

# Russia–Pakistan Strategic Relations

## An Emerging Entente Cordiale

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Since the famous American raid in 2011 that killed Osama bin Laden and given the US exceptional favor to India's nuclear ambitions, Islamabad has gradually moved away from the United States, deepened Pakistan's relations with China, and sought rapprochement with Russia. While Pakistan's strategic relations with China have been developing for more than five decades, Islamabad's relations with Moscow are new, evolving for less than a decade. Russia has always preferred India to Pakistan and shied away from any proactive role in conflict resolution between India and Pakistan. Additionally, Russia has been unsure of Pakistan's future and its strategic direction. In South Asia, Moscow seems to balance Russia's interests proportionate to the strategic importance and economic advantage that each nation offers. Pakistan is a relatively small power undergoing internal and economic perils. It cannot match India's power potential and offer the same scope of political, strategic, and economic influence that India wields in its relations with major powers. Yet, Pakistan is a very important piece in the emerging geopolitical chessboard in Eurasia. Notwithstanding the handicap of perpetual asymmetry vis-à-vis India, Pakistan leverages its geophysical location, strong military with advancing nuclear capability, and considerable influence in the Islamic world in its conduct of international relations.

In the past, Pakistan and Russia could not develop close ties because neither country fully trusted the other. However, given the mutual benefits to building relations, as discussed in this article, both countries are trying to move forward past lingering mistrust. For instance, Russia is apprehensive of Pakistan's close alliances with the West, which have been established since early Cold War years, and it is now observing the nature of Pakistan's deepening strategic relations with China. Likewise, Islamabad is concerned of Russia's strategic relations with India. Over the past decade, with shifts in the international system (e.g., Russia's resurgence under Pres. Vladimir Putin and the deterioration of US relations with Russia and Pakistan) have provided both countries a Machiavellian common cause by which to reevaluate their mutual relations. Russia is finding new opportunities in South Asia as the United States contemplates withdrawing from Afghanistan and simultaneously confronts Iran. Meanwhile, Islamabad is seeking new allies to compensate for its gradually fraying relations with Washington while Pakistan also faces new tensions with its archrival India, which is led by a revitalized right-wing Hindu

nationalist government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Pakistan is attempting to influence its geo-economic significance, boosted by the fast-developing China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—touted as a flagship of China’s Belt Road Initiative (BRI). Nascent Russia–Pakistan relations are developing under these changing geopolitical circumstances in South Asia.

For more than a decade now, the Pakistan military has been in a constant state of war. Since 2001, the spillover of the Afghan War into Pakistan has given unprecedented rise to homegrown extremism and terrorism, especially in the western provinces and along the tribal borderlands with Afghanistan. The Pakistani military and civilians have suffered immensely as has the country’s economy, which is in dire straits. Though Pakistan has received compensation from the United States for its role in the war in the form of “coalition support funds,” the combination of wear and tear of arms and equipment, depletion of strategic reserves, and general exhaustion from constant combat have adversely affected the Pakistani military combat potential. Beset by these adversities, the realization of Pakistan’s need to modernize its military faces significant challenges. As demands for national security continue to grow, Pakistan’s weak economy, plagued with structural problems, is unable to meet the Pakistani defense requirements. Additionally, Pakistan’s defense needs have increased copiously, especially given its constant compulsion to balance against India, which has much greater resources. During the Cold War, Pakistan sought alliances with major powers to offset its strategic asymmetry with India. Since the 1950s, a military alliance with the United States allowed Islamabad to maintain adequate qualitative and quantitative equilibrium with India for a while, but the gap with India continued to widen. Lately, as Pakistan’s alliance with Western countries erodes, Islamabad has been moving toward Moscow and Beijing to reestablish a strategic balance with India.

Scholars have published little open-source literature regarding Russia’s newfound coziness with Pakistan. Extrapolating from recent media reports, articles, and general discussion in the strategic community in Pakistan, this article examines the trends in this new relationship and assesses possible influence Russia might have in shaping future Pakistani security policy and nuclear doctrines. The first section of this article provides an overview of Russia–Pakistan relations affected by the historical baggage of the Pakistani alliance with the United States and China in the Cold War. The second section examines the evolving rapprochement in the past decade. Russia–Pakistan military relations have been progressing at a time when US–India strategic partnership is growing, and US–Russian relations are deteriorating along with a downslide in US–Pakistan relations.<sup>1</sup> The third section examines possible convergence between Russian and Pakistani security outlooks. I analyze the commonalities in Russian and Pakistani strategic doctrines, including

the rationale in nuclear first use policy, transition from strategic deterrence to battlefield deterrence, and the possible impact/influence of Russia's "escalate to deescalate" concept on Pakistani thinking. The fourth section surveys the divergence in Russian and Pakistani policies and concludes with a prognosis of Russia–Pakistan strategic cooperation.

### **Russian-Pakistan Relations: An Overview**

The partition of the British India into two separate states (India and Pakistan) coincided with the beginning of Cold War. The newly independent nation-states—emerging from colonialism and fracture with structural weaknesses—faced the dilemma of choosing an alliance between the two superpowers (the United States and Soviet Union) in the emerging bipolar international system. India inherited the colonial political structure of the British Raj, and New Delhi preferred strategic autonomy to military alliances; however, it also consciously collaborated with the Soviet Union while officially maintaining a nonaligned policy. As the weaker, more vulnerable, and more economically struggling of the two states, Pakistan joined the US-led military alliances that lasted until the end of the Cold War. Pakistan benefited economically and militarily from alliances with the West but not without paying for its choice. For most of its history, Pakistan suffered from the Soviet Union's retaliation and antagonism for Islamabad's pro-Western choices.

There were three distinct periods during the Cold War wherein Pakistan's proactive role in pursuance of US strategic objectives laid the basis of historical distrust between the Soviet Union and Pakistan. First, Islamabad provided the United States with air bases and intelligence assets on Pakistani soil that facilitated reconnaissance on and monitoring of the Soviet Union in the pre-satellite era. A major example of when the Soviets threatened retaliation was concerning U-2 flights from PAF Camp Badaber, near Peshawar, especially after the infamous Gary Powers incident in May 1960.<sup>2</sup> As a superpower in the Cold War, the Soviet Union frequently voted against Pakistan's interests in all international forums, and in particular, against Pakistan's position on Kashmir in the United Nations.<sup>3</sup>

Second, in the 1970s, Pakistan facilitated Pres. Richard Nixon's geopolitical summit that brought rapprochement between China and the United States.<sup>4</sup> The Soviets retaliated by signing the India–Soviet Mutual Friendship treaty in August 1971, which provided India with political and strategic support during the 1971 Indo–Pakistan War. Pakistan suffered a humiliating surrender in East Pakistan that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. Pakistani intelligentsia consider the dismemberment of a united Pakistan as the heaviest price Islamabad paid for Pakistan's role in facilitating US–China rapprochement.

