan mirrors its broader foreign policy goal of positioning itself as a key player in multiple regions without becoming overly dependent on any single partner.

Russia's relationship with India is also driven by shared concerns about regional stability in Asia, particularly in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Russia recognizes India's role as a stabilizing force in South Asia and its ability to counterbalance the influence of China and the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific region. The evolving security situation in Afghanistan, especially after the U.S. withdrawal, has increased Russia's interest in working closely with India to address concerns related to terrorism, narcotics trafficking, and regional instability. Russia's engagement with the Taliban, despite India's initial reservations, reflects Moscow's pragmatic approach to regional diplomacy, aimed at ensuring security and influence in Central Asia. Russia's engagement with Pakistan is also driven by shared concerns over terrorism and extremism, especially in the context of Afghanistan. Moscow recognizes Islamabad's influence over various factions within Afghanistan and views cooperation with Pakistan as essential for maintaining stability in the region. Russia has participated in multilateral efforts involving Pakistan to mediate the Afghan conflict and prevent the resurgence of extremist groups. By improving relations with Pakistan, Russia seeks to ensure a role for itself in shaping the post-conflict future of Afghanistan, while also managing the threat of terrorism that could spill over into Central Asia.

3. Russia-Pakistan Relations Under Putin

This section delves into the specifics of Russia-Pakistan relations since the 2000s, focusing on the key areas of defence cooperation, economic engagement, and diplomatic alignment. In 2014, Russia lifted its arms embargo on Pakistan, signalling a major shift in its South Asia policy. This was followed by a series of defence deals, including the sale of Mi-35 helicopters and joint military exercises. Additionally, Russia and Pakistan have explored economic cooperation in the energy sector, with Russia agreeing to invest in Pakistan's gas infrastructure, including the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline.

Over the past decade, the evolving relationship between Russia and Pakistan has garnered attention from analysts and policymakers alike. Historically, these two countries stood on opposite sides of global ideological and strategic divides, particularly during the Cold War when Pakistan was a staunch ally of the United States, and Russia was the nucleus of the Soviet Union. The 21st century, however, has seen a recalibration in their bilateral ties, driven by shifting geopolitical landscapes, strategic interests, and the reconfiguration of regional alliances. Several key drivers underline the emerging Russia-Pakistan partnership, including the changing global order, mutual economic interests, shared concerns about terrorism and instability in Afghanistan, and a desire for diversified foreign policies.

Vladimir Putin's ascent to power in 2000 marked the beginning of a more assertive Russian foreign policy aimed at re-establishing Russia as a global power. This shift was characterized by a pragmatic approach to international relations, where Moscow sought to diversify its partnerships and reduce its reliance on any single global actor. As part of this broader strategy, Russia began to explore closer ties with Pakistan, recognizing the latter's strategic importance in South Asia and its role in regional security dynamics, particularly in relation to Afghanistan.

One of the key drivers behind Russia's engagement with Pakistan has been its interest in countering terrorism and extremism in the region. The instability in Afghanistan and the rise of Islamist militancy posed significant security challenges for Russia, particularly in its restive North Caucasus region. Pakistan, given its influence over various factions in Afghanistan, emerged as a critical player in regional security, prompting Moscow to engage Islamabad more actively in counterterrorism efforts.

The deepening military ties between Russia and Pakistan have raised concerns in India, which has historically been the largest importer of Russian arms. While the volume of Russian arms sales to Pakistan remains relatively small compared to India, the symbolic significance of these transactions cannot be ignored. They reflect Moscow's willingness to diversify its defence partnerships in South Asia and reduce its dependence on India as its primary arms customer.

In addition to military cooperation, Russia and Pakistan have sought to enhance their economic ties, particularly in the energy sector. Russia has expressed interest in investing in Pakistan's energy infrastructure, including the construction of the North-South gas pipeline, which is valued at over \$2 billion, representing a significant step toward strengthening economic cooperation between the two countries. Moreover, Russia's involvement in regional multilateral forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), has provided additional avenues for diplomatic and economic engagement with Pakistan. Both countries have emphasized the importance of regional connectivity and economic integration, particularly through initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which Russia has expressed interest in joining as part of its broader Eurasian integration strategy.

