

## THE EVOLVING RUSSO-PAK ENTENTE-CORDIALE: CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Toheeda Begum\*

### Abstract

*Historically, the Russo-Pak relationship had a foreign policy context and a legacy that went through the historic eras of pre-partition Great Game between the British Indian and Czarist Empires, and the post-partition Cold War between the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the United States of America (USA). Pakistan on its creation sided with the American led West through Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) or Baghdad Pact, plus, the partnerships against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and in the War on Terror. The US military and financial aid and the support by the International and Asian financial institutions for Pakistan is decades old—albeit now with a friction over Afghanistan, Russia and China. Still, the transactional-cooperation remains over Afghanistan through the air-corridor that is useful for Americans in many ways. American influence, assets and the air-corridor is a deadly mix in Afghanistan. The Afghan Taliban know that the drones, jets and aircrafts using the corridor take-off from and land at Qatar without ever landing in Afghanistan. Moreover, intelligence sharing is part of Pak-US operational cooperation with a possibility of a military base too. The context of Pak-US cooperation is the centuries old British era Frontier Policy. It remained until the American strategic withdrawal from Afghanistan. The relationship since then has deteriorated and the perception of each other is not harmonious despite the tactical cooperation in Afghanistan. The reason is the strategic choices made by Pakistan and America lacking congruence over China, Russia, Afghanistan and India. The interactive-arm-twisting of Pakistan is an indicator. The rest is the detail of Pakistan's New Frontier Policy.*

**Keywords:** Eurasia, New Great Game, New Cold War, New Frontier Policy, Energy Control.

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\* Lecturer, Department of History and Pakistan Studies, Saheed Benazir Bhutto Women University, Larama, Peshawar, Pakistan. Email: [toheed236@gmail.com](mailto:toheed236@gmail.com)

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## Introduction

A triangular relationship between Pakistan, China and Russia is growing in the midst of New Great Game, the New Cold War and the New Frontier Policy. Pakistan's New Frontier Policy encompasses both China and Russia. The triangular cooperation is strategic, especially with the Chinese and the evolving *entente-cordial* with Russia carries great potential. The nuclear triangle indicates a balance of power too, whereas, China and Russia have a 'no-limit partnership' as great power competition continues. The trust initiated by President Musharraf during a visit to Moscow in 2004 was meant to forge a partnership. That conviction since then is being nurtured. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the forging of a new relationship with Russia is Pakistan's New Frontier Policy. Back in 2018, a British security think tank Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) assessed that for the first time in 200 years, Pakistan Army has abandoned the British raj policy of confronting Russia for control over Central Asia—and Pakistan Army now sees the Russians as their strategic partners.<sup>1</sup> The reset is a historic paradigm-shift.

Pakistan's perception is that Russia is no more an ideological or a strategic threat. The incorporation of erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) is an indicator, though operational tasks remain. It is a recurring problem. The challenge is the diplomatic and operational management of diminishing and transactional British era Frontier Policy and the forging of a strategic partnership with Russia, besides, the expansion of Sino-Pak relationship with Cyberspace and Artificial Intelligence (AI) too. Chinese are challenging Americans in AI, Cyberspace and high-end technologies, whereas, Russians are global in hardware, AI, Cyberspace and increasingly in the world of Artificial General Intelligence (AGI). The technological competition is meaningful for Pakistan's national-security. Pakistan's foreign policy interests decisively converge with China and by extension with Russia, as opposed to continuously expanding decades old *Indo-US Entente* that now includes Space and Cyberspace cooperation. Also, rising as a global power, China has regarded the existing world order unreasonable enough to meet the interests of China and emerging powers.<sup>2</sup> The budding powers are Asian powers like Pakistan, besides, Russia as a revanchist Eurasian power—despite the economic and strategic problems of the two.

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<sup>1</sup>Murtaza Ali Shah, "Pakistan Army has reversed Great Game: report", *The News*, (8 September 2018), accessed on 12 April 2022, [https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/365389-pak-army-has-reversed-great-game-report?fbclid=IwAR3LH\\_YYa9F3rjWiAZcfzC7M564wmlsNIINdFKUqzmFsmE5p\\_nEk\\_OueJ44](https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/365389-pak-army-has-reversed-great-game-report?fbclid=IwAR3LH_YYa9F3rjWiAZcfzC7M564wmlsNIINdFKUqzmFsmE5p_nEk_OueJ44)

<sup>2</sup>Suisheng Zhao, *China's New Global Strategy: The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)*, Volume 1 (New York: Routledge, 2020): 1.