Finally, in the 1980s, after the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, the United States and Pakistan realigned to wage an asymmetric war to defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan. Moscow's involvement in Afghanistan in the 1980s contributed to the Soviets' strategic overextension and eventually the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Arguably, US involvement in Afghanistan the 1980s was American payback for the US defeat in Vietnam (a proxy war the Soviets supported against United States) and Pakistan's revenge for its dismemberment at the hands of Soviet-supported India in the 1971 war. In other words, both Pakistan and the Soviet Union played an indirect role in each other's disintegration during the Cold War. This historical baggage casts a shadow, even as Russia and Pakistan are fostering a new relationship.

### ***Post–Cold War Efforts to Restore Relations***

In the mid-1990s, Russia and Pakistan attempted to reset their relations with little success. At the time, Pakistan was under US nuclear sanctions under the Pressler amendment to US nonproliferation law, which went into effect in 1990 and banned economic and military assistance to Pakistan unless the president certified annually that Pakistan did not have nuclear devices. At this time, Pakistan desperately needed to modernize its military. Pakistan felt the United States had abandoned it as an ally after using Pakistan for US Cold War objectives. This also meant that Pakistan was left alone to face the fallout of the Afghan War. Also, at that time, Russia was emerging from the throes of the Soviet Union's dissolution and undergoing an economic crisis. Thus, Moscow was eager to sell military weapons and defense equipment. However, Pakistan could not afford the prices Russians were asking and found the credibility of those negotiating on behalf of Russia to be of dubious nature.<sup>5</sup> Both countries were transitioning in the 1990s into fledgling democracies and experiencing internal instabilities. The rise of Taliban in Afghanistan exacerbated the situation and created a potential threat to Russia's "southern vector." Additionally, Chechen rebels found refuge in the lawless lands spanning from Central Asia to the western borderlands of Pakistan's tribal areas.<sup>6</sup>

After the September 2001 terrorist attacks, the United States and Pakistan renewed their alliance. Under Pres. Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan once again became a central player in a new war in Afghanistan. However, following the December 2001 terror attacks on the Indian parliament in New Delhi, once again Pakistan and India teetered on the brink of war. Like the rest of world, Russia worried about the military standoff between the two nuclear-armed countries. As a result, President Putin offered to mediate between India and Pakistan, which

Pakistan welcomed but India dismissed. New Delhi has come to loathe any outside mediation in the region, which India considers to be its hegemonic space. During the Musharraf era (1999–2008), Russia maintained cordial relations with Pakistan and generally supported the US-led war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

The end of President Musharraf's military rule and Pakistan's return to democracy coincided with the fruition of a US–India nuclear deal legislated under the Hyde Act of 2008. The resulting Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) gave an exception for India to undertake civil nuclear trade after a complex and tedious journey leading to the US legislation. This nuclear exception for India provided Russia with new openings in South Asia, and Moscow took advantage of the new market to sell nuclear power plants to India. With a long history of military cooperation and defense sales to India, Russia was more experienced with the Indian working culture and its rigid bureaucratic system than other countries vying for India's nuclear market. In addition, the nuclear deal allowed India to retain its nuclear weapons program, freed up its domestic uranium capacity for military purposes, and obligated nothing from India regarding nonproliferation treaty goals (to which both India and Pakistan are outliers). In contrast, Pakistan encountered international disapproval over the A. Q. Khan nuclear proliferation network that unraveled in 2004, which has continued until now. Feeling betrayed and alienated by the US legislation and its fallout, the Pakistanis reached out to Russia and China. Predictably, both were eager to exploit the Pakistani estrangement with the United States.

Another source of rift between the United States and Pakistan came with the Obama administration's policy on South Asia (2009–2016), which focused on further deepening and expanding relations with India—dubbed as a “lynchpin” of the US pivot to the Asia-Pacific. Meanwhile, Pakistan's significance was relegated to counterterror cooperation in Afghanistan and concerns on nuclear security issues. From the US standpoint, Pakistan was playing both ends—hunting with the hounds and running with the hare—as Pakistan was receiving coalition support money while simultaneously providing safe haven and facilitation to Afghan Taliban, against whom the US forces were fighting. Furthermore, Islamabad was facilitating China's access to Pakistan's coastline, while the United States was trying to contain China. From the Pakistani standpoint, Washington was seeking Pakistani cooperation and support for the US war in Afghanistan but also dismissing Pakistani sacrifices and the collateral losses it was suffering from the Afghan instability. Worse, from the Pakistani standpoint, the United States was handing over strategic space to India that it was winning with Pakistani strategic partnership, which allowed India to use Afghanistan territory for New Delhi's proxy war against Pakistani interests.

From being the “most allied ally” in the 1960s through the “most sanctioned ally” in the 1990s, the United States and Pakistan drifted apart as their strategic interests were increasingly more often in conflict than in congruity. Russia and China saw the emerging schisms, and both began hedging their bets for an uncertain outcome of US engagement in the region. Russia stepped in Afghanistan quietly and is currently in contact with some factions among the Afghan Taliban to keep Russian interests alive.

### ***Emergence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization***

While its relations with the United States were gradually eroding, Pakistan began to see the emergence of the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as an opportunity for closer relations with Russia and China through a common platform. In 1996, China took the initiative to create the Shanghai Five, an organization comprised of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Uzbekistan joined post 9/11) with an initial objective of security and antiterrorism cooperation; this grouping was the forerunner of the SCO. In 2004, the Tashkent Summit created a regional antiterrorism structure in addition to expanding the SCO to promoting further economic development and cooperation against three evils: terrorism, separatism, and extremism. As years passed, the SCO expanded its scope geographically to include other countries—India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—and extended its mandate to include drugs, weapon smuggling, organized crime, cyberterrorism, terrorist financial flows, transportation, and so forth. Instabilities stemming from Afghanistan have brought Pakistan and India into the forefront. As such, SCO members have concluded that continued war in Afghanistan could lead to wider instability in Central, South, and Southwest Asia. They have also come to realize that military means alone cannot win the war on terrorism without commensurate multilateral, international cooperation on political, economic, and social issues.

India and Pakistan joined the SCO in 2017, and since then there have been four annual meetings at Astana, Kazakhstan (2017); Qingdao, China (2018); Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (2019); and Chelyabinsk, Russia (2020).<sup>7</sup> For Pakistan, becoming a member of the SCO club was a significant milestone for two main reasons. First, membership allowed Pakistan space to maneuver against India’s blunt diplomacy efforts to isolate Pakistan. For its part, India alleges that Pakistan is the hub of everything the SCO’s core objectives are attempting to eradicate. Mirroring India, Pakistan makes the same allegations about India.<sup>8</sup> Second, the SCO provides Islamabad a place to prevent India from using the forum against Pakistan’s interests or for it to counter India as need arises.<sup>9</sup> Russia had reluctantly agreed to the membership of India and Pakistan, sensing the high proclivity of

India and Pakistan to bring their interstate, cross-border issues into the fold of the SCO, which arguably would distract and sap away energies from the group's core objectives and agenda.