One of the primary drivers of the Russia-Pakistan engagement is the evolving global order, which is increasingly becoming multipolar. The unipolar moment of U.S. hegemony that followed the Cold War is gradually fading, giving way to a multipolar system where powers such as Russia, China, and India are asserting themselves in global and regional affairs. This shift has presented new opportunities for countries like Pakistan and Russia to recalibrate their foreign policies and form alliances outside traditional frameworks. (Adomeit 2017) Russia's foreign policy, especially under President Vladimir Putin, is focused on resisting U.S. dominance and asserting Moscow's influence in regions where it previously had minimal strategic involvement. Engaging with Pakistan,

a key player in South Asia and the broader Islamic world, offers Russia an avenue to expand its influence in a region historically dominated by U.S. alliances.

For Pakistan, a nation with long-standing ties to the United States, especially during the Cold War and the War on Terror, this partnership represents a strategic diversification. While Pakistan remains an important ally of the U.S., particularly in counterterrorism and military affairs, it has sought to reduce its over-reliance on Washington, particularly in light of strained relations in recent years. Russia offers Pakistan an alternative great power partner that can provide military, economic, and diplomatic support without the stringent conditions often attached to Western aid.

Afghanistan represents a crucial area where Russia and Pakistan's interests have converged. Both countries have a vested interest in ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a hotbed of terrorism and instability that could spill over into their borders. Pakistan, sharing a long and porous border with Afghanistan, has historically played a significant role in Afghan affairs, from supporting the Mujahideen during the Soviet invasion to backing the Taliban in its early days. Today, Pakistan is deeply concerned about the rise of groups like ISIS-Khorasan and the potential resurgence of terrorism in the region.

For Russia, the lessons of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1989) continue to shape its approach to the country. Russia fears that instability in Afghanistan could lead to the spread of terrorism and drug trafficking into Central Asia, a region that Russia views as its sphere of influence. Moreover, the presence of extremist groups like ISIS in Afghanistan is seen as a direct threat to Russia's security, particularly in its Muslim-majority regions such as Chechnya. (Rumer 2019) Thus, both Moscow and Islamabad have a mutual interest in stabilizing Afghanistan and preventing it from becoming a breeding ground for extremist groups.

This convergence of interests has been evident in the multilateral diplomatic efforts surrounding Afghanistan. Both Russia and Pakistan have been involved in initiatives like the Moscow Format talks, which seek to bring together key stakeholders, including the Taliban, to find a political solution to the Afghan conflict. Moreover, the two countries' intelligence and military cooperation in counterterrorism has also expanded in recent years, with joint military exercises focusing on counterinsurgency and anti-terrorism operations.

For both Russia and Pakistan, their bilateral engagement is part of a broader strategy of diversification in foreign relations. Russia, facing increasing isolation from the West following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent sanctions, has sought to strengthen ties with non-Western countries, particularly in Asia. Pakistan, with its complex relationships with the U.S., China, and India, views Russia as a valuable partner that can help balance these relationships.

Pakistan's strategic partnership with China, epitomized by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), remains its most critical foreign alliance. However, Pakistan is acutely aware of the risks of over-reliance on any single power. Engaging with Russia allows Islamabad to pursue a more

balanced foreign policy, reducing its dependence on Beijing and Washington while also sending a message to India that it has other powerful allies in the region.

Similarly, Russia's outreach to Pakistan can be seen as part of its broader strategy to counterbalance India's growing closeness with the United States. While Russia continues to maintain strong defence and economic ties with India, particularly through organizations like BRICS and the SCO, it is also aware that India's strategic alignment with the U.S. presents challenges to the long-standing Russia-India relationship. By engaging with Pakistan, Russia can hedge its bets in South Asia and ensure that it remains a key player in the region's geopolitical dynamics.

While Russia-Pakistan relations are still in their nascent stages compared to Russia's long-standing relationship with India, the gradual deepening of ties has raised concerns in New Delhi, particularly in light of Pakistan's historical alliances with China and the United States.

4. The Implications for India

India, as a key regional power and Russia's traditional ally, views the growing Russia-Pakistan relationship with caution. While Russia has reassured India that its ties with Pakistan will not affect its long-standing partnership with New Delhi, the deepening defence cooperation between Moscow and Islamabad has raised strategic concerns in India, especially given its own tense relations with Pakistan. This section will explore how India perceives Russia's growing ties with Pakistan, focusing on the defence, diplomatic, and economic implications for India.