The Belt & Road Initiative (BRI) is exporting finance and infrastructure to operationalize a supply-chain with China at the qualitative high-end. The same is true for Russian perception on exporting its capital. The mix of revisionist Russia and an ascending China is now a global challenge in the realms of finance, technology, trade, energy and strategy. Moreover, the CPEC and the new relationship with Russia is the New Frontier Policy. Pakistan's New Frontier Policy is State-Policy and state-policies do not change with a change in government.<sup>3</sup> However, Pakistan's diplomacy is challenged by a strategic-friction between the old and new frontier-policies. The challenge is complex. For an order is being replaced by another. It is strategically meaningful and competitive. The transition is destabilizing. In the context, the two challenges of Balochistan and the erstwhile FATA across the Indus have domestic and foreign policy dimensions in the context of Pakistan's New Frontier Policy.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, the fact that China and India are growing strong simultaneously is an entirely new fact, one carrying significant risks.<sup>5</sup> The Sino-Indian Himalayan tensions are an indicator of this simultaneous rise of the two great powers.

Russia too is not of the 1990s. It is a resurgent Eurasian power in a conflict with the American led Nato in Ukraine. Russians have good relations with the Chinese and Indians and are forging an equation with Pakistan. Russians can have a calming effect on the region and beyond, notwithstanding the war in Ukraine. Though, it's no longer debatable that the USA and China are entering their own New Cold War and that President Xi has declared it, whereas, a rare bipartisan consensus in the USA has accepted the challenge.<sup>6</sup> America has an operational financial-law fare against Russia, whereas, its Indo-Pacific pivot along with Japan, Australia and India is aimed at containing China. The Chinese are responding to the pivot in East Asia, South China Sea, South and Central Asia, plus Indian Ocean, as are Russians in Ukraine, Eastern Mediterranean, and South and Central Asia. The chessboard is murky. The clash of interests is regional and global. And India has clashed with Pakistan and China over Kashmir.<sup>7</sup>

Pakistan's foreign policy challenge is to correctly contextualize all the great and regional powers within the Eurasia strategic environment. This

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<sup>3</sup>Saeeda *et al.*, "The Frontier Policy", *The Dialogue*, 16 (1), (January-March 2021). accessed on 12 April 2022, [https://www.academia.edu/45611762/The\\_Frontier\\_Policy](https://www.academia.edu/45611762/The_Frontier_Policy) (accessed on 12 April 2022).

<sup>4</sup>Khalil Ur Rehman, "Balochistan: The Strategic Pearl", *The Dialogue*, VI (1), (2010), accessed on 12 April 2022, [https://www.academia.edu/10389410/Balochistan\\_The\\_Strategic\\_Pearl](https://www.academia.edu/10389410/Balochistan_The_Strategic_Pearl).

<sup>5</sup>Bruno Macaes, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018): 110-111.

<sup>6</sup>Hal Brands & John Lewis Gaddis, "The New Cold War", *Foreign Affairs*, 100 (6), (2021):10-21.

<sup>7</sup>Jonathan Holslag, *World Politics since 1989* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 3.

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is vital for strategic and foreign policy decision making. And as the play thickens on the Eurasian chessboard, red-lines and thresholds are being drawn gradually. The strategic-intentions and foreign policy objectives are backed by an AI-driven Cyberspace and strategic infrastructure to add operational-authenticity to the declaratory aspects of foreign policy. Take for example China which intends its forces to deter any thought of an attack or infringement on Chinese territory, or on anything it defines as a significant interest, such as its global shipping and sources of food, oil, and other essential materials.<sup>8</sup> And Russia is more than willing to defend its interests in Europe, Mediterranean Sea, Greater Middle East and Central Asia, especially in Afghanistan. Pakistan's interests are converging with Chinese, Russians and Central Asians in Afghanistan and Central Asia, let alone Pakistan's energy and wheat needs that Russia is willing to take care-off. Pakistan's diplomatic, strategic and intelligence cooperation with Russians and Central Asians is now almost two decades old and is significant in time and space dimensions. The Central Asian perception is that Pakistan is central to Afghanistan, so is Russian.

America is buttressing a militarized Germany against Russia and a globalized India against China as its bulwarks. Americans have raised the bars in Eurasia. However, Russia and China are countering American moves diplomatically and strategically with an impact. There are indeed economic and geopolitical giants that continue to have sway in global affairs.<sup>9</sup> Strategically, what was an implicit affair is now an explicit strategic and technological competition. It is an escalating Eurasian strategic environment. Ukraine is an additional theatre to the ongoing two-decade old struggle for the Eurasian domination. It is impacting Pakistan in many ways. Ukraine enjoys good relations with Pakistan and supplied T-80 tanks and other hardware to Pakistan in the post-USSR context. However, the *entente-cordiale* with Russia and by extension with Central Asia has to be preserved and nurtured. Russia is far more important for Pakistan in the world of *Real politik*, as opposed to Ukraine. The calculations of power dictate as such. The diplomatic challenge involves a rigorous balancing act by Pakistan. More importantly, US foreign policy confirmed the image of the United States as an adversary and convinced North Korea, Iran and Pakistan that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) were needed to stop it.<sup>10</sup> The three are not much off the mark.

Ukraine has shifted the strategic centre of gravity from the Indo-Pacific to Europe for great powers, not that South China Sea is dormant. The

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<sup>8</sup>Clyde Prestowitz, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 98.

