



A STUDY ON RUSSIAN, CHINESE, AND PAKISTANI CONFIGURATION: IMPACT ON INDIA

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Abstract

Scholars and political observers have noted that “Russia, China, & Pakistan” are inching toward the formalization of an ‘axis’ or a strategic “counter alliance” against the West because of Russia’s growing alienation from the “West, Pakistan’s displeasure with the USA over the stoppage of security aid, and India’s proximity with the latter.” Even though there are not enough indicators to establish that the so-called “axis” between “Russia, China, and Pakistan” is a reality, what is of relevance is the formation of overlapping interests among these three governments, which is progressively heading toward deeper interactions between them. Policymakers and members of India’s strategic elite in India have expressed anxiety at the shift in Russia’s attitude toward Pakistan and its extensive engagement with China. It is also common knowledge that Russia backed India’s position during the “closed-door meeting of the UN Security Council.” This position, which opposes efforts by third nations or international organizations to take part in the process of resolving the Kashmir issue and advocates instead for a settlement through bilateral negotiation, has been acknowledged by everyone. India and Russia can interact with China and Pakistan in multilateral forums such as the RIC and the SCO. Keeping this larger backdrop in mind, this article attempted to assess the forces driving such a change and determine its repercussions on the time-tested relations between “Russia and India.”

Keywords: *Bilateral, Diplomatic relations, Multilateral forums, Regional politics.*

Introduction

Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which gives Jammu and Kashmir a unique status, and the division of the state territory into two Union Territories (Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh), were both abolished on August 5, 2019, by the Government of India by a presidential decree.^[1] This was done after receiving consent from both houses of parliament. In retaliation, Pakistan dropped diplomatic relations with India and suspended “bilateral trade and contact between the people of the two countries.” Following this, on August 13, 2019, Pakistan requested “the United Nations Security Council” to hold a meeting in connection with the decision made by the Indian establishments. The increasing tension in the region directly results from China’s agreement with Pakistan’s desire for a Security Council and its characterization of India’s moves as unilateral.^[2] According to the statements by China’s representatives, China has given Pakistan diplomatic support. Still, China has made it clear that it has no interest in becoming engaged in a military battle. However, China lays claim to a portion of Kashmir known as Aksai Chin, much like Pakistan^[3].

China has expressed its strong displeasure and stern objection to the decision made by the Indian government. China has also emphasized that China’s attitude and its real control over the Aksai Chin region have not changed in any way. Hua Chunying, a spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, issued a warning that “The inclusion of Chinese territory in the western section of the boundary between China and India under India’s administrative jurisdiction is something that China has consistently taken exception to. This strong and unwavering position has not changed at all. Recent events have demonstrated that India will not stop undermining China’s territorial sovereignty by

unilaterally altering its domestic law. A practice of this nature is unacceptable and will not be implemented.” [4]

The session of the Security Council has been adjourned, and Russia expressed support for resolving the issue through bilateral talks. That is, in effect, what it meant was that it approved the stance of India, which is to say that it rejected efforts by third countries or international organizations to join in the resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Examining the most current move in Russian policy toward Pakistan is the primary purpose of this piece of writing that I am writing. The thesis of this article is that “the cooperation between Russia, China, and Pakistan,” specifically in the Afghan theatre, does not suggest any form of alignment or alliances to fight Indian interests in the region. Specifically, the paper focuses on the Afghan theatre. It says that to checkmate both China and Pakistan in the area, India ought to involve Russian Federation in various multilateral platforms to a considerable level [5].

Strategies Employed by Russia and China towards Pakistan

Due largely to the ongoing competition between “India and Pakistan, South Asia is one of the world’s weakest integrated areas.” The recent shift in Russia’s policy towards South Asia has garnered a lot of attention because of the significant departure from Russia’s conventional approach brought about by the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the region. The vacuum of ideological and geopolitical competition between Russia and China has resulted in Russia’s shift away from perceiving India as a potential counterweight to China. Russia’s goodwill gestures toward Pakistan have reinforced this shift in strategy [6].