The growing relationship between Russia and Pakistan has undoubtedly raised concerns in India, which shares a long-standing strategic partnership with Russia, especially in defence and energy sectors. While the Russia-India relationship has deep historical roots dating back to the Cold War era, the recent Russia-Pakistan engagement has added new complexities to this dynamic. India's concerns stem from Russia's increasing military cooperation with Pakistan, a nation India considers a regional rival. (Dmitri 2018) However, it is important to recognize that the Russia-Pakistan relationship remains largely pragmatic, driven by specific geopolitical and strategic interests rather than a deep alliance that might supplant Moscow's ties with New Delhi.

On the defence front, Russia has been the largest supplier of arms to India for decades, and this remains a cornerstone of their relationship. However, with Russia opening up to arms sales to Pakistan, including the sale of Mi-35 helicopters and potential discussions around air defence systems, India has expressed unease. While these arms sales are relatively modest compared to the vast defence trade between India and Russia, they mark a departure from Moscow's historical policy of avoiding defence deals with Pakistan due to its alliance with India. This shift, however, seems driven by Russia's broader diversification of its foreign policy amid growing isolation from the West, rather than a move to weaken its ties with India.

India's strategic alignment with the United States, especially through platforms like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), may have also prompted Russia to explore closer ties with Pakistan. However, it is clear that Russia values its long-standing relationship with India, particularly in the defence, energy, and multilateral cooperation domains. The India-Russia relationship continues to thrive through initiatives such as the S-400 missile defence system deal and cooperation in energy projects, including nuclear power and hydrocarbons.

India has long been one of Russia's most important strategic partners, particularly in the defence sector, where Russian arms and technology have played a critical role in India's military modernization. However, the growing closeness between Russia and Pakistan has raised concerns in New Delhi about the future of the India-Russia relationship. India's strategic community views Russia's engagement with Pakistan as a potential erosion of the traditional Indo-Russian partnership, particularly in light of India's increasing ties with the United States.

The shift in Russia's foreign policy has led to a sense of unease in India, which has traditionally relied on Russia as a counterbalance to its adversaries in the region, particularly China and Pakistan. The prospect of a Russia-Pakistan-China axis, driven by shared interests in regional security and economic cooperation, poses a potential challenge to India's strategic calculus. However, it is important to note that Russia has been careful to maintain a balance in its relations with both India and Pakistan, emphasizing that its engagement with Islamabad is not directed against New Delhi.

India's reliance on Russian military hardware, including advanced fighter jets, tanks, and missile systems, has historically been a cornerstone of the India-Russia relationship. However, as Russia diversifies its defence exports to Pakistan, India has responded by diversifying its own military procurement, increasing arms imports from the United States, Israel, and France. Additionally, this section will examine India's broader foreign policy response to Russia's pivot to Pakistan, including its deepening strategic ties with the United States and its involvement in multilateral forums like the Quad.

In summary, while Russia's engagement with Pakistan has introduced a new layer of complexity to its ties with India, it is unlikely to cause a significant rupture. Moscow's relationship with Islamabad is driven by pragmatic needs such as counterterrorism cooperation and energy projects, whereas its strategic partnership with India remains deeply entrenched, particularly in defence. Nonetheless, India will continue to monitor these developments closely, especially if Russia-Pakistan defence cooperation expands further in the future.

5. Regional and Global Implications

Russia's foreign policy has been marked by a strategic reorientation towards multipolarity, and its engagement with South Asia plays a crucial role in this global vision. In recent years, Russia has sought to deepen its relationships

with key South Asian nations, particularly India and Pakistan, while navigating the complex geopolitical dynamics of the region. The implications of Russia's policies in South Asia extend beyond the regional context, influencing global power structures, alliances, and economic trends. This article examines the key elements of Russia's foreign policy in South Asia and its broader global implications.