<sup>9</sup>Tim Marshall, *The Power of Geography: The Maps that Reveal the Future of our World* (London: Elliot and Thompson Ltd, 2021), xii.

<sup>10</sup>Jonathan Holslag, *World Politics since 1989* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021): 112-113.

Ukrainian conflict has a trans-Eurasian geo-political impact on regional powers, let alone the effect on food supply-chain. Pakistan in the context is not an exception. Also, both Presidents Biden and Xi in their long-distance virtual meetings failed to evolve a consensus over the conflict in Ukraine. President Xi declined to hold President Putin responsible for Ukraine and asked the US president to hold dialogue with Russia to resolve the various aspects of the conflict. Xi also asked Biden to address the valid security concerns of Russia. The Sino-American animosity is on the rise and it is not in China's interest to turn its back on Russia. Plus, aiming China with Russia like sanctions will have implications for global financial system. The Chinese have rejected the US Cold War mentality. And whereas Americans are cautious towards Pakistan, the embracing of India is that of a lover. Still, South Asia in American perception is an economic backwater that would soon impose itself as a major source of global insecurity.<sup>11</sup> And Afghanistan is a transactional-game between Pakistan and America in South Asia.

### **Great-Power Competition and Eurasia**

By 2020 China had already disbursed US\$38 billion of loans to South Asia, and in Pakistan, it has completed Gwadar Port and energy projects, and is upgrading roads through the Karakoram Pass. Besides, China is central to the international system as world's largest trading power and greatest source of global lending while boasting the world's largest population and military, and has become a global centre of innovation.<sup>12</sup> Plus, the Sino-Russian energy cooperation is mammoth. And critical is the connection between energy-security and state-security. Though, the less said about the deals with the Independent Power Producers (IPPs) in Pakistan, the better it is. Since energy-security is now national-security, South Asia contributes towards its insecurities by its energy-deficiencies. Russia can be a net energy-contributor to tackle these insecurities. Russia and Pakistan have a \$2 billion energy pipeline agreement which according to the plan has to be operationalized in 2023,<sup>13</sup> however the completion seems difficult by the deadline. For timeworn geo-political frontiers are back. Europe is dependent on Russian gas despite the decision to stop gas imports from Russia. However, Hungary does not agree and an alternative will take time. Russia has reduced its own dependence involving energy and financial domains e.g., it developed a substitute for the clearing-mechanism Swift and

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>12</sup>Elizabeth Economy, "Xi Jinping's New World Order: Can China Remake the International System", *Foreign Affairs*, 101 (1), (2022): 52-61.

<sup>13</sup> Ministry of foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, accessed on 27/06/2022 <https://mofa.gov.pk/notice-pakistan-north-south-gas-pipeline-to-open-new-market-for-russia/>,

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Visa credit cards, and in information technology it has an internet that can be disconnected, if required, from the global internet.<sup>14</sup>

The strategic dimension of the competition is in the forefront of a rivalry over geo-economic, geo-energy and geo-technological domination of Eurasia. The competition is metamorphosing into a New Cold War between great powers with technological innovation at the heart of it. Russia already produces advanced hardware of all types and the Chinese investment in Research and Development (R&D) matches that of the USA. The Sino-Russian security collaboration is already meaningful plus. And if the Sino-Russian cooperation broadens into a military alliance, it would enhance the substantial threat China already poses to the American led west, and Pakistan is tightly tied to China, as Saudi Arabia is becoming more so.<sup>15</sup> The Chinese power of adaptability is enormous. Russia is on board with China to integrate Eurasia to create a New World Order (NOW). The war in Ukraine is a spanner in the wheel, but part of it. Pakistan has to anchor itself in the Eurasian security context to reap evolving dividends as BRI and CPEC continue unfolding. Russians in 2015 agreed to merge Russia led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) into BRI. The Russian endorsement of China threw open Central Asia for Chinese investments.

While the idea of integration is European, yet China and Russia are integrating Eurasia. Nevertheless, India is explicitly against the BRI and CPEC and is a strategic partner in the framework of Indo-Pacific strategy against China. Eurasia is becoming smaller, more integrated, the stage for intense rivalry and competition between different poles, each of them projecting influence outwards and creating new connections.<sup>16</sup> Pakistan's bilateralism with China and Russia should be able to withstand the American financial arm-twisting and the US influence in Eurasia. Pakistan is an important strategic player in a sensitive region at the heart of Eurasia. Pakistan controls southern route to the *Heartland*. Convergence of interests is a powerful idea between Nation-States and Pakistan's economic, technological and hardware interests are converging with China and Russia. American led west is not willing to share technology and hardware with Pakistan. The tying-up of Pakistan with America and Europe through a limited trade is Western strategy. Pakistan has to move beyond being the sweat-shop of America and Europe.

Certain regions of the Eurasian supercontinent are dense areas of technological innovation e.g., Europe and East Asia, others are enormously rich in natural resources e.g., Russia, it is here that the United States finds

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<sup>14</sup>Jonathan Holslag, *World Politics since 1989* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021): 306.