Russia's skepticism was well founded. In February 2019, another India–Pakistan crisis in Kashmir occurred. Following a suicide attack in Indian-administered Kashmir against an Indian troop convoy in Pulwama, the Indian and Pakistani air forces exchanged fire. In the pursuant air battle, the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) shot down an Indian Air Force (IAF) plane (a Russian made MIG -21) and captured the pilot. The crisis diffused after Pakistan returned the captured pilot as a goodwill gesture. India wanted to bring the Pulwama issue up in the SCO forum, but China and Russia declined and suggested solving the issue bilaterally.<sup>10</sup> As Russia did not press the issue, Pakistan saw this development as a sign of improved Russia–Pakistan relations. Russia, however, voted in the United Nations Security Council in favor of an India-sponsored move to declare the head of Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM)—a Pakistan-based terrorist organization held responsible for the Pulwama attack—as international terrorist. This was Russia's fine balancing role between India and Pakistan.<sup>11</sup>

### **Russia–Pakistan Military Relations: 2010–2020**

Starting in 2010, relations between Pakistan and Russia improved markedly as illustrated by high-level visits, arms sales, and increased cooperation; at the same time, US–Pakistan relations grew strained. This section outlines key events from 2010 onward. For example, in early 2010, Russia organized a four-nation summit in Moscow on Afghanistan that involved Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. This summit was the first sign of Russia's renewed interest in Afghanistan, and, more significantly for Pakistan, the summit did *not* include India. Furthermore, this was when US–Pakistan relations were undergoing a tense period over Afghanistan. In the following year, several incidents resulted in sudden deterioration of the US–Pakistan alliance, most notably the US raid inside Pakistan that killed Osama bin Laden and an accidental cross-border firing between Pakistan and US forces in November 2011 that resulted in the death of several Pakistani officers and soldiers at a border post with Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup> While relations with the United States were at an all-time low, Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani visited Moscow in 2011 and convinced Russia of Pakistan's new approach and defense needs. Kayani urged Russia to reconsider its policy of proscribing arms sale to Pakistan. The army chief's visit was followed by Pakistan Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafiq Butt's visit in August 2012 and Russian Air Chief Viktor Bondarev's reciprocal visit to Islamabad in April 2013. It took two years for Moscow to lift the arms embargo on Pakistan, and this did not sit well with India. Until then,

Russia had deferred to India before contemplating any defense sales to Pakistan. The lifting of the embargo was a clear signal to Pakistan and India that a new Russia had emerged, and Moscow was redefining its strategic interests in the changing geopolitics of South Asia.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shigu visited Pakistan in November 2014 and signed a defense cooperation agreement with Islamabad.<sup>13</sup> A month earlier, Russia and Pakistan conducted their first joint counternarcotics exercise, which was followed by a second one in December 2015. In summer 2015, Pakistan Army Chief Raheel Sharif visited Moscow; three months later, Russia signed a deal for Pakistan to purchase Mi-35M Hind-E assault helicopters. In September 2016, Russia and Pakistan conducted their first major joint military exercise. This was the first public sign of the nature of Russia–Pakistan military relations.<sup>14</sup> In March 2017, a Russian senior military delegation visited Pakistan’s tribal areas bordering Afghanistan and studied Pakistani border management and counter-terror strategy. In August 2017, Pakistan received four more Mi-35M Hind-E helicopters. Following these procurements, Russia and Pakistan began a series of joint military exercises, such as the Arabian Monsoon naval drills in 2014 and 2015. In 2017, the Pakistan Navy spearheaded the Aman naval exercise, which included the participation of 35 countries. In this exercise, for the first time, “Russia’s largest antisubmarine warship *Severomorsk* participated.”<sup>15</sup> In addition, both militaries conducted joint exercises, starting with the Friendship-2017 military exercises—involving about 70 military mountaineers from Pakistan and the Russian mountain infantry division of Southern Military District—held in the mountain range near Nizhny Arkhyz settlement in Karachay-Cherkessia, Russia, in September 2017.<sup>16</sup>

In February 2018, Pakistan’s foreign minister visited Moscow and signed several agreements. In April 2018, General Qamar Bajwa, the third consecutive Pakistan army chief, visited Moscow, and the countries formed the Joint Military Commission.<sup>17</sup> In the same month, the national security advisors of both countries held high-level security meetings in Moscow. The Pakistani delegation included defense officials from the Strategic Plans Division—indicating possibilities of discussions involving strategic and nuclear issues.<sup>18</sup> The frequency of exchanges of military delegations between Moscow and Islamabad increased thereafter. For instance, in August 2018, a Pakistani naval delegation led by Vice Admiral Kaleem Shaukat visited Russia and signed a memorandum of understanding on naval cooperation.<sup>19</sup> In September 2018, military contingents from India and Pakistan participated in SCO joint exercises, which, given the ongoing India–Pakistan tension, was a pleasant positive gesture that happened on Russian soil. As relations between Pakistan and Russia were humming along, US

president Donald Trump terminated Pakistan's participation in America's International Military Education Program.<sup>20</sup> No sooner than this became public, Pakistan and Russia signed the "Security Training Agreement" to train Pakistani military officers in Russian military institutions for the first time.<sup>21</sup> While Pakistan and Russia are not publicizing the nature of their cooperation as openly as Islamabad would do in Pakistan's agreements with China, the trajectory is quite clear. Pakistan is keeping its options with Moscow and Beijing open after US military support has dried up under the Trump administration.

### ***Russia and the Belt Road Initiative***

While relations between United States and Pakistan were ebbing and flowing, in 2013, China launched its BRI, which included connectivity of the most remote and hitherto inaccessible landlocked areas with major cities, economic hubs, and access to the seas in the Indian Ocean. Beijing reached out to India and its neighbors with economic cooperation and development through the BRI and China's Maritime Silk Road strategy throughout the Indian Ocean region. For these initiatives, Pakistan provides the most critical access through its flagship CPEC project, dubbed as the linchpin to the BRI, as it links landlocked western China and Central Asia to access to the Arabian Sea. At the mouth of Straits of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman on the Pakistani coastline is the port of Gwadar. China is helping build up this port as a potential energy hub that would feed the BRI through CPEC, which includes a complex web of railroad networks and energy projects—a definite game changer in the region. To the west of Gwadar, approximately 90 miles along the same coastline and across the border with Iran, is Chabahar Port, Iran. India is helping to build up Chabahar to compete with Gwadar, which would allow India to bypass Pakistan and to link its strategic trade to Afghanistan via Iran.