Russia's foreign policy shift towards Pakistan not only affects India but also has broader implications for regional and global geopolitics. South Asia is a region of intense strategic competition, with India, Pakistan, and China as the key players, and external powers like the United States and Russia seeking to influence the regional balance of power. (Donaldson 2020) This section will explore how Russia's outreach to Pakistan affects broader regional dynamics, including the India-Pakistan-China triangle, U.S. strategy in South Asia, and the evolving role of Russia and China in shaping regional security through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

One of the cornerstones of Russia's South Asian foreign policy is its longstanding relationship with India. Dating back to the Cold War era, this partnership has evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership, encompassing defence, energy, and space collaboration. India remains one of Russia's largest defence customers, importing advanced weaponry such as the S-400 missile systems and Sukhoi fighter jets. These military ties are not just a reflection of historical ties but also underline the mutual interest in balancing China's growing influence and countering Western pressure. Moreover, their cooperation in the energy sector, with Russian oil companies investing in Indian refineries and oil exploration, further strengthens this bilateral bond.

However, the deepening of US-India relations, particularly through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and agreements such as the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), has introduced a layer of complexity into the Indo-Russian partnership. Russia, keen to maintain its strategic autonomy, has responded by recalibrating its approach to India, ensuring that its military cooperation does not conflict with India's evolving relationship with the West. This balancing act illustrates Russia's broader diplomatic strategy: maintaining diverse partnerships without becoming overly reliant on any single actor.

On a global scale, Russia's partnership with India has implications for the US and NATO. India's continued purchase of Russian military hardware, despite pressure from the US to diversify its suppliers, underscores the limitations of Western influence and suggests a multipolar world where regional powers like India assert their autonomy in foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, India's strategic autonomy, supported by its military ties with Russia, creates a buffer in South Asia that complicates Western attempts to isolate or contain Russia globally.

While India remains a key partner, Russia's relationship with Pakistan has seen a significant shift in recent years. Historically, Russia and Pakistan were on opposite sides of the Cold War divide, with Pakistan aligned with the US

and playing a pivotal role in the anti-Soviet campaign during the Afghan War. However, since the early 2010s, Moscow has taken steps to improve ties with Islamabad, driven by a convergence of interests in Afghanistan, counterterrorism, and regional stability.

One of the most significant developments in Russia-Pakistan relations is their growing military cooperation. In recent years, the two countries have conducted joint military exercises and negotiated arms deals, signalling a gradual thaw in relations. Russia's decision to sell helicopters and other military equipment to Pakistan, a long-time US ally, is indicative of its intent to diversify its partnerships in South Asia and reduce its overdependence on India. Additionally, energy cooperation between Russia and Pakistan, particularly in the form of gas pipeline projects, highlights Russia's ambition to expand its economic footprint in the region.

On the global stage, Russia's engagement with Pakistan has far-reaching implications for South Asian security and global power dynamics. By forging closer ties with both India and Pakistan, Russia positions itself as a key mediator in the India-Pakistan rivalry, potentially enhancing its diplomatic clout in regional conflict resolution. Furthermore, this balanced approach aligns with Russia's broader strategy of leveraging regional rivalries to increase its own influence. As US-Pakistan relations face strains, particularly after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia's engagement with Pakistan serves as a counterbalance to Western influence in the region and reflects a shift in the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

One of the key areas where Russia's engagement with Pakistan has direct implications for India is in the context of regional security, particularly in Afghanistan. Both Russia and Pakistan have a vested interest in the stability of Afghanistan, given the potential spillover effects of terrorism and extremism. Russia's diplomatic outreach to the Taliban and its efforts to facilitate a political settlement in Afghanistan have been closely coordinated with Pakistan, which has long been a key player in Afghan affairs.

For India, Russia's growing cooperation with Pakistan in Afghanistan is a source of concern, particularly as New Delhi has historically viewed Afghanistan as a critical element of its regional security strategy. India's investments in Afghan infrastructure and its support for the Kabul government have been aimed at preventing Pakistan from gaining undue influence in the country. However, the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban has complicated India's position, with Russia and Pakistan playing increasingly prominent roles in shaping the future of the country.

6. India's Strategic Response and Policy Options

Given the potential threats posed by a closer Russia-Pakistan relationship, India must carefully navigate its foreign policy and strategic responses. This section will explore India's possible policy options in response to Russia's growing ties with Pakistan. It will analyse whether India can maintain its historical defence and diplomatic ties with Russia while pursuing deeper engagement with the United States and other Western powers. (Mohan 2015) Moreover,

it will discuss India's broader strategic positioning in the Indo-Pacific region, including its role in the Quad and its efforts to balance relations with both Russia and the West.