<sup>15</sup>Clyde Prestowitz, *The World Turned Upside Down* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 230.

<sup>16</sup>Bruno Macaes, *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (London: Hurst & Company, 2018): 4.

the only state actors rivaling it in power and wealth: China, Russia, the European Union, perhaps India in the future, as well as smaller states it nonetheless regards as security threats.<sup>17</sup> Is Pakistan one of those smaller states as a threat in American perception? Besides, the war in Ukraine has created a new context in which Europe is forced to square-off against Russia, not to mention EU-China tensions over Russia. An indicator of things to come is the \$112 billion jump in German defense budget. The militarization of Germany against Russia is back and Americans yet again successfully disallowed a *German-Russo Entente* that could have challenged American dominance in the long run. Even British Brexit is aimed at blocking full spectrum German rise. Americans fought two World Wars to disallow this to happen in Europe. In the post-USSR context, American aim is not to allow Germans and Russians come together. The methodology involved is continuing eastward expansion of NATO since the end of Cold War while also influencing European decision making. The Eurasian strategic environment definitely impacts Pakistan.

Both China and Russia are working towards a multipolar world, as opposed to diminishing American unipolarity. Pakistanis looking forward to a multipolar world, both at declaratory and operational levels of foreign policy. The struggle is for preserving and expanding spheres of influence. The context for China is no more domestic or regional; it is global, whereas, Russian framework is Eurasian. And Pakistan's economy of national security makes it an Asian power. The truth is that the economic capacity of a nation plays a far less important role in determining the course of the power struggle than is generally supposed.<sup>18</sup> The same is true for Pakistan's economy. Pakistan is central to the power struggle in Eurasia. It understands that. It should play restraint, but a bold one. Pakistan's suicidal instinct and its nuclear deterrence throw any conventional invasion of Pakistan out of the window. However, domestic context makes it vulnerable. All consecutive governments in Pakistan have been shoddier than the earlier one. A destabilized Pakistan suits Americans, as opposed to a stable one desired by Russians and Chinese. The BRI is already having a significant impact and central to its success is Pakistan which is rich in natural resources and with a vast internal market of over 200 million people, it is an asset for BRI.<sup>19</sup>

The BRI and CPEC support is across the board in Pakistan. It is an integral part of Pakistan's political and strategic structure. Besides, Russians too like Chinese have opened their universities involving disciplines that Americans and Europeans have banned for Pakistanis since long, especially

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>18</sup>James Schlesinger, *The Political Economy of National Security: A Study of the Economic Aspects of the Contemporary Power Struggle* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger Publishers, 1982): i.

<sup>19</sup>Bruno Macaes, loc. cit., 59-60.

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metallurgy. Russian investments in Pakistan's natural resources and its market need to be encouraged. Pakistan's security cooperation with Russia too is of an immense importance keeping in view the hybrid-warfare challenges and the continuing insurgencies in Balochistan and Pakistan's erstwhile FATA. The annual military exercises between the two countries are continuing in addition to training opportunities at the Russian's military institutions. The procurement of hardware from Russia, particularly the jet-engines, MI35 helicopters and long-range air-defense systems, is an attractive option along with China in the absence of American and European choices. With the strategic environment what it is, Russia cements the Sino-Pak strategic equation. Pakistan's choices are obvious in the midst of major realignments taking place in the region and beyond. The growing *Indo-US Entente* makes Sino-Pak-Russo equation a choice, as also a necessity in Eurasia.

### **Convergence of Interests and Civilizations**

Convergence of interests is meaningful in statecraft. Pakistan's strategic, economic, trade and investment interests are clearly converging with China and Russia. Russians now have an access to Gwadar Port too and the Sino-Russian equation is to Pakistan's foreign policy advantage. However, Pakistan's exports to Russia were a meagre \$175.2 million in 2021. This needs to improve in a big way to counter European and American arm-twisting. Pakistan's economy of national security is bit more than a sweatshop of Americans and Europeans. Russians on their part are contemplating long term investments in Pakistan e.g., a group of companies led by Russian Gazprom is seeking to invest \$14 billion in the energy infrastructure that includes two gas pipelines, plus underground storage facilities and gas from Russian owned deposits in Iran. The Russo-Pak energy interaction is a positive indicator of an improving strategic partnership. Pakistan's domestic gas shortages and demands are rising and it is an occasion to act in Pakistan's interest. It is time for Pakistan to truly define its trade, commercial, energy and strategic interests to reach-out to a multilateral world that both China and Russia are in the process of creating.

Besides, decisions have been made by the Kremlin and public opinion that Russia does not belong to the Western world and will no longer try to become one of its poles.<sup>20</sup> It is a coincidence of history that the Russian decision coincided with the decline in the American power, as Russia continues embracing Asia. The question of Ukraine was one of the undecided questions of international politics and so are terrorism and energy control. Russia's Special-Operations in Ukraine are an effort to settle the unsettled Ukrainian question to its advantage. Russian perception is that

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<sup>20</sup>Bruno Macaes, *The Dawn of Eurasia* (London: Penguin Books, 2019): 8.