These geopolitical maneuverings on the regional chessboard do not go unnoticed in Moscow. Thus far, Russia's interest in China's BRI has been ambiguous. The impact of China's initiative on Russia's near abroad (Central Asia) is plainly clear. However, with the evolution of the SCO, Russia and China have a forum to develop consensus on the future of the region. Russia now faces three complex challenges in its policies toward South Asia. First, New Delhi is gradually shifting away from dependency on Russia in favor of the United States, and India is pursuing military and technology purchases from the United States and Europe. Second, Russia is balancing between its newfound interest in Pakistan and its historical market with India. Moscow can neither afford to alienate India, wherein lies a huge market for defense and nuclear sales, nor can Russia ignore the potential market for military sales in Pakistan. China's lucrative economic packages via

the BRI are creating influence in Russia's backyard and moving with unprecedented speed. The next section examines what possible influence Russia may have given the convergence with Pakistan on several political and strategic matters.

## **Convergence in Security Outlook**

Pakistan and Russia have moved a long way in warming up to each other, and in the past decade or so, they have reduced their trust deficit significantly. As highlighted earlier, there are sufficient grounds for alignments in respective security thinking; yet there are many areas where potential disagreements have existed and may continue to exist for a long time. This section discusses the convergence in the mutual relations between the two countries. There are six major areas where broad convergence between Russian and Pakistani policy interests might have some potential: the future of Afghanistan; strategic balance in South Asia; nuclear doctrinal similarities; integration of conventional and nuclear deterrence; changing character of war—hybrid war and its counter; and Pakistan's quest for NSG membership along with its energy needs.

### ***Future of Afghanistan***

The foundation of Russia–Pakistan convergence lies in mutual thinking regarding Afghanistan. The end of 2008 disillusioned both the United States and Pakistan. As explained earlier, as years passed, Washington concluded that Islamabad was unlikely to act in full compliance with the US strategy for Afghanistan. Moreover, the United States alleged that Pakistan has been providing safe havens to Taliban leadership, which was fighting asymmetric war against US forces in Afghanistan. For its part, Pakistan has been convinced that US strategy in Afghanistan was unlikely to succeed and was destabilizing Pakistan. Worse, from a Pakistani standpoint, the United States allowed India to use the strategic space in Afghanistan against Pakistan, space that was won with Pakistani cooperation. The gulf between these differing convictions widened as war in Afghanistan dragged on to become “an endless war.”<sup>22</sup>

Russia and Pakistan concluded many years ago that the US war in Afghanistan had reached its limits and it was a matter of time before the United States would seek withdrawal or drawdown significantly from Afghanistan. Pakistan and Russia were hedging their bets as they carried out mutual consultations for the past decade. As the Taliban was gaining influence and control in nearly 70 percent of Afghanistan, Moscow and Islamabad agreed that a negotiated peace process was the only viable option for the future stability of Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> There seems consensus that the threat from al-Qaeda is significantly reduced, while new

threats from Daesh (also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) has emerged. Russia and Pakistan have pledged to jointly tackle this threat under an SCO mandate.

In my assessment, though Russia and Pakistan believe that the continued US presence in Afghanistan is a source of instability, neither desire a complete US withdrawal either. The future government in Kabul relies on the presence of US forces, and Afghan security forces are unlikely to sustain without financial support from the United States. At the time of this writing, the United States has successfully concluded agreement with the Taliban in Doha, Qatar.<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, Russia is now proactively engaged in hosting a parallel peace initiative involving the Afghan Taliban and Afghan opposition. The last two meetings were held in Moscow, one in early February and another in April 2019. It was notable that both US-led and Russian-led processes have excluded the current Kabul government. Islamabad is facilitating both initiatives as well as keeping Pakistan's options open. On its part, Pakistan understands that Russia is back in the new great game. As for Russia, it seems to understand Pakistan's indispensability in any settlement of the Afghan problem.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Strategic Balance in South Asia: Pakistan Defense Needs***

Russia now most likely accepts Pakistan defense needs as legitimate in the interest of the balance of power in the region. Previously, the Russian stance was to favor India as a source of hegemonic stability in South Asia. This pragmatic change came about with probable realization that nuclear-armed Pakistan would resist India's hegemony at all costs and also that China would continue to ensure Pakistan security by bolstering sufficient conventional and nuclear deterrent to balance India. With an arms race in the offing between India and Pakistan, Russia has no desire to be left behind.

In the February 2019 military crisis with India, Pakistan shot down the aging MIG-21, which embarrassed India and underscored the IAF's shortcomings. India claimed Pakistan had used US-supplied F-16 in the encounter and that India had shot down a Pakistani F-16; however, New Delhi never provided proof, which then allowed Pakistan to further ridicule India's false claim and to blame India's belligerence aimed at raising national fervor in the forthcoming elections.<sup>26</sup> Indian defense planners are making the case for state-of-the-art defense purchases, and the world market, including its traditional supplier, Russia, is lining up to make business. Meanwhile, Pakistan is already conscious of the impending imbalance between its air force and India's. After losing hope that the United States would aid it, the PAF's historic first choice was to rely on China; however, Pakistan is currently in discussion with Russia for the purchase of state-of-the-art

aircraft to counter India's purchase of the fifth-generation Dassault Rafale multi-role fighter from France.<sup>27</sup>

Moscow no longer cares whether Pakistan is concerned with Russian military sales to India; nor does it matter if India is unhappy with Russia's military cooperation with Pakistan. A decade ago, India's objection would equate to a veritable veto over Moscow's decision on arms sale to Pakistan; however, Russia's new policy is to treat both countries on merit. Additionally, as equal members of the SCO, Russia expects India and Pakistan to respect the multilateral nature of the organization's charter. Moreover, Russia and Pakistan have conducted several joint military exercises bilaterally as well under the SCO on counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, and settlement of refugees.

Even so, joint military exercises and other forms of military exchanges between Pakistan and Russia are still new at this time. At best, they are leading to better tactical and operational coordination and firmer understanding of each other's concepts and are very symbolic of emerging military relations. It is only a matter of time before Russia and Pakistan have strategic and doctrinal influence on each other's thinking.

### ***Similarities in Nuclear Doctrines***

There is considerable ambiguity regarding the interpretation of Russian military doctrine. One view is that its strategy includes decisive nuclear use against superior conventional forces with the objective of limiting escalation or larger-scale conflict. In this view, the Russian concept is designed to “deter large-scale attack against Russia and deescalate limited conflict in case deterrence fails.”<sup>28</sup> The notion of “deterrence of limited conflict” implies that by design Russia would keep the precise conditions for battlefield nuclear employment in control to be able to inflict “just the right amount of damage to that attacker that aggression is not worthwhile.”<sup>29</sup> Such an explanation reverberates closely with Pakistani rationale of its deterrence strategies, as explained later in this article.

