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Amin, Tahir

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Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding “New Great Game” in South Asia

Tahir Amin

The historical and territorial conflict between India and Pakistan dominates the political scene in South Asia, and this conflict is also one of the regional tensions that keeps the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan unsettled and agitated. Because India-Pakistan relations are very much a “zero-sum” conflict (that is, a loss for one party is interpreted as a corresponding gain for the other party), the region is a type of political terrain that readily absorbs the geopolitical rivalries of external powers and weaves them into the bilateral conflict. It is against this background of the Cold War legacy in the region that this chapter examines the present-day relationship between Pakistan and Russia. It inquires how this bilateral relationship has transformed since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and what prospects it has for contributing to the security and stability of the region when the Western military presence declines in Afghanistan.

Although the wider region has undergone profound changes over the past decades, change in Pakistan-Russia relations has been only modest. The problematic legacy of their mostly hostile relationship with each other during the Cold War continues to cast its shadow. From the point of view of Islamabad, any improvement in this relationship is difficult when Russia at the same time continues to maintain a robust strategic relationship with India, thereby raising serious security concerns in Pakistan over strategic stability in South Asia. Russia also supports India in its goal to gain a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. The interpretation is common in Islamabad that the main reason why Russia seems reluctant to engage in closer cooperation with Pakistan, especially in regard to the sale of military hardware, is the priority it gives to its relations with India.¹ Despite high-level visits from both countries not much concrete progress has been generated in Pakistan’s

¹ The following articles discuss Russia-Pakistan relations from the perspectives of the two countries: Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky and Sergei Kamenev, “Russia and Pakistan: A view from Moscow,” *Pakistan Horizon* 66, no.1–2 (January–April 2013); Muhammad Nawaz Khan and Beenish Altaf, “Pakistan-Russia Rapprochement and Current Geo-politics,” *Islamabad Policy Research Institute Journal* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2013).

relations with Russia during the last decades. However, more recently there have also been signs of change.

In the wake of the on-going Ukrainian crisis and the implementation of American and European sanctions, Russia has begun to re-evaluate its policies in South Asia as part of Russian President Putin's "reaching East" strategy. A new opening in the relationship was provided by the visit of Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in Islamabad on November 20, 2014. This was the first high-level visit since the visit of Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov to Pakistan in April 2007. Shoigu's visit was all the more significant due to the fact that President Vladimir Putin's visit, which had been planned for October 2012, had been unexpectedly cancelled, and this had been widely interpreted as a "major setback" which had made it clear that the post-Cold War relationship between the two countries still lacked a solid basis.² Shoigu's visit also bore concrete results: a cooperation agreement on security and defense issues was signed and, thus, the relationship between both states became more institutionalized.

The consequences of the "endgame" in Afghanistan will be significant in the wider region and they will immediately be felt in Pakistan,³ but it is still too early to argue what exactly they will be and how they will impact Pakistan's relations with Russia in particular. The question that has inspired the writing of this chapter is how the Pakistan-Russia relationship is preparing for the change. We argue that a potential convergence of interests is on the horizon in Pakistan-Russia relations as the U.S. and its allies prepare to depart from Afghanistan.⁴ Russia is interested in cooperation with Pakistan in terms of building a defense capacity around Afghanistan so as to prevent the spreading of unrest from this country into surrounding areas and, ultimately, to Russia's borders. While this is in harmony with the approach of its policies in Central Asia as well, the problematic issue is how the two parties will be able to build cooperation against the background of their

² Raja Mohammad Khan, "Deferral of Putin's Schedule Visit," *Pakistan Observer*, October 1, 2012, <http://pakobserver.net/201210/01/detailnews.asp?id=176091>.

³ Dmitri Trenin and Alexei Malashenko, *Afghanistan: A view from Moscow* (Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2010); Thomas Kunze and Michael Logvinov, "Central Asia facing ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan: Islamist threats and regional solutions," *International Reports of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung*, December 18, 2013, http://www.kas.de/wf/doc/kas_36412-544-2-30.pdf?131218151342.

⁴ Nazir Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations: Lost opportunities and Future Options," *Journal of Political Studies* 19, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 78–89.

contradictory interests in regard to India and the mutual suspicions that have existed between them throughout the decades since Pakistan achieved its independence.