Russia knows how international politics work. The Russian claim rests on knowing the *Real World* and not an imaginary world pursued by Americans and Europeans. Russians play by the rules of *Realpolitik* rooted in power and power politics. And as opposed to the single Western model to be imposed on the entire world, Russian belief is that the change and the pace of change have to be in harmony with the cultural norms of a given society. Russians seek a new international order that is less parochial and more inclusive. The eastward expansion of NATO to Russians is a strategic error in the sense of losing an opportunity to create an inclusive World Order. Time in Russian perception is not on the side of fading American order. Time could be on Russia's side.<sup>21</sup>

Eurasianism is back in Russia. The Eurasianist perception is that the Western cultural hegemony needs to end. The Eurasian legacy is explained in an original academic work titled *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* by Prince Nikolai Sergeyevech Trubetzkoy. To Eurasianists, the landlocked geographic space between Western and Central Europe at one end and East and South Asia at the other end is Eurasia. This landlocked Eurasia, Eurasianists believe, needs to be unified. Genghis Khan was the first to accomplish this unification and therefore the Russian state, which has striven and continues to strive to recreate the broken unity, 'is the descendent of Genghis Khan, the heir and successor of his historical endeavors'<sup>22</sup>The 15<sup>th</sup> century birth of a state in Moscow expanded just like the Mongol Empire, despite the Mongol yoke for five hundred years. The Tatars were replaced by Czars and Czarinas. They demanded the unification of Russia and the Horde under the power of Moscow.<sup>23</sup> The struggle is civilizational.

There had always been unease between the West European and Russian civilizations. The same remains true today. The perception is that the Eurasian idea is an adversarial idea for the West European civilization, as opposed to Russia led Slavic civilization. The Russian idea now is to throw away the yoke of Western civilization,<sup>24</sup> as was done in case of Mongols after 500 years of subjugation. The fascinating thing about the Eurasianism is that, on the one hand, it refers to a third continent carved out of the landmass between Europe and Asia, and on the other, it means the

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<sup>21</sup>Liana Fix & Michael Kimmage, "What if the War in Ukraine Doesn't End?", *Foreign Affairs* (20 April 2022), accessed on 20 April 2022. [https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-20/what-if-war-ukraine-doesnt-end?utm\\_medium=newsletters&utm\\_source=fatoday&utm\\_campaign=What%20If%20the%20War%20in%20Ukraine%20Doesn%E2%80%99t%20End?&utm\\_content=20220420&utm\\_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017](https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-04-20/what-if-war-ukraine-doesnt-end?utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=fatoday&utm_campaign=What%20If%20the%20War%20in%20Ukraine%20Doesn%E2%80%99t%20End?&utm_content=20220420&utm_term=FA%20Today%20-%20112017)

<sup>22</sup>Nikolai Sergeyevech Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russia's identity*. ed. Anatoly Liberman (Michigan: Slavic Publications, 1991[1925]): 167.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 183-184

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 220.

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supercontinent encompassing Europe, Asia and everything in between.<sup>25</sup> The Russian perception revolves around reorganizing and reordering the Greater Eurasia in harmony with China and others. It is an evolving phenomenon and the Now Moment in foreign policy is critical in the meaning of things unfolding. The emerging *entente-cordiale* between Pakistan and Russia is civilizational. Otherwise too, Pakistan is either way located on the geographical-frontiers of this historic Eurasian idea at the heart of Russian state and its history. Pakistan needs an intellectual and academic capital to forge a relationship with Russia in the greater context of its relationship with China, a relationship which should be to its advantage. It is a civilizational coming together.

Moreover, the CPEC within the BRI is an ambitious undertaking involving all sectors of Pakistan's economy. Chinese companies are getting integrated into Pakistan's economic structures. India is concerned over the range and aspiration of CPEC and beyond. The Indian perception is that CPEC has geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economics ambitions. For a Chinese-Pakistani alliance taking shape, most notably in Gwadar Port, near the Strait of Hormuz, and an Indian naval buildup on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, near the Strait of Malacca, the Indian-Chinese rivalry is taking on the dimensions of a maritime Great Game.<sup>26</sup> The Sino-Indian clashes in the Himalayas are an indicator of China expecting India to recognize Chinese power in Asia. There are many more indicators too e.g., India joining Quad and continuing to expand its *entente* with the USA. The greater context is the Sino-Indian geo-political competition encompassing an arc from the Strait of Hormuz to the Strait of Malacca. Meaningfully, Russia never denounced China over the Sino-Indian clashes in the Himalayas and now China's access to Gwadar Port too. The Chinese returned the favor by not denouncing Russia over the war in Ukraine.