An alternate interpretation is that Russia has not “substantially embraced a broadened coercive role for nuclear weapons,” and some analysts argue that “escalate to deescalate” is not a policy. Russian declaratory nuclear policy is to ensure national survival.<sup>30</sup> Austin Long quotes President Putin as stating in 2015, “We proceed from assumptions that nuclear weapons and other nuclear weapons are means to protect our sovereignty and legitimate interests, not the means to behave aggressively or fulfill some non-existent imperial ambitions.”<sup>31</sup> This interpretation of Russian nuclear policy is even closer to Pakistani thinking. Perhaps no other nuclear-armed state clings to its nuclear capability as sine qua non for its national survival and national sovereignty than does Pakistan.<sup>32</sup>

Pakistan has made public criteria for possible nuclear use based on a combination of four conditions: loss of territory, destruction of forces, economic strangulation, and domestic instability. Pakistan has not officially declared a nuclear doctrine as of yet, although its doctrinal position can be extrapolated from statements of officials; national command authority declarations, announcements, and explanations after missile flight-tests; interviews with journalists and scholars; participation of serving officials from Pakistan's Strategic Plans Division (SPD) in seminars; and SPD officials' publications in reputed journals.<sup>33</sup>

Thus far, there is no explicit indication that Russia's doctrine has influenced Pakistan, and similarities of the two doctrinal thinking are coincidental. In my assessment, Pakistani nuclear strategy is *sui generis*; it is evolving, adjusting, and reacting to India's doctrinal changes and its strategic weapons developments. As Pakistani and Russian officers experience higher-level military education in their respective military institutions (e.g., national defense universities), there is increasing likelihood of interexchange of doctrinal thinking in the conventional and nuclear domains.

### ***Integration of Conventional and Nuclear Doctrine***

Pakistan's security thinking has been primarily influenced by studying Western literature, and its security and nuclear doctrines are reflective of those concepts. As explained in this essay, Russia and Pakistan strategic interactions are still evolving, and the increase in the frequency of exchanges is recent but has deepened at a much faster pace in recent years than previously thought would occur. Russian doctrine may not yet have permeated in Pakistan strategic thinking, but the emergence of strategic congruity between the two is becoming obvious. Given their common alienation from the United States and the closure of training for Pakistani military officers in US military institutions, the potential of Russian indoctrination and its impact on Pakistani doctrinal thinking is quite high. Additionally, there are structural circumstances in Russia that resonate well with Pakistan.

Pakistan's integration of conventional and nuclear doctrine is shaped by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) erstwhile doctrine in Europe during the Cold War. NATO's Fulda Gap vulnerability against conventionally superior Warsaw Pact countries in the 1950s and 1960s is somewhat analogous to the situation that Pakistan faces vis-à-vis India. Strategic circumstances have now reversed in contemporary times. Today, Russia believes a conventional war with NATO is inevitable, given the situation in Ukraine and the Baltic States; the modernization of Russian nuclear forces restores Russian

prestige and compensates for its conventional weaknesses vis-à-vis NATO and possibly China. This logic and operational thinking resonate with Pakistan.

Eight years ago, Pakistan demonstrated the Nasr short-range ballistic missile (with a range of 60 kilometers), which it declared capable of carrying nuclear warheads. Islamabad's explanation for the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons (TNW) was that Pakistan must demonstrate a "full spectrum nuclear capability" to meet India's conventional threat at tactical, operational, and strategic levels.<sup>34</sup> In essence, Pakistan has sought an insurance against surprise attack and a guarantee at the operational level to buy time and prevent India from declaring victory. In Western experience, the downsides of the risks of TNW deployment outweigh the potential deterrent benefits battlefield nuclear weapons could provide. The risks of deterrence failure increase with the potential of preventive strikes from across the border and decreased safety and security coefficients after battlefield deployment. This is more so given the volatile political climate in South Asia and the frequency of military crises. While Pakistan and the United States disagree on the deterrent value of battlefield nuclear weapons, Russia and Pakistan may not find much difference on TNW employment concepts, as explained above.

While the revolution in military affairs (RMA) of the 1980s helped NATO achieve a qualitative technological and conventional military edge that rendered its battlefield nuclear deterrent strategy redundant, Pakistan does not have this luxury. In Pakistan's case, deterring the Indian Army with twenty-first-century armaments—that have both conventional superiority and technological edge in space, surveillance, and intelligence—with advanced conventional capability remains a significant challenge. Pakistan does not have a similar RMA edge comparable to that which NATO had in the 1980s, and Pakistan is unlikely to bridge the technological gap with India any time soon. Therefore, Pakistan considers the risks associated with TNW deployments as inescapable. Nevertheless, Pakistan insists that all its nuclear weapons—including short-range battlefield systems—are not for war fighting but for deterrence and that these weapons will remain in the assertive centralized control of Pakistani National Command Authority in all circumstances.

### ***Changing Character of War: Hybrid Wars***

Another area of significant interest to Pakistani military officers is the study of the changed character of warfare. In recent years, the research themes most in vogue among Pakistani think tanks is "fifth-generation" or "hybrid" warfare. Of late, central to Pakistani security narrative is that India is waging a well-conceived and concerted covert war against Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> Islamabad staunchly believes India—supported by Western powers—is destabilizing Pakistan using multiple vectors,

including disinformation, insurgency, economic and financial coercion, and diplomatic isolation. The argument is that Pakistan's "full-spectrum deterrence" strategy has succeeded in frustrating India's conventional force strategy, which has now forced New Delhi to resort to hybrid warfare.<sup>36</sup>

In a December 2018 article on hybrid warfare, former Pakistani Ambassador Munir Akram, a highly respected strategic thinker, referred to the "Gerasimov doctrine," named after the Russian military chief who is attributed with developing the comprehensive approach Russia applied in Ukraine.<sup>37</sup> In the article, he notes that Russia used a combination of narrative control, cyberattacks, anonymous militias and irregular forces, clandestine supplies, and diplomatic support, dubbed with various names such as asymmetrical, gray-zone, whole-of-government, and so forth. Such a complex stratagem does not appear to an outright war, but a form of statecraft designed to erode the adversary's national power and will to resist. This new art of war has seemingly impressed Pakistani think tanks as well. Ambassador Akram recognizes that such a new form of warfare is growing increasingly more sophisticated with new technologies, such as autonomous weapons, artificial intelligence, and cybertools—all of which blur the distinction between conventional and hybrid warfare, with grave implications for command-and-control vulnerabilities.<sup>38</sup> In sum, if Russia is the architect of hybrid wars, Pakistan is keen to learn and acquire technologies to defend against destabilization and hybrid attacks that might be on the future menu of training in Russian military institutes.