Moscow shifted its focus to the south, reevaluating its relationships “with Pakistan and India and devising a new strategy for Afghanistan.” The most significant shifts in Russia’s foreign policy have occurred in South Asia in recent years. Relations between countries in the region during the Cold War mostly continued unaltered for the first two decades after the fall of the Soviet Union. While maintaining the wariness of the US ally Pakistan, Russia has inherited the robust relationship that the Soviet Union had with India. Around the turn of the 21st century, Russia and Pakistan began establishing more cordial relations. Russia and Pakistan, adversaries during the Cold War, have had no reason to stay away from one another ever since the Soviet Union disintegrated. It was an anticipated decision to improve collaboration between Russia and Pakistan for quite some time [7]. On the other hand, Islamabad and Moscow have moved closer together in recent years, particularly since 2014. When the Kremlin lifted its arms embargo over Islamabad in 2014, it began a new era in Russian and Pakistani relations. In 2015, Moscow agreed with Pakistan to supply four Mi-35M helicopters and welcomed Islamabad’s membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Russia and Pakistan conducted their first-ever joint tactical exercises under Friendship-2016 from September 26 until October 10, 2016. The exercises took place at the Special Forces training center in Pakistan’s Cherat, located in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province’s northwestern region. Because of the shifting geopolitical landscape in both the region and the world, Pakistan and Russia have been working closely together for the last decade. Following 2014, Russia has expressed a willingness to continue managing security in Afghanistan in close collaboration with Pakistan. This desire was shown by Russia’s arrangement of discussions over Afghanistan with Pakistan and China in December 2016 and February 2017. It is not a secret that Russia is tremendously concerned about the expansion of ISIS and the potential collapse of Afghanistan. Russia is so concerned about these two issues that it is willing to talk to the Taliban about them. Moscow should be able to prevent more radical jihadists from spreading to Central Asia by

aggressively collaborating with Pakistan. This should allow Moscow to achieve its goal. Therefore, Russia is attempting to depict its security concerns as the *raison d'être* for reconciliation by portraying the rapprochement as a threat to Russia's security.^[8] "On the other hand, China is the kind of friend that Pakistan can count on in any situation." This has been the case for quite some time. Pakistan has stood by "the People's Republic of China's side through all of its successes and failures, which it celebrated alongside the People's Republic of China's 70th anniversary of its founding." According to the Joint Statement of Pakistan and China on November 4, 2018, the two countries reiterated their commitment to continue strengthening "the Pakistan-China All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership to construct a Community of Shared Future in the New Era. China expressed its appreciation for Pakistan's unceasing efforts and enormous sacrifices in the fight against terrorism."^[9] It encouraged the international community to acknowledge Pakistan's contributions to regional peace and security due to "Pakistan's successes in the war against terrorism." It also offered support to Pakistan as it worked to execute its National Action Plan.

Pakistan is engaged with CPEC as the country's primary driver of growth and development, assisted by foreign aid. Pakistan regards China as a defender of its sovereign claims, which extend into contested Jammu and Kashmir. CPEC was established in 2016. Because of the sensitive political and economic climate in Xinjiang, located in the far northwestern corner of China, maintaining the integrity of the country's borders and warding off intrusions by newly formed political-military groups are of the utmost importance. In addition, China has inked yet another trilateral deal with Pakistan and Afghanistan to strengthen its anti-terrorism security cooperation. At the same time, China is attempting to involve the Taliban as a diplomatic partner to preserve its regional concerns^[10].