What Pakistan needs to understand is that, 'if a country's goal is economic growth above all other considerations, the truly winning combination appear to be neither liberal democracy nor socialism of either a Leninist or democratic variety, but the combination of liberal economics and authoritarian politics that some observers have labeled the bureaucratic authoritarian state, or what we might term a market-oriented authoritarianism'.<sup>27</sup> Pakistan's foreign policy has to correctly contextualize the regional and global strategic environments, especially the altered strategic environment in the Himalayas. The British legacy in South Asia pursued by Americans since 1947 is a destabilizing one. It is a source of

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<sup>25</sup>Bruno Macaes, loc. cit., 185.

<sup>26</sup>Marlene Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire*. Trans from French by Mischa Gabowitch (Washington: Woodrow Wilson Centre Press, 2008), 129.

<sup>27</sup>Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin Books, 2020[1992]): 123.

friction. Besides, Russia's pivot to the East is being absorbed by the countries economically and strategically. The United States may be rich now, but developing countries, where Russia is much more popular, have brighter prospects.<sup>28</sup> Not to mention the fact that the overtly pro-Western camp in Russia has shriveled to insignificance.<sup>29</sup> The faction has literally withered away.

### **The Nuclear Triangle**

Russia has adopted the route of independent foreign policy in partnership with China and the Muslim world.<sup>30</sup> The realignments taking place as a result of Russian pivot are significant and meaningful. And based on similarities in worldview, it is possible to see Russia and China as two pillars of what some have called the "World without the West, or the WWW".<sup>31</sup> Plus, the Russian threat for Pakistan is no more and the two sides are forging an increasingly meaningful strategic partnership that will impact the region and beyond in the years ahead. Pakistan's strategic perception now views Russia as a partner. Russians are on the side of Pakistan in Afghanistan in the midst of US financial, technological and intelligence interference in Afghanistan. There are also hardware agreements, intelligence cooperation<sup>32</sup> and annual *Druzhiba* exercises between Russia and Pakistan, as opposed to an aggressive American arm-twisting of Pakistan. The popular reaction in Pakistan speaks for itself. The push and pull experienced by Pakistan is a question of operational and strategic management. Pakistan cannot allow to go things unnoticed beyond a certain point in the context of its relationship with China, as also increasingly in case of Russia for a variety of strategic and economic reasons. American involvement in Afghanistan is now a threat to the region, especially Pakistan. The TTP attacks in Waziristan are a backlash against the American interference in Afghanistan. The conflict in Afghanistan continues in another form. Pakistan's air-strikes in Khost and Kunar indicated.

Russia is being integrated in CPEC and Moscow agreeing to participate in the construction and expansion of Gwadar Port is perceived as a game-changer in Pakistan. Equally, Chinese have welcomed it in the sense that it will allay Indian fears with regard to the CPEC. Russia has the

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<sup>28</sup>Edward Lucas, *The New Cold War; Putin's Russia and the Threat to the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 201.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>31</sup>Naazneen Barma *et al.*, "Welcome to the World without the West", *The National Interest*, (12 November, 2014), accessed on 11 May 2022. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/welcome-the-world-without-the-west-11651>.

<sup>32</sup>Saeeda; Waqas, Muhammad; Rehman, Khalil ur. Dialogue (Pakistan) . 3/31/2021, Vol. 16 Issue 1, p134-134.

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potential to act as a glue in the South and Central Asian regions, as opposed to American overt and covert interference regionally and beyond. And as the American led West rushes hardware to Ukraine to escalate and prolong the war, what haunts NATO is a formal military alliance between China and Russia. The chances of the use of WMD in Ukraine are real. The new reality is that of a world of WMD and AI-weapons. The world is heading in the direction of human conducted AI-warfare in any case, if not, an autonomous AI-machine conducting AI-warfare with all types of AI-weapons. And since there are no agreements involving AI, restraint is the missing-link. The three unresolved problems of international politics i.e., energy security, terrorism and Ukraine will remain part of strategic environment for years to come. Pakistan is not only faced with these problems, but is confronted by players confronting these problems.

The deteriorating Pak-Afghan relations are not a good omen. Afghanistan and Ukraine are strategic-turfs. The two theaters have an escalating destabilizing impact across the length and breadth of Eurasia. And China's neutrality in the Ukrainian war is a dilemma for the American led West, not to mention the neutrality of number of other countries including Pakistan. Both Russia and Ukraine are China's friends and the Sino-Ukrainian trade in 2021 was \$19.3 billion, as opposed to Sino-Russian trade worth \$147 billion in the same year. Besides, President Xi in his virtual meeting with the EU leaders on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 urged all sides to show restraint and work towards a negotiated settlement. The Chinese leader urged American, European and Russian leaders to negotiate a new European security-framework. The escalating rhetoric is worrying for the Chinese. China's ascendance on the world stage is accompanied with its age-old Confucius wisdom asking for a middle-course restraint.