Research on Pakistan-Russia relations generally employs traditional realist frameworks when analyzing the relationship between the two countries.⁵ While this approach can be helpful in analytical reconstructions of the “zero-sum game” between India and Pakistan, it provides very limited perspectives for analyzing the more comprehensive regional dynamics that exist. Western presence is waning not only militarily but also economically and culturally, and Russia cannot offer any social order to replace the Western liberal order. Because the issues of a desirable social order today cannot be left to the side, and because the region cannot be considered merely a chessboard for the mutual rivalries of major powers—as is the case when the notion of the historical “Great Game” is invoked—it is also misleading to interpret a possible increase of Russian influence in the region from the perspective of its geopolitical rivalry with the U.S. Rather, we may recognize that a “new great game” is unfolding with intricate patterns of interaction that involve both strategic competition and economic cooperation between multiple “world orders.” Such orders are not simply predetermined by nature or history; instead, they are geographically linked socio-historical unities of practices. These interpretative unities are identifiable on the basis of patterned regularities in the relationships between international or world actors or in their relations with their social and natural environment.⁶ The regions of Central and South-Central Asia are a good illustration of how

⁵ As examples of previous research on Pakistan-Russia relations the following can be mentioned: Mohammad Ahsen Chaudhri, *Pakistan and the Great Powers: A Study of Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1954–1970*, 2nd rev. ed., (Karachi: Royal Book Co., 1999); Werner Levi, “Pakistan, the Soviet Union, and China,” *Pacific Affairs* 35, no. 3 (Autumn 1962): 211–22; G. W. Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Major Powers: Politics of a Divided Subcontinent* (New York: The Free Press, 1975); Mahboob A. Popatia, *The Perspective of Pakistan-Soviet Union Relations 1947–1979* (Karachi: Pakistan Study Center, 1988); Hafeez A. Malik, ed., *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987); Syed Riffat Hussain, “Pak-Soviet Relations since 1947: A Dissenting Appraisal,” *Strategic Studies* (Spring 1987): 64–88; Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, *Great Powers and South Asia: Post-Cold War Trends* (Islamabad: Institute of Regional Studies, 1996).

⁶ This perspective synthesizes insights from the Dialectics of World Orders approach articulated by Hayward Alker, Thomas Biersteker, Takashi Inoguchi and Tahir Amin. According to these authors, multiple world orders are socio-historical entities that can be identified in our multi-cultural and multi-religious world. See Renée Marlin-Bennett, ed., *Alker and IR: Global studies in an Interconnected World* (London: Routledge, 2012).

multiple world orders—some authors have identified the Western liberal, Russian-Slavic, Islamic, Indic, and also a residual Socialist order—overlap, intermingle and coexist simultaneously.⁷ In the following, we review the past decades of Pakistan-Soviet and Pakistan-Russia relations and examine how the present changes unfold in such broader contexts.

Historical Burden of the Soviet Decades

Although the frame itself was ideological, it was mainly as a geopolitical contest that Soviet policies were perceived in South Asia. It did not go unnoticed in Pakistan that the Soviet Union under Stalin initially displayed an indifferent attitude towards the emergence of India and Pakistan in 1947. It regarded their independence as “illusory,” indeed, as a part of British policy to “divide and rule” in order to perpetuate its control over India by creating two hostile states and acting as arbiter between them.⁸ Nationalist leaders in the two countries were seen as “stooges of British imperialism.” The creation of Pakistan was considered even worse than that of India because of the religious rationale of the independence movement. It was against the backdrop of the unfolding Cold War that the Soviet Union, when the U.S. invited Indian Prime Minister Jawahar Lal Nehru to visit in 1949, immediately extended an invitation to Moscow to Pakistan’s Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan—even though Pakistan at that time had not even established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. However, Liaqat Ali Khan chose to go to Washington instead of Moscow, possibly using the Soviet invitation as a bargaining chip to extract an invitation from the U.S. This incident created deep mistrust between the Soviet Union and Pakistan.⁹

Pakistan joined the U.S.-sponsored alliances of SEATO (1954) and CENTO (1955), which were aimed at the containment of communism, and it eventually become “the most allied ally” of the United States in Asia. The main purpose of the Pakistani decision-makers was to seek military assistance against India, which was four times larger and perceived as

⁷ Tahir Amin, “World Orders in Central Asia,” in *Alker and IR*, 71–86.

⁸ D. N. Durke, *Soviet Russia and Indian Community in 1917–1947* (New York: Broochman Associates, 1959), 269–83.

⁹ Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh*, 123.