This section will also explore the potential for India to leverage its economic and diplomatic ties with Russia to limit Moscow's engagement with Pakistan. Additionally, it will assess the risks and opportunities for India in a multipolar world, where traditional alliances are shifting, and new geopolitical realities are emerging.

Despite the challenges posed by Russia's engagement with Pakistan, India has sought to maintain its strategic autonomy and avoid being drawn into a binary geopolitical competition between global powers. India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been characterized by a pragmatic approach that seeks to balance its relationships with multiple global actors, including the United States, Russia, and China. In this context, India has continued to emphasize the importance of its partnership with Russia, particularly in areas such as defence, energy, and nuclear cooperation.

At the same time, India's growing strategic convergence with the United States, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, has raised questions about the long-term viability of the India-Russia partnership. The U.S.-India defence and security relationship has expanded significantly in recent years, with India becoming a key partner in U.S. efforts to counterbalance China's rise in the region. This has inevitably led to some friction with Russia, which views the U.S.-India partnership with suspicion, particularly in the context of its own tensions with the West.

India's response to Russia-Pakistan ties must be calibrated, avoiding overreaction while ensuring that its core security interests are protected. The following policy options could guide India's approach:

1. **Engaging Russia through Strategic Dialogue:** India must continue high-level diplomatic engagement with Russia to address concerns over its Pakistan ties. Through established forums like the India-Russia annual summit, India can communicate its concerns and seek reassurances that Moscow's relationship with Pakistan will not undermine India's security. India should emphasize its long-standing defence partnership with Russia and the mutual benefits of maintaining stability in South Asia. Additionally, India can propose trilateral or multilateral dialogues involving Russia, India, and Central Asian countries, focusing on regional security and counterterrorism cooperation, thereby diluting the impact of Russia-Pakistan military cooperation.
2. **Diversifying Defence Supplies:** Although India remains heavily dependent on Russian military equipment, it has made strides in diversifying its defence procurement, particularly through partnerships with the U.S., France, and Israel. By continuing to diversify its defence sources, India can reduce its reliance on Russia without abruptly disrupting ties. This approach allows India to leverage Russia's defence industry while ensuring it has alternative suppliers to maintain strategic autonomy.
3. **Leveraging Energy and Economic Cooperation:** India

should also focus on expanding energy cooperation with Russia. Moscow remains a key player in global energy markets, and India, as one of the world's largest energy consumers, can use energy collaboration as a means to deepen ties. Investment in joint energy projects, such as oil exploration in the Arctic and liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports, would strengthen the economic dimension of India-Russia relations, making it less likely that Russia would pivot fully towards Pakistan at India's expense.

While managing Russia-Pakistan relations is one facet of India's foreign policy, another challenge is balancing its growing partnership with the U.S. and its historical ties with Russia. The Indo-U.S. strategic partnership has grown significantly in recent years, especially in the areas of defence, technology, and Indo-Pacific security. Washington views India as a key player in its strategy to counter China's rise, as reflected in initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) involving India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia.

However, India's closeness to the U.S. cannot come at the cost of alienating Russia, a crucial partner in defence, energy, and geopolitical stability. Moscow remains an important counterbalance to China, and India cannot afford to isolate Russia in the shifting global order. Balancing these relationships requires a multi-pronged strategy:

1. **Strategic Autonomy as a Guiding Principle:** India must continue to pursue a policy of strategic autonomy, maintaining flexibility in its foreign policy to engage with multiple powers without becoming overly dependent on any single bloc. This approach allows India to cooperate with the U.S. on issues like Indo-Pacific security while continuing its defence and energy partnerships with Russia. Strategic autonomy also provides India with the leverage to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes without being drawn into great power rivalries.
2. **Strengthening Multi-Alignment:** India has successfully pursued a multi-alignment strategy, engaging with diverse partners such as the U.S., Russia, Japan, and the EU. By expanding partnerships with middle powers like Japan, France, and Germany, India can balance its relations with both the U.S. and Russia. For example, India's deepening defence and economic ties with Japan complement its partnerships with the U.S. and Russia, while France's involvement in India's defence sector adds another layer of strategic cooperation. Multi-alignment also allows India to avoid overreliance on any one partner while securing access to technology, capital, and military equipment from a range of sources.
3. **Managing U.S. Expectations:** While India's strategic partnership with the U.S. is vital, New Delhi must carefully manage Washington's expectations regarding its ties with Russia. The U.S. has pressured India to reduce its reliance on Russian military hardware, especially in light of sanctions on Moscow. India should seek to explain its unique geopolitical position, emphasizing that its defence relationship with Russia