China's independent foreign policy neutrality is its impartiality and pragmatism. The same should be true for Pakistan as China's strategic partner, as opposed to transactional relationship with the USA. The meaningful truth is that both China and Russia are neutral in the conflicts be they Crimea, Taiwan, South China Sea and the Sino-Indian border dispute. The Sino-Russian relationship is a mature relationship and not a politicized one. Confucius is back in China, whereas, Orthodox Church is in the vanguard of Russian worldview. The Sino-Russian *entente-cordiale* is an association of civilizations. Both have a material and ideological capacity to pursue independent geo-political and geo-strategic objectives, irrespective of their economic standings. On the other hand, the pursuit of absolute security by the American led West is a problem for the world, let alone the great powers like China and Russia. The American led West may have discarded the Westphalian idea of sovereign nation-states as a foundational principle of World-Order, but China and Russia are civilizations. The war in Ukraine

is a conflict between Western and Russian civilizations impacting Chinese civilization too, let alone the Islamic civilization.

Alongside, the eastward expansion of Nato has unleashed a New Cold War with no treaties, rules and mechanisms overseeing the arms-race, especially in the realms of AI and Cyberspace. The Cold War era balance of power politics have not been replaced by a new equilibrium between great powers. This is problematic. The world is on a slippery slope. For the conflict now is nothing short of Clash of Civilizations.<sup>33</sup> Pakistan's pan-Islamic identity and worldview is pulled in all directions by civilizational dynamics. The safest route is pursuit of national interest. Geographic limits of any world order depend not on the reach of mind, but on the objective grasp controlling a regional or global geographic space. Technology played and plays an important role in the hegemonic control and operations of a geographic space. Historically, the formal framework for a function of hegemony was at the most regional, until technology in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century gave birth to a globalized World Order. The post-Cold War World Order emerged after the Soviet disintegration. The United States ensures the hegemonic functioning of this global financial, trade and security architecture. However, challenges have emerged across Eurasia.

The contemporary, now global Westphalian system—what colloquially is called world community—has striven to curtail the anarchical nature of the world within an extensive network of international legal and organizational structures designed to foster open trade and a stable international financial system, establish accepted principles of resolving international disputes, and set limits on the conduct of wars when they do occur.<sup>34</sup> Yet, the USA and its allies have been at wars one after another since the end of the Cold War, and the conflict in Ukraine is an example of forcing Russia into a war. The insurgencies and counter insurgencies around the world too are a challenge to the World Order. Besides, the violation of the Westphalian principle of sovereignty by the USA and its vassal states in Europe is the new norm to reset the global financial balance. American strategic withdrawal from the Greater Middle East and its pivot to the Indo-Pacific and the shift of focus to Ukraine has forced realignments in Eurasia. Saudi Arabia and others are seeking a regional order involving another outside power, perhaps China, India or even Russia.<sup>35</sup> The reality of oil trade in Rubles and Yuan has also emerged. Moreover, the Asian balance in the absence of a hegemon is not a congruent one. America is not an Asian

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<sup>33</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

<sup>34</sup>Henry Kissinger, H. (2014). *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*. (London: Penguin Books, 2014): 7.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 141.

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hegemon. While India appears mostly concerned with China as a peer competitor, China sees its peer competitors in Japan and the United States.<sup>36</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The coming together of Pakistan and Russia is strategic in nature and China is a force-multiplier of the trilateral-equation. Pakistan and Russia have strategic problems next door i.e., Afghanistan and Ukraine. Equally, American involvement in both the theaters is decades old. The coming decade is not an exception in the context of American involvement in Afghanistan and Ukraine. America is at war with Russia and with Pakistan it has number of problems, not to mention the Indo-US partnership adversarial to Pakistan and China. The Himalayan theatre on the LAC between China and India is an example of technology cutting across geography. The great geographic barriers between China and India are no more insurmountable and, therefore, expand the great power competition to yet another theater in the Himalayas. Pakistan is now the strategic extension of this new Sino-Indian theater with America in the background. Pakistan continues to be the strategic worry of India. The historic legacies of various Asian Empires that include Chinese, Russian, Indian and Islamic are interacting in a new Eurasian strategic environment with Americans as outsiders. American strategic withdrawal from Afghanistan has created a security vacuum that is increasingly sucking-in China and Russia. The reliance just on diplomacy is not sufficient.

In the context above, an immediate problem for the region and regional powers is the final outcome and an inclusive settlement in Afghanistan. However, the conflict in Afghanistan continues. The involvement of US, Pakistan and others is an operational fact. The implications for Pakistan are much more than any other regional or extra-regional power. Pakistan above all in its domestic structure, Russia partly in its south and west, China with its significantly Muslim Xinjiang and Iran too are influenced strategically by the developments in Afghanistan.<sup>37</sup> Afghanistan is a challenge for an Asian balance to emerge, so is Ukraine for a new European balance. Eurasia now has two theaters of active conflict with a serious potential of escalation, both at conventional and sub-conventional levels. The potential use of tactical nuclear weapons in the Ukrainian theater is backed by declaratory statements and rhetoric. The already deployed nuclear forces of Russia and NATO in the European theater add substance to the possibility. Meanwhile, the *Indo-US Entente* continues to expand in the midst of India exploiting the global and regional

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 321.

strategic environments to its diplomatic and strategic advantages. India wants to have best of all the worlds.