### ***Pakistan's Energy Challenges and Nuclear Supplier Group Membership***

For more than a decade now, an energy shortage has been among the most serious problems facing Pakistan. Islamabad is exploring all possible options to increase its energy output, including nuclear-power generation under a 25-year strategic plan to be completed by circa 2040. To achieve this, Pakistan is trying to improve energy supply and transmission and safety standards, and Islamabad is aspiring to freely develop business partnerships to acquire nuclear reactors, nuclear fuel, and technical assistance from multiple global industrial nuclear suppliers.<sup>39</sup> To achieve this end, NSG membership and/or a waiver of membership requirements would allow Islamabad to pursue Pakistan's nuclear energy aspirations. More importantly, Islamabad considers NSG membership to be a crucial element of Pakistan becoming part of the mainstream in the nuclear world order, which it believes would confer some sort of legitimacy to its nuclear weapons program, as has been the case with India.

Aware that a nuclear deal of the kind India received is unlikely, Pakistan has applied for NSG membership and is insistent on a criteria-based approach for new membership. On the other hand, India demands a "merit-based" approach to

Pakistani membership, which implies there were no chances for Pakistan's membership given the 15-year-old scar of the A. Q. Khan proliferation scandal. Also, by keeping Pakistan out of contention in export control regimes, New Delhi would reinforce India's policy of isolating Pakistan. In reality, Pakistani ambitions for NSG waiver or simultaneous membership have been scuttled due to deteriorating relations between Islamabad and Washington.<sup>40</sup>

From a Pakistani standpoint, the Washington siding with New Delhi encourages India to undertake an adversarial policy toward Pakistan. Until lately Russia—along with the United Kingdom and France—has also been supporting India's membership to NSG on merit and exceptional basis. Pakistan seems to have only China standing by its side to scuttle India's exclusive entry into NSG.<sup>41</sup> A subtle hint of support of Pakistan's NSG application came when a Russian embassy official in Islamabad reportedly indicated Moscow's backing of the "criteria-based approach for new members of NSG."<sup>42</sup> It is still unclear whether there is an actual shift in Russia's position on the NSG question, but if true, Russian support of Islamabad's quest for NSG membership would be a huge indicator of the deepening of Russia–Pakistan security relationship and possibility of Russian interest in investing in Pakistan's quest for civil nuclear power.

### **Diverging Interests**

While there may be existing areas of convergence and some potential areas where Russia and Pakistan may come to some sort of understanding, there are several divergences and disagreements that could easily derail the nascent relationship. There are at least five identifiable areas wherein divergences continue to cause concern: Pakistan policy of using jihadi elements as proxy; the fate of Kashmir; Russia's preferred defense relations with India; Pakistan's preferred strategic reliance on China; and Pakistan's continued dependence on the United States.

The fundamental disagreement between Russia and Pakistan is on the status quo in South Asia. As explained before, Russia may have accepted a balance of power model for stability on pragmatic grounds, but the primacy of India and Russia's investment in India is incomparable to what Pakistan can offer. Additionally, these strategic trajectories and power potentials between India and Pakistan will likely widen. If Pakistan hopes for parity in international relations in South Asia, Pakistan's expectations from its partnership with Russia are likely to fall short.

### ***Pakistan's Regional Asymmetric Strategy***

Russia vehemently disagrees with Pakistan's asymmetric strategy using jihadi elements as a tool of military strategy—especially in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

Though Pakistan has come a long way in distancing itself from radical organizations and suffered a great deal domestically in loss of life and economic hardship, the perception of hedging with jihadi-based forces as tool for strategy continues to linger. Unlike the United States, Russia has not publicly rebuked Pakistan, but deep down, Russia has critical interests in ensuring the Islamabad follows through on Pakistan's commitments on eliminating and containing violent extremist forces on its soil. As Moscow balances its interests with India and Pakistan, it does not countenance India's bringing the India–Pakistan bilateral issue to the SCO; however, following the Pulwama–Balakot incident in February 2019, Russia did not hesitate in supporting the United Nations Security Council resolution to declare the leadership of the Pakistan-based radical organization JeM as proscribed terrorists, as India demanded.

Russia has no serious issues with India's role in Afghanistan, which is a principal reason for Pakistan to hedge its bets with the Taliban, which caused deterioration of Pakistan's relations with United States. The India factor, combined with Pakistan failure to satisfy Russia—and China—regarding its love-hate nature of relationship with jihadi elements, could well be a major reason for potential setback in Russia–Pakistan relations. Islamabad views stability in Afghanistan as critical to Pakistan's national security. Pakistan desires an internally settled and friendly regime in Kabul that recognizes the international border with Pakistan and does not allow India use of Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan. In such an environment, India's positive role in Afghanistan would be a welcome change in regional politics. For this to be achieved, multinational consensus on Afghanistan is important. As explained above, Islamabad's support of a Moscow-led process for Afghanistan's future and Pakistan's active participation in the SCO provide good forums to alleviate misunderstandings and assurance of Pakistan's changed policy on asymmetric strategies.

### ***The Fate of Kashmir***

Kashmir has been a disputed territory between India and Pakistan since their independence from Britain and has been a *casus belli* for enduring India–Pakistan conflict.<sup>43</sup> In my worldwide interaction with scholars and policy makers, including those from Russia, I have assessed that Russia—and the international community—accepts the division of Kashmir as defined by the Line of Actual Control as a *fait accompli* of history. Like all major powers, Russia is unlikely to bring up this issue publicly either with India or with Pakistan in deference to political sensitivities. The logic is plain and clear: there is no military solution to the Kashmir issue. With nuclear weapons and sizable modernized conventional forces on both sides, there is no further possibility of affecting change in the status quo.

The Russian position on the status quo on Kashmir is one issue about which Pakistan—and possibly India—might disagree. This disagreement is also linked to the issue of Pakistan’s moral and political support for the Kashmiri freedom struggle, which India conflates with terrorism. Kashmir is not just critical but also a politically sensitive issue for India and Pakistan. Given the historical, political, and ideological factors, accepting division in Kashmir as final would be very hard for India and Pakistan; however, the sooner a resolution to the conflict is found the better it will be for the future of the region and the world.

### ***Defense Cooperation and Arms Sales to India***

Russia is unlikely to downgrade its defense ties with India, even though New Delhi may be currently prioritizing purchases from Western sources. Russia once had a near monopoly with defense sales in India, but that is no longer the case. Even so, Pakistan will always be concerned about potential Russian arms sales to India.

Lately, Pakistan is weary of Russian arms sales (e.g., the S-400) and offers of other state-of-the-art weaponry to India. In the Pakistani assessment, Russia–India joint production of *BrahmaMos* cruise technologies as well as sales of ballistic missile defense technologies will likely tilt the offense–defense balance in favor of India and thus further destabilize the region.