is essential for maintaining strategic balance in Asia. At the same time, India can assure the U.S. that its growing military cooperation with Washington, including arms deals and joint exercises, reflects a genuine commitment to deepening the partnership.

In addition to managing relations with the U.S. and Russia, India must continue to expand its engagements with other powers, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. The rise of China and its assertiveness in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean has prompted India to strengthen partnerships with countries that share concerns about Beijing's actions.

- 1. Deepening Quad Cooperation:** The Quad has emerged as a key platform for India to collaborate with the U.S., Japan, and Australia in promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific. India should continue to invest in the Quad's military, economic, and technological dimensions while avoiding framing the initiative as an anti-China alliance. By focusing on areas like maritime security, infrastructure development, and supply chain resilience, India can position itself as a key player in shaping the Indo-Pacific order.
- 2. Enhancing Ties with Europe:** India's relations with the EU and individual European countries like France and Germany have gained momentum in recent years. As Europe diversifies its strategic engagements beyond the transatlantic alliance, India stands to benefit from stronger ties in areas like technology, climate change, and defence. India should prioritize free trade agreements with the EU and work with European partners to strengthen connectivity and infrastructure initiatives in the Indo-Pacific.
- 3. Regional Diplomacy in South Asia:** India must also focus on maintaining regional stability in South Asia, where Pakistan's ties with Russia and China pose challenges. By strengthening diplomatic and economic ties with its neighbours, particularly Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, India can counterbalance Pakistan's influence and promote regional cooperation. Initiatives like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) can serve as platforms for advancing regional integration.

India's foreign policy in response to Russia-Pakistan ties and its broader balancing act between Russia, the U.S., and other powers requires a nuanced and flexible approach. By pursuing strategic autonomy, diversifying defence and energy partnerships, and strengthening ties with key regional and global players, India can navigate the evolving geopolitical landscape. Engaging Russia in dialogue, while deepening the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership and expanding multi-alignment, will enable India to secure its national interests while contributing to regional and global stability.

7. Conclusion

The evolving nature of Russia's foreign policy under Vladimir Putin, particularly its growing relationship

with Pakistan, represents a significant shift in South Asian geopolitics. While Russia remains an important partner for India, the deepening Russia-Pakistan ties pose new challenges for New Delhi, particularly in the defence and strategic realms. India must carefully navigate this changing geopolitical landscape, balancing its historical ties with Russia while strengthening its partnerships with the United States and other key players in the Indo-Pacific. The evolution of Russia's foreign policy under Vladimir Putin has led to a notable shift in its orientation toward South Asia, with a growing focus on Pakistan as a key partner in regional security and economic cooperation.

This development has significant implications for India, which has traditionally enjoyed a close partnership with Russia but now faces the challenge of navigating a more complex and multipolar regional environment. While Russia's engagement with Pakistan is driven by pragmatic considerations, including counterterrorism cooperation and energy interests, it raises important questions about the future of the India-Russia relationship and the broader balance of power in South Asia.

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Russia's relations with India and Pakistan will be shaped by several factors, including the evolving security situation in Afghanistan, the dynamics of great power competition between the United States, China, and Russia, and the strategic choices made by India in balancing its relationships with these global actors. As South Asia continues to be a critical theatre for geopolitical competition, the triangular relationship between Russia, Pakistan, and India will remain a key determinant of regional security and stability.

The implications of Russia's foreign policy shift go beyond India and Pakistan, affecting regional security dynamics and global geopolitics. As the world moves toward a more multipolar order, the relationships between Russia, India, and Pakistan will continue to evolve, with significant consequences for the balance of power in South Asia and beyond.

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