The virtual summit between President Biden and Prime Minister Modi preceding US-India 2+2 Ministerial meeting in the second week of April 2022 was termed “constructive direct conversation” between the two leaders by the White House, as the United States sought more help from India to exert pressure on Russia. American president emphasized Indo-US defense partnership and offered to diversify India’s energy needs while pointing out that it was not in India’s interest to expand its energy imports from Russia. India by the time of this writing had already imported around 15 million barrels of discounted Russian crude oil since the start of the Ukrainian war. However, Indian perception is that what India purchases from Russia in a month are purchased by Europe in an afternoon. And notwithstanding Prime Minister Modi’s urgings to Presidents Putin and Zelenskyy for holding direct negotiations, India is executing the strategic management of a balancing act between the USA and Russian Federation over the war in Ukraine. The conflict in Ukraine and the strategic environment it has created is worrying for the Indians. It is fast approaching a stage where sides will have to be taken in the Real World of War and Peace. The Special-Operations intensified as Russia in its Donbas offensive engaged 1200 Ukrainian military targets on the first day of escalation with US-India 2+2 ministerial dialogue in the backdrop. The strategic environment is escalating.

The decades old Indo-US diplomacy is of a love-hate relationship, however, the two estranged-lovers have finally met and found each other. The April 2022 US-India 2+2 Ministerial meeting was a good-date and the two sides came out satiated in the strategic sense of the things e.g., the scientific cooperation to produce vaccines at the biological facilities in India, not to mention the security cooperation between the two in the Indo-Pacific in the defense of rule based order. The two sides also pledged an inclusive economic growth and people to people ties, especially in education and skill development. Moreover, the two decades old defense cooperation framework is expanding as a consequential partnership. It was agreed to expand the strategic cooperation to include technological innovation, Space and Cyberspace collaboration. The bilateral Space situational awareness arrangement, Cyberspace training exercises, expanding information-sharing within all war fighting spheres, trade in defense technology including air-launched unmanned aerial-vehicles and the new supply chain cooperative measures to fast support each other militarily whenever need arises. India is acquiring key US defense platforms that are forging greater ties between the two militaries. America recognizes India as a defense industry leader and a provider of net security in the Indo-Pacific region. The US-India 2+2 Ministerial dialogue is climbing of the next strategic-ladder.

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In the context above, China, Russia and Pakistan need to strengthen their equation to balance the *Indo-US Entente* which is global in scope. The *Indo-US Entente* is a threat to China, Russia and Pakistan. American interests are clashing with Chinese, Russian and Pakistani security interests in Afghanistan, Ukraine and the Indo-Pacific. For example, America in case of Kashmir dispute is following Nehruan line to turn the Line of Control (LoC) into an international border, whereas over the Line of Actual Control (LAC) it is siding with India and, again in the Nehruan spirit, expecting China to cede territory to India. So much for Pakistan and China's national interests, not to mention Russian interests in Eastern Europe and Pakistan. Similarly, the May 2022 visit to Washington by Pakistan's DG (ISI) was limited to counter-terror cooperation in Afghanistan. The operational line taken in Afghanistan is not in the interest of Pakistan, Russia, China and Central Asian Republics (CARs). And Islamic State continues to be an interesting variable and is emerging as a threat in Afghanistan. One does not have to be a genius to figure out as to what Pakistan is expected to do in the perception of American establishment. American dissonant expectations from Pakistan revolve around Afghanistan, Russia and China. Americans buy their way out at individual and national levels. It is part of American created World Order. It is an element of statecraft since time immemorial.

Someone has said that lest is best. An imaginative lest for Pakistan, in the sense, is clinging to national interest like grim death. The ideas of nation-state and national-interest are synonymous, especially for a country like Pakistan. There is no other safe way out for a country surrounded by all the great powers. Pakistan is located at the crossroads of great power competition. Had it not been for Pakistan's nuclear weapon capability, the world would have forgotten Iraq and Syria. Pakistan needs to summon all its faculties, intellect and its ancient wisdom and imagination to chart a course in the midst of obvious strategic realities and the threats that emanate from these realities. The Now Moment is critical in decision making which sequentially comprises of facts, analysis, probabilities, possibilities and options. The choosing of an option in the decision making is tricky, because, half of it is science and the rest is art. For a decision maker is both an artist and a strategist. The whole thing involves an orienting generalization that gives decision maker an orientation to make decisions. And the first piece of orientation is to establish where one is, before tackling the bigger questions like where one wants to go and how to proceed. It not only involves induction and an inductive mind, but also wisdom and imagination. The problem of statecraft, especially in Pakistan, is that wisdom and imagination cannot be prescribed. It is a Divine gift.



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