### ***Pakistan’s Strategic Reliance on China***

Despite the SCO and a new form of partnership Russia is developing with China, Moscow remains ambivalent about the breadth and depth of emerging Sino–Pakistan relations. Equally, Beijing is also keeping an eye on the contours of Pakistan’s developing relations with Russia. China has been Pakistan’s principal defense supplier, especially when Pakistan came under a US arms embargo and with Russia’s continued refusal to sell weapons to Pakistan in deference to India’s objections. Thus, China has had a near monopoly in the Pakistani defense market. With Russia opening up to Pakistan now, there is competition with China for defense sales to Pakistan. Russian offers for defense and space technology are arguably better but more expensive. There have been cases in the past where, after protracted negotiations with Russian companies, Pakistan accepted China’s bid for relatively less sophisticated technology to the chagrin of Russian defense companies. If Russia concludes that defense sales to Pakistan require Chinese approval, Moscow may be disinclined to continue offering defense trade, which then could become a factor of divergence in defense relations.

### ***Continued Dependence on the United States and Fear of Revived Alliance***

Russia is very aware that Pakistan's relations with the United States have frayed many times before and that, with each such rupture in the past, Pakistan drew closer to Russia only to revert back to the US camp as soon as Washington returned with new packages to revive its strategic partnership with Pakistan. In the late 1960s, disappointed with lack of support in the 1965 war and under arms embargo, Soviet–Pakistan relations flourished; however, as soon as Pres. Richard Nixon took office, Pakistan went back into deep alliance with the United States. Again in 1979, after Pakistan, having bid farewell to US anticommunist alliances (e.g., the Central Treaty Organization, originally known as the Baghdad Pact, and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) returned back to alliance against the Soviet Union and waged war. And for the third time, Pakistan did the same in 2001, when it reversed its policy, despite being under nuclear sanctions. Russia could be wary that the current phase of difficult relations may once again be over, either with a new administration in Washington or due to some major geopolitical shock that would again make Pakistan central to Western policy objectives. Russia will likely remain skeptical of Pakistan's commitment of remaining truly nonaligned and committed to common Eurasian vision and agreed strategic cooperation.

### **Conclusion**

Russia–Pakistan relations have grown under the shadow of dramatic shifts in geopolitical competition and deteriorating regional security in South Asia. Pakistan's diminished role as a frontline state in the US war on terror in Afghanistan and India's rise as an Asian power have affected Pakistani threat perceptions and Islamabad's cooperation with the United States. Initially, Pakistan believed its role to be central to the Washington achieving US objectives in Afghanistan, but with time, it became evident that America's larger objectives had little room to accommodate Pakistani strategic interests. Pakistan became convinced that Western powers prefer Indian hegemony as a model of stability rather than a balance of power and resolution of the complex nature of India–Pakistan conflict. With this premise, Islamabad began to hedge Pakistan's bets and reached out to Russia and China. Pakistan's and India's membership in the SCO has allowed Pakistan a forum in which to expand its strategic and economic interests and balance against Indian moves to diplomatically isolate Pakistan.

With increasing geopolitical importance, however, especially after China's BRI featured the CPEC as its flagship project, Pakistan's geophysical location found new geo-economic significance. With the United States imposing sanctions on Russia in the wake of the Crimea and East Ukraine crises, Moscow has reached out to

Beijing and expanded its interests to Southwest and South Asia. Russia is now involved in the delicate balancing of relations with South Asian countries. From the Russian standpoint, the future of Afghanistan has important bearing on Russian security interests in Russia's southern vector. Russia has also found a significant market for defense cooperation and sales in South Asia. Both Islamabad and New Delhi are disappointed with Russian policy, as each sees its relations as a zero-sum game. Russia's sales of the S-400 system to India has concerned Pakistan, and New Delhi is disappointed that India's strategic partner Russia is developing new defense ties with its archrival Pakistan, which India is trying to punish and isolate.

For most of Pakistan's history, Russia and Pakistan have distrusted each other; however, there are four emerging factors driving Russian interests in Pakistan currently: CPEC, the future of Afghanistan, markets for defense, and strategic sales, including space cooperation. Russia's preference is not to lose India, and Russia will do its utmost to compete with the United States and Europe for India's markets. India's major defense systems are based on Russian technology, and Russia has significant investment in the Indian nuclear industry—thanks to India's membership in three of the export control regimes. Pakistan does not offer that kind of market, and Islamabad continues to pay the price resulting from the aftermath of A. Q. Khan network scandal. Though India does not hold veto over Russia's decision on defense cooperation with Pakistan as it once had, there are many hurdles, such as Chinese monopoly, high costs, and a financial crunch, affecting Russia's military sales to Pakistan. Finally, Russia's progressively neutral position on South Asian bilateral issues is indicative that Russia has greatly expansive strategic interests in South Asia, which while they are still primarily with India are not exclusive to India anymore. ☼

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## Notes

1. At the time of this writing, there are signs of improvement in US-Pakistan relations, following Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan meeting with Pres. Donald Trump and his delegation visit to Washington, DC, in July 2019. Additionally, there are recent reports of positive progress and constructive Pakistani role in the ongoing negotiations to end war in Afghanistan.

2. In May 1960, Soviet air defenses shot down a U-2 piloted by Gary Powers while on a photographic aerial reconnaissance deep in Soviet territory. Powers was subsequently captured by the Soviets and sentenced for spying. He was released in 1962 in exchange for a Soviet spy, Rudolf Abel, captured by the United States.

3. For a brief period in the late 1960s, Islamabad's attempt to repair relations with Moscow failed to flourish after Pres. Richard Nixon reset US relations with Pakistan, which had lost its warmth during the Johnson administration. After the 1965 India-Pakistan War, the Soviet Union mediated peace talks between India and Pakistan at a summit at Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in January 1966.

4. Pakistan facilitated Henry Kissinger's famous secret nocturnal visit to Beijing from Islamabad in summer 1971.

5. Oddly, several Russian delegates negotiating defense deals in Islamabad would never follow up and simply disappeared. Additionally, many of them were removed or transferred to other posts.

6. Igor Torbakov, "The 'Southern Vector': Russia's Strategic Interests in Central and South Asia," in *Does South Asia Exist?: Prospects for Regional Integration*, ed. Rafiq Dossani, Daniel C. Sneider, and Vikram Sood (Stanford, CA: Walter H Shorenstein Asia Pacific Research Center, 2010), 275–93.

7. Riaz Khokar, "Pakistan and India's Membership in SCO: Implications for Bilateral Cooperation," *CISS Insight* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 23–40.

8. India alleges that Pakistan is fomenting state sponsored "terrorism" in the region, abetting Kashmir "separatism." Equally, Pakistan alleges India is fomenting Baluchistan "separatists" from Afghanistan and that New Delhi has a rightwing Hindu government fueling extremist ideology. China has always been concerned of India's role in supporting Tibetan unrest and separatism since the late 1950s when the Dalai Lama found asylum in India.