Pakistan's principal security threat because of the unresolved dispute over Kashmir.¹⁰ Soviet-Indian relations were further strengthened during the 1960s, when India became a leading country in the Non-Aligned Movement. The Soviet Union gave its strong support to India on the Kashmir issue and twice used its veto in the UN Security Council in India's favor. It also began to cultivate its relations with Afghanistan and extended its support for the issue of Pashtunistan, which had developed into a border issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹¹ Soviet-Pakistani relations hit rock bottom when a U.S. U-2 plane (flown from Peshawar in Pakistan for espionage purposes) was shot down by the Soviets in 1960 and Premier Nikita Khrushchev subsequently threatened to annihilate Peshawar with rockets.¹²

Anxious over the threats issuing from the Soviet Union and also increasingly disenchanted with the U.S. for courting India (as U.S.-India relations were intensified in the wake of the Sino-Indian war of 1962), Pakistan moved to normalize its relations with the Soviet Union and to strengthen further its relationship with China.¹³ It signed an agreement on oil trade with the Soviet Union (1960) as well as a boundary agreement with China (1963). In April 1965, Pakistan's President Ayub Khan visited Moscow and, one year later in the wake of the Indo-Pakistani war of 1965, the Soviet Union successfully mediated between the warring parties at Tashkent.¹⁴

When the political crisis in East Pakistan (which led to another India-Pakistan war in 1971 and resulted in the birth of Bangladesh) started brewing, the Soviet Union again moved closer to India. Pakistan's role in bringing rapprochement between Washington and Beijing by arranging Henry Kissinger's (then President Richard Nixon's National Security Advisor) secret trip to China further alienated Moscow from Islamabad. These developments eventually led to the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty of 1971, which extended Moscow's full support to India during the Indo-

¹⁰ W. Wilcox, *India, Pakistan and the Rise of China* (New York: Walder & Co, 1964), 40.

¹¹ Speech by Soviet Premier Nikolay Bulganin in Kabul during his visit on December 16–18, 1955, reported in *Dawn*, December 18, 1955.

¹² Mohammed Ahsen Chaudhri, "Pakistan's Relations with the Soviet Union," *Asian Survey* 6, no. 9 (September 1966): 492–500.

¹³ M. Ayub Khan, "The Pakistan-American Alliance: Stresses and Strains," *Foreign Affairs* 42, no. 2 (January 1964).

¹⁴ Tahir Amin, *Tashkent Declaration: Third Party's Role in the Resolution of Conflict* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, 1980).

Pakistani war of that year.¹⁵ Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited the Soviet Union in 1972, and again in 1974, in an attempt to normalize the relationship between Pakistan and the Soviet Union. Pakistan withdrew from U.S.-sponsored military alliances and adopted a non-aligned foreign policy. It started to play an active role in the Non-Aligned Movement and more vigorously espoused Third World causes in international forums. By taking these measures, Pakistan adopted a course designed to distance itself from the West and to move closer to both China and Russia.

The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 led Pakistan once again to seek the support of the U.S. and Western countries.¹⁶ The containment of communism—the “red menace”—now became the focus of its policies. Pakistan feared the expansionist designs of the Soviet Union towards the Indian Ocean and lent its full support to the Afghan mujahedin against the Soviet troops. The Soviet Union again sought support from India and threatened to further dismember Pakistan, from which Bangladesh had separated only eight years earlier in 1971.¹⁷ Pakistan-Soviet Union relations remained intensely hostile until 1988, when the Soviet Union started to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. A new phase in the relationship between the two countries was opened when the Soviet Union disintegrated and the Russian Federation was established in December 1991.

Post-Cold War Overtures

During the Soviet decades, Moscow's political rivalries with Washington worsened the conflict between India and Pakistan and increasingly made the region an arena for geopolitical contest. When the Soviet Union disintegrated, geo-economical competition gradually grew more important. Simultaneously, issues related to identity, culture and “civilization” assumed greater significance. Realist and traditional geopolitical interpretations lost their earlier significance and the new complexity of world politics made it increasingly important to understand these processes as an interplay of

¹⁵ Choudhury, *India, Pakistan, Bangladesh*.

¹⁶ Tahir Amin, *Afghanistan Crises: Implications and Options for Muslim World, Iran and Pakistan* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1982).