From the standpoint of Islamabad, the trip that Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan made to Beijing on October 8-9, 2019, was an overwhelming success. The Kashmir problem came up rather frequently during Khan's conversations in Beijing. In a joint press release issued by Pakistan and China on October 9, 2019, the following was stated: "The Pakistani side informed the Chinese side on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir, including its worries, stance, and the most pressing matters at the moment. The Chinese side responded by saying that it was paying close attention to the current situation in Jammu and Kashmir. They also reaffirmed that the Kashmir issue is a dispute left over from history and that it should be resolved properly and peacefully based on the United Nations Charter, relevant resolutions from the United Nations Security Council, and bilateral agreements. China is opposed to any action taken by a single nation that would further complicate the situation. The two parties emphasized that a South Asia that is peaceful, stable, collaborative, and wealthy is in the common interest of all parties involved. The parties involved in the conflict in the region need to resolve their differences and difficulties via a conversation based on equality and mutual respect." A situation in which Afghanistan is unstable represents a significant risk for "the countries in the region, particularly Russia, China, India, and the Central Asian Republics." However, the unrest in Afghanistan creates a pretext for the United States to maintain its strategic presence there for a longer period and to continue destabilizing the region to realize its strategic interests^[11].

On the other hand, being the regional countries they are, China, Russia, and Pakistan have convergent interests, both strategically and economically. This is the case for all of their interests. However, the tactical collaboration between Russia, China, and Pakistan, specifically in the Afghan theatre, does not suggest any alignment or coalitions fight Indian regional interests^[12].

The triangular relationship between Russia, India, and China

After World War I, the international order was predicated on the concept of a bipolar world. There were two primary power bases to choose from. After the fall of the Soviet Union, there was a trend toward unipolarity because only one great western center of power was left standing. However, many additional centers, such as Russia, China, Brazil, India, and others, are expanding. Because these countries, which are new non-Western centers of power, are becoming more powerful and more significant, the international system needs to respond to this reality — the reality of a multipolar world.

Former Russian Foreign Intelligence Agency head and Minister of Foreign Affairs Yevgeny Primakov advocated the “Iron Triangle” arrangement of collaboration between Russia, India, and China, an early version of the BRICS alliance. The history of China and Russia’s bilateral ties can be traced back to the Cold War, during which the mutual relationship had several highs and lows^[13]. An unofficial summit between the heads of state of Russia, India, and China (also known as RIC) took place on June 28, 2019, in Osaka, Japan, during the G20 summit, which is an occasion of tremendous significance that is also rich with symbolism and potential. The Prime Minister of the Republic of India, Narendra Modi, observed the following: “The trilateral conference we have today is an effective forum for discussing and coordinating responses to important problems facing the world community. During the meeting of our Foreign Ministers in China in February of this year, we discussed a wide range of topics and shared our perspectives. It encompassed the promotion of counter-terrorism, international hotspot issues, reformed multilateralism, climate change cooperation, and collaboration under the RIC.” It would appear that “Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi” is on board with the RIC project, which implies that the RIC will be an important driver for development, politics, the economy, the environment, and anti-terrorism based on their strategic relationship.^[14]

Russia is beginning to entertain the possibility that it, along with India and China, may lead the area, pushing for a modification from a regional order led by the United States to one more international. Russia is not powerful in terms of its economy, but it is powerful in terms of its military and political capabilities. There is a Chinese pole (it becomes an independent international player, and economically, China is much more developed), as well as a few others, in addition to the Eurasian pole that suddenly appears. Against multiple poles of influence, India stands out as a demographic, economic, and political powerhouse. It is utterly unaffected by Russia or China, let alone the West. Even though India, China, and Russia may hold divergent opinions on several concerns about the security of Eurasia, there are other regions in which their interests coincide, such as Afghanistan. The Russia-India-China trilateral (also known as the RIC) is an important multilateral organization that allows India to collaborate with China on various strategic problems by way of Russia^[15].