9. India is already member of the G-20 and Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) forums, in which Pakistan has no say. In 2017, at the BRICS summit in Xiamen, China, India utilized the platform to make declarations concerning terrorism implicating Pakistan. "BRICS Declaration Condemns Pakistan-based Terror Groups: Full Text on What It Said about Terrorism," *Financial Express*, 4 September 2017, <https://www.financialexpress.com/>.

10. "Resolve Post-Pulwama Differences Bilaterally, China led SCO tells India- Pakistan," *Hindustan Times*, 21 March 2019, <https://www.msn.com/>.

11. Swati Gupta, "Modi Claims Political Win after UN lists Masood Azhar as Terrorist," *CNN*, 2 May 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

12. Pakistan stopped all ground lines of communications through its territory for eight months before it was restored. “Pakistan Reopens NATO Supply Routes to Afghanistan,” *CNN*, 3 July 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

13. Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan–Russia Sign Landmark Defense Cooperation Agreement,” *Dawn*, 21 November 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/>.

14. The exercise was scheduled in northern areas of Pakistan (once part of the Princely State of Jammu & Kashmir before Partition). India objected to the location. In the meantime, a major militant attack occurred in Uri in Indian-administered Kashmir, which brought renewed tension between India and Pakistan. The venue subsequently was changed, but the exercise went ahead.

15. Muhammad Nawaz Khan, “Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux: From Estrangement to Pragmatism,” *IPRI Journal* 19 (Winter 2019), 72.

16. Khan, “Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux,” 72.

17. “Gen Bajwa Meets Counterpart during Official Visit to Russia,” *Dawn*, 24 April 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/>; and Khan, “Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux,” 56–85.

18. Ayaz Gul, “Pakistan, Russia Hold High-level Security Talks,” *VOA News*, 23 April 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/>.

19. Vinay Kaura, “Russia Signs Naval Cooperation Deal with Pakistan: Recent Warmth in Moscow–Islamabad Ties May Worry New Delhi,” *First Post*, 3 August 2018, <https://www.firstpost.com/>.

20. This participation termination was for the second time after 1990, when nuclear sanctions under the Pressler amendment were applied. For a decade, US–Pakistan military training and partnership were put on hold. It was restored after 9/11, and renewed relations began. At the time, the United States admitted it was a mistake to have halted military-to-military cooperation and pledged never to repeat it again. Anwar Iqbal, “U.S. Cuts Military Training Program for Pakistan,” *Dawn*, 11 August 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/>.

21. Michael Peck, “Pakistan is Russia’s New Best Friend,” *National Interest* (blog), 7 October 2018, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.

22. “State of the Union 2019: Read the Full Transcript,” *CNN*, 6 February 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

23. Institute of Strategic Studies, “South Asia and Afghanistan” in *Strategic Survey 2018* (London: Institute of Strategic Studies, 2018), 110–47.

24. While the new administration of President Joe Biden in the United States is to take office in January 2021, the outgoing Trump administration has already reduced the US footprint to 2,500. See: Robert Burns and Lolita C Balder, “Pentagon to cut troop levels to 2500 in Iraq, Afghanistan,” *Associated Press*, 17 November 2020 <https://apnews.com/>.

25. Khan, “Pakistan–Russia Relations Redux.”

26. Feroz Hassan Khan, “Disputed Narratives escalate tensions in Kashmir,” *East Asia Forum*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/>.

27. Muhammad Sarmad Zia, “Pak–Russia Relations: Exploring the New Avenues,” *CISS Insight: A Bi-annual Journal of Strategic Studies* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2018), 13.

28. Russian Ministry of Defense 2003 policy paper cited in Nikolai Sokov, “Russia’s Nuclear Doctrine,” *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 1 August 2004, <https://www.nti.org/>. Also see: Olga Oliker and Andrey Baklitsky, “The Nuclear Posture Review and Russian ‘De-escalation: A Dangerous Solution to a Non-existent Problem,” *War on the Rocks*, 20 February 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/>.

com/; and Bruno Tertrais, "Russia's Nuclear Policy: Worrying for the Wrong Reasons," *Survival* 60, no. 2 (March–April 2018): 33–44.

29. Nicolai Sokov, "Russian Nuclear Doctrine."

30. Austin Long, *Russian Nuclear Forces and Prospects for Arms Control* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2018), 4, <https://www.rand.org/>.

31. Long, *Russian Nuclear Forces*, 4.

32. See: Peter R Lavoy, "Islamabad's Nuclear Posture: Its Premises and Implementation," in *Pakistan's Nuclear Future: Worries Beyond War*, ed. Henry D. Sokolski (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008).

33. Khalid Kidwai and Peter Lavoy, "A Conversation with Gen. Khalid Kidwai, Carnegie Endowment International Conference, 23 March 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>; and Zahir Kazmi, "Normalizing the Non-proliferation Regime, *Survival* 57, no. 1 (February 2015): 133–50.

34. Kidwai and Lavoy, "A Conversation with Gen. Khalid Kidwai."

35. Farman Kakar, "Hybrid Warfare and Pakistan," *The News*, 13 January 2019, <http://tns.thenews.com.pk/>.

36. Ahmad Saeed Minhas, "Deterrence, Hybrid Warfare and Pakistan," *Express Tribune*, 19 May 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/>; and Saghir Iqbal, *Hybrid Warfare and Its Impact on Pakistan's Security* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018).

37. Munir Akram, "Hybrid Warfare," *Dawn*, 9 December 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/>.

38. Akram, "Hybrid Warfare."

39. China is the only country that is currently constructing nuclear power plants or has plans for future expansion in Pakistan—and even these plans may be curtailed by financial limitations, domestic capacity, and existing international sanctions. Consequently, Pakistan is severely limited in its technological choices and its safety and regulatory planning, and it remains economically restricted, with China as its sole nuclear supplier. Although Pakistan can meet most if not all NSG criteria for membership, it faces a difficult political struggle to attain membership or even an NSG waiver.

40. From the US standpoint, for Pakistan to be considered for NSG, Islamabad must take several steps, including tamping down the trajectory of its nuclear weapons program affecting strategic stability, improving safety and security criteria, and satisfying the international community by taking steps to mitigate the negative impact of Pakistan's reputation.

41. India is already member of the other three export control regimes: Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR); Australia Group (AG); and Wassenaar Arrangement (WA)

42. Khan, "Pakistan-Russia Relations Redux," 73.

43. Kashmir has been undergoing a separatist insurgency for the past 30 years, which spikes sporadically. The latest surge began in summer of 2016, after Indian security forces killed a fire-brand Kashmiri leader, Burhan Wani. Since then, the Kashmir Valley is in the grip of violence, and the more brutally the security forces suppress, the more the Kashmiri insurgency expands.

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