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

multiple world orders. The change of times was immediately manifested in the identity debates in which Russia found itself.¹⁸ Is Russia part of the West, as the new Atlantic-oriented foreign policy elites liked to argue; or is it a Eurasian power with a unique bridging position towards both Europe and Asia; or perhaps a more isolated historical-cultural formation with its own, distinctly “Slavic” features? Should Russia pursue an abiding policy towards the West, a pragmatic policy, or a more aggressive nationalist policy that would keenly protect Russia’s own national interests?¹⁹ During the first years of the re-born Russia, it was the Atlantic’s policy of “looking towards the West” that dominated. The new Russia that emerged under the leadership of Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrei Kozyrev was more interested in becoming part of Europe than representing Asia. Asia was regarded as an area of low priority. In these early years, Central Asia (as a former part of the Soviet Union) was mainly regarded as being part of the Islamic world and as a “burden” to be shed in the new post-Cold War era.²⁰

In the first decade of the new Russia, South Asia assumed an even lower priority in the eyes of Moscow’s decision-makers. Russia-Pakistan relations focused on the issues of terrorism, Afghanistan and drug trafficking emanating from the region. The Russian government accused the Pakistani government of sponsoring terrorism in Chechnya and the Caucasus.²¹ Pakistan sought to allay Russian concerns by explaining that it was neither sponsoring nor encouraging terrorist movements in Central Asia or in any part of the Russian Federation. In 2000, during the second Chechen war, Pakistan even sent the Chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) General Mahmud Ahmad to reassure Russia that the Pakistani government was not involved in any of these activities.²² Another concern in Moscow was Pakistan’s support for the Taliban movement in Afghanistan, which

¹⁸ Christian Thorun, *Explaining Change in Russian Foreign Policy: Role of Ideas in post-Soviet Russia’s Conduct Towards the West* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁹ Stephen White, *Understanding Russian Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

²⁰ Andrei Kortunov and Andrei Shoumikhin, “Russia and Central Asia: Evolution of mutual perceptions, policies and interdependence,” in *Ethnic Challenges Beyond Borders: Chinese and Russian Perspectives of the Central Asian Conundrum*, ed. Yongjin Zhang and Rouben Azizian, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 20–26; Irina Zviagelskaia, *The Russian Policy Debate on Central Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

²¹ Rashid Ahmad, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Moscow’s new approach towards South Asia,” *The Diplomatic Insight* 5, no. 7 (2012): 5–6.

²² Hussain, “Pak-Russia Relations.”

Moscow's decision-makers interpreted as having the ability to potentially undermine the status quo in entire Central Asia.²³ Against the backdrop of Tajikistan's Civil War (1992–1997) and the fragile peace attained to conclude it, Russia was deeply concerned about the spread of the armed insurgency to the other Central Asian states and to southern parts of Russia.²⁴ These concerns were intertwined with the drug-trafficking business from Afghanistan which very easily reached Russia through the territory of Central Asia's former Soviet republics.²⁵ Pakistan was thus looked at from a perspective that connected it with this troubled zone and Russia's burdensome historical "backyard."

Islamabad, in turn, had hoped that the formulation of policy in the newly established Russian Federation would set New Delhi and Islamabad at an equidistance from Moscow. Strategic stability in South Asia continued to be the main concern of Pakistan's decision-makers, who feared that the continuity of Indo-Russian ties, and especially the sales of sophisticated military hardware to India, would affect the precarious military balance between Pakistan and India. Immediately in 1992, the first year of the existence of the Russian Federation, Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ahmad Ali and the Foreign Secretary Akram Zaki visited Moscow in order to voice Pakistan's concerns and to allay Russian fears over Pakistan's support of militant insurgency in the region and even on Russian territory; and this message was repeated when Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Moscow in 1999.²⁶ The prospects of economic cooperation were also discussed and a joint commission to promote trade and economic cooperation between the two countries was formed in 1999. Although this was regarded as a sign of a new beginning, no major breakthrough followed that could ease the historical burden in the relationship.

²³ A. Z. Hilali, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Bitter Cold War & Better Today," *The Diplomatic Insight* 5, no. 6 (2012): 17–18.

²⁴ Hussain, "Pak-Russia Relations."

²⁵ Mohammad Farooq Afzal, "Pakistan-Russian Relations warm up," *Business Recorder*, June 12, 2013, <http://www.brecorder.com/supplements/88/1269401/>.

²⁶ Zahid Anwar, "Pakistan-Russia Relations in the Regional and Global Context," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Analyst*, June 30, 2004, <http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/2237>.

