

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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PAKISTAN ENTERING THE EASTERN AXIS AND RIVALRY BETWEEN GREAT POWERS (USA, RUSSIA, AND CHINA) IN ASIA

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Abstract

This article analyzes relations with global powers like the USA, China, and Russia from the independence of Pakistan to today's year, and predicts the future policy of Pakistan. It mostly emphasizes rivalry between the USA and the Soviet (Russia) for hegemony in South and Central Asia. Besides that, most importantly China is also entering this competition with its today's huge economy and working with Russia in order to fight together in the future against the EU and USA. From this rivalry, Pakistan is developing according to its economy, military, and other fields.

Keywords Global Power, International Relations, Axis, Balance of Power, Taliban, USSR.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is a very crucial country on the world's geopolitical stage in the eye of great countries: the USA, China, and Russia, despite the fact that it is not a huge world player. It is located in South Asia sharing borders with Iran in the west, Afghanistan in the north-west, China in the north, and India in the east, besides much busy sea route- the Arabic Sea washes its shores in the south. All those neighbors are very active in the world theatre as well as important ones in one way or other.

To understand Pakistan's capacity more clearly, we have to apply to the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the previous century--the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the main reasons for the break-out of the biggest country in the world was its invasion of Afghanistan. First, Soviet troops brutally cracked down on Afghan opposite groups and overcame their rivals. Thousands of Afghanis sought refuge in Pakistan who were soon settled in the camps near the border . Pakistan decided to

manipulate them in its soft power project to resist Russians who nearly reached its borders. So, it created a new army out of Afghan youngsters with sensitive Islamic ideology yet much more extremist. They were called Taliban which means 'Students' because they studied for many years and earned this pseudonym. After the Taliban had been found ready for warfare, they were re-directed to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets for their independence. Ten years of disastrous proxy and guerrilla fights of Pakistan supported Taliban exhausted Russian troops and ruined the country's economy. De-moralized Red Army was withdrawn from Afghanistan just before the Soviet Union was dissolved. It means Pakistan won over Russians in this proxy war showing its real military and intelligence proficiency against one of the two great countries.

The USA-Pakistan relations mounted during this period. Because, Washington wanted to strike the Soviet Union from different ankles and supplied Pakistan with money, technology, and military advisors. This was how Washington used

Islamabad as leverage to disrupt Russian move in South Asia. After the Soviet Union collapsed, US-Pakistan relations slowed down as Pakistan's importance decreased although the White House re-established alliance due to 9/11 in 2001. It is still a key role for the US that the balance of power in the world remained the same that the Russian Federation has inherited Soviet policy. For example, after Russian tensions with NATO backed Ukraine had escalated in late 2021, the US and the EU imposed new sanctions on Russia. However, Moscow has close allies in Asia to help its economy breathe such as Iran, Central Asian republics, and China. Bounding with nearly all the above is the main significance of Islamabad.

To say, Pakistan has a long border with America's harshest enemy-Iran. White House might one day need a reliable bridgehead like as efficient as Islamabad to raid Tehran. Besides, it is a perfect corridor for the USA to access Central Asia going around its main rivals Iran, China, and Russia. Washington might want to pull out these countries from Russian influence using its close Asian ally and its mutual religious interest as well as deep historical and cultural roots. Besides, Pakistan is initiating pipelines to Turkmenistan and railroads to Uzbekistan through Afghanistan to boost its interest in the region. Last but not least, Pakistan has a common border with a newly emerged power- China. Besides blocking it in the sea, the White House may impose strategic pressure on China by land relying on Pakistan in case of future conflict

China-Pakistani relations have been developing for more than six decades as the two emerged in the world theatre nearly at the same time. Islamabad is vitally important to the new Asian giant –People's Republic of China which has recently been committing maximalist foreign policy claiming its neighbors' territories in both mainland and in the sea. America manipulated this situation and formed an alliance in the Pacific Ocean against the Chinese in the sea. Despite its firm movements in the Ocean, China also decided to build trade routes called the 'Belt and Road' initiative through the land on the basis of the ancient Great Silk Road constructing motorways and railways from Beijing to as far as Berlin to

avoid the USA interference or pressure in the sea. This mega-project would not only benefit the Chinese economy and flourish Asian countries but also enable China to put its influence on the whole continent which the White House could not stand.

The project has mainly three routes outside China: The Russian route to Europe, the Central Asian route to Middle East and Europe as well as Pakistani route to the Indian Ocean. The latter has special economic and strategic functions:

- This is the only route out of Russian territory or Russian zone of influence.
- The route enables China to go round its regional enemy –India's marine territory in the Indian Ocean.
- The route offers the traders a 'short-cut' to China, Korea, or Japan through Pakistan without crossing the Indian economic zone which decreases the significance of Indian transit and would be a sensitive strike to its economy.

Besides its logistic key role, Pakistan could be a great strategic partner for China against India with whom both of them having territorial and ideological conflicts. At last, because of Chinese repression of the Muslim majority Sinzyian (Uyghur) province, Beijing worries that all Islamic countries may someday interfere with its internal affairs and unite against it. Pakistan would be the most dangerous of them with more than 250 million population, recent big scale war experience as well as nuclear power. Moreover, Islamabad is closer to China's East Turkistan rather than China itself that Pakistan may initiate proxy wars like it did in Afghanistan and would be supported by other Muslim nations or the USA. Thus, China always tries to keep a warm relationship with Pakistan and other Muslim nations.

Soviet (Russian) and Pakistani relations fluctuated but generally, they were rivals during the Cold War committing proxy war against each other in Afghanistan. Russians preferred India to Pakistan so they backed New Delhi on the world stage and always vetoed against Islamabad's interests. Moscow supported India between India and Pakistan war over Kashmir and Islamabad had a humiliating defeat in 1971. However, Pakistan

revenge the Soviets in Afghanistan ten years later that Soviets had to withdraw from there. After USSR collapsed, they achieved some warm relations and economic cooperation in the field of energy. For example, Russia promised that it would invest \$14 billion in Pakistan's energy sector in 2019, including the construction of a US\$ 2.5 billion pipeline in Pakistan in 2021.

In fact, Russian interest to Pakistan demonstrates that Moscow is moving towards the East as its relations are soaring with the West. To exemplify, Russia as had been expected by many launched an invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Of course, the West responded to Russian offenses with their sanctions and boycotts. Moscow will surely rely on Asian states and Pakistan is no exception. Even Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan paid a visit to Moscow amidst the Russian invasion of Ukraine and stated: "What a time I have come! So much excitement". Although experts say this is a sign of Pakistan's position in favor of Russia and a 'huge diplomatic disaster', Pakistani officials referred that the meeting was timed sometime earlier and had nothing to do with the Russian-Ukrainian war. Khan and Putin discussed bilateral cooperation and development in South Asia as well as exchanged their views about Afghanistan. However, this 'business trip' shows that Pakistan is turning to Russia this time when the world is dividing into two poles again: The USA-West and Russia-China, and an eastern axis is about to be formed among Russia, China, and Pakistan in the immediate future.

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