India did not respond positively to the question despite India’s long-running competition with Beijing and the thawing of relations between New Delhi and Washington. The United States and India established their strategic relationship in 2002 based on the idea that the world’s two largest democracies were “natural friends.” India, once one of the early pioneers and leaders of “the Non-Aligned Movement,” now refers, in words, to the concept of any formal three or four-sided “axis of security” in the context of competing with China in the Asia-Pacific region. This seems to be done without much enthusiasm on India’s part. Nevertheless, the evidence demonstrates that India is moving closer to becoming more like the United States. India has approached its participation in the Quad, a grouping consisting of the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India that acts as a forum for security talks and cooperation, with a degree of circumspection.

The SCO: Pakistan, China, India, and Russia

The collaborative cooperation and strategic collaboration that exists between Russia and China serve to maintain “peace and order” in this part of the world. This is quite obvious because several regional organizations and procedures came into existence due to this relationship. “China and Russia” are extremely valuable members of “the SCO” and have significantly contributed to the organization’s expansion. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization includes Pakistan and India as participating members (SCO)^[16]. The fact that Pakistan and India have both been accepted into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) simultaneously demonstrates that member states like “China and Russia” are aware of the sensitivity of the “Indo-Pak” relationship. The most prominent members have particularly close ties with both India and Pakistan. China has closer relations with Pakistan than India, but China would not want to alienate either country. At the same time, it is a member of the UN since Russia has closer relationships with India^[17].

Central Asia is a critical region for India due to its huge oil and natural gas deposits and its placement in the geographic center of Eurasia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is significant because it has the potential to aid and strengthen India’s energy security by constructing many different bilateral and regional transport connections. The SCO may fulfill its duty outlined in the SCO Charter to ease tensions between India and Pakistan. China and Russia are both highly significant countries that can persuade India to choose the diplomatic resolution of all disputes through peaceful conversation and negotiation^[18].

The way Forward

Despite having summit-level discussions regularly over the past few years, India’s relations with Russia have become more strained. The reality is that India is a welcome participant in both the Eastern Economic Forum and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum as an honored guest. During his trip to Russia for the annual summit and to participate in the Eastern Economic Forum, the Prime Minister stated that the Indo-Russian partnership has expanded beyond the military and technical cooperation framework. One example is Moscow’s assistance in training Indian astronauts for the Gaganyaan project.

India chose not to participate in the anti-Russian sanctions, and the perspectives of India and Russia on a variety of international issues are comparable. It would appear that Moscow and Delhi have a lot in common with one another in terms of geopolitics. India counts Russia as one of its oldest and most reliable allies. Since the division of the subcontinent in 1947, the two countries have worked to expand their military and commercial relations with one another. 1971 saw “the signing of a treaty of friendship” between India and the Soviet Union, which took place during the height of the Cold War. Russia is not likely to become a significant partner of Pakistan any time soon and will continue to maintain tight ties with India.

In October, in Chennai in southern India, “Chinese President Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi” met for a casual encounter. During the second meeting between President Xi and Prime Minister Modi, which was an informal gathering, the two leaders shared in-depth perspectives on overarching, long-term, and strategic issues that are of importance on a global and regional scale, and they agreed to enhance the two countries fairly close development collaboration. Swaran Singh, a scholar from India, observed, “Over the past few years, China and India have engaged in a bilateral commercial relationship that has made significant advancements, and it is anticipated that this year it will surpass \$100 billion. Equally striking is the development of China’s investments in India, which

already total \$8 billion and are still growing.” In May 2019, China concurred with the United Nations’ decision to designate Masood Azhar, the leader of Jaish-e-Mohammad, as a global terrorist. China already backed the United Nations resolution to place Masood on a terrorist watch list. Relations with Pakistan are still held prisoner by Pakistan’s continued support for terrorist activities beyond its borders. Concerns have been raised in India regarding the prospect of Russia selling weaponry to Pakistan. India and Russia are inherently compatible partners. It is in the best interest of both nations to have healthy relations with one another. In the South Asia Region, India and Russia have certain conflicts of opinion that must be resolved.

Despite India’s increasing closeness with the United States of America, India needs to engage Russian Federation in different multilateral forums to a larger level to checkmate both Pakistan and China in the neighborhood.

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