Relations After 9/11

Autumn 2001 became a turning point: Pakistan's volte-face in its policy on Afghanistan and its participation in the War on Terror removed a major irritant between Russia and Pakistan. Russia had been quite uncomfortable with Pakistan's support of the Taliban, and all this was reversed in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan. In addition to Afghanistan and the Taliban, Moscow's interests specifically focused on issues of terrorism, drug trafficking and the non-proliferation of nuclear materials (neither Pakistan nor India have joined the non-proliferation regime established in the NPT of 1968). In February 2003, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow and categorically declared that Pakistan regarded Chechnya as Russia's internal problem and that it had no role whatsoever in encouraging or sponsoring Islamist networks in Central Asia or any areas of Russia. Although neighboring Afghanistan was a concern in Pakistan, its main interest in relations with Russia continued to relate to strategic stability in South Asia and the prospects of trade and economic cooperation between the two countries.²⁷ This order of priorities was Islamabad's own but was certainly facilitated by the presence of the U.S. and NATO-led forces in Afghanistan.

Musharraf's visit paved the way for more institutionalized cooperation between the two countries. Joint Working Groups on the issues of counter-terrorism, strategic stability, and economic and cultural cooperation were established. In April 2007 Mikhail Fradkov was the first Russian Prime Minister to visit Pakistan. President Asif Ali Zardari visited Russia in 2011 and invited President Vladimir Putin to Pakistan. Putin's visit to Islamabad, planned for early October 2012, was cancelled at the last moment, and the event was immediately interpreted as a major setback in the attempts to improve relations. Moscow sent foreign minister Lavrov to assure Pakistan that the visit had been merely postponed because of scheduling issues.²⁸ High-level visits of both Pakistani and Russian military and civil officials continued throughout 2013 and after. General Asif Kayani, the commander-

²⁷ Mohammad Faheem Khattak, "Pakistan-Russia Relations since 9/11: Implications for Pakistan's Security," (master's thesis, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 2011).

²⁸ "Lavrov Stresses Ties With Pakistan After Putin Cancels Visit," *The Moscow Times*, October 5, 2012, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/lavrov-stresses-ties-with-pakistan-after-putin-cancels-visit/469309.html>.

in-chief of Pakistan's army, visited Moscow twice and Russian military and Air Chiefs paid visits to Islamabad. However, this did not signal any breakthrough in the relations between Russia and Pakistan.²⁹

Pakistan facilitated Russia's entry into the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), and Russia reciprocated by helping Pakistan to gain observer-status (and later in 2014 to start accession procedures to full membership) in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).³⁰ Russia also agreed to the re-export of 150 engines of JF-17 planes from China to Pakistan and helped Pakistan in launching a communication satellite, Badar 11.³¹ Russia has also signed a memorandum of understanding on the upgrading of a major steel mill in Pakistan, and it has expressed interest in the new strategic energy pipelines, of which the Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India gas pipeline (TAPI) and the Iran–Pakistan–India gas pipeline (IPI) are major examples. All this has meant that Russia's annual trade with Pakistan has grown to half a billion dollars. Simultaneously, Russia has left relations with Islamabad in the cold by continuing to sell highly sophisticated military hardware to India and by supporting India's case for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.³²

It is against the background of a long period of "no breakthrough" that the visit of Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu in Islamabad on November 21, 2014, and the signing of a deal on military cooperation were hailed as a "milestone development" by Pakistan's Ministry of Defense.³³ The agreement provides for the exchange of information on politico-military issues, cooperation in promoting international security, an intensification of counter-terrorism and arms-control activities, the strengthening of collaboration in various military fields, and sharing experiences in peace-keeping operations. Joint efforts in fighting international terrorism and drug

²⁹ Zahid Ali Khan, "New Trends in Pak-Russian Relations since 9/11," *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan* 48, no. 2 (2011).

³⁰ Asif Manzoor, "Pakistan Russia Relations in the Post-Cold War Era," (master's thesis, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad, 2014). The accession process for Pakistan's membership in the SCO started at the organization's summit in Ufa on July 10, 2015.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Pakistan, Russia ink milestone defence pact," *The News*, November 21, 2014, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-34246-Pakistan-Russia-ink-milestone-defence-pact>. The agreement also includes cooperation in the spheres of education and culture, as well as in a variety of scientific fields (medicine, topography, hydrography, etc.).

trafficking were also discussed.³⁴ The announcement by Shoigu confirming that “during the meeting, we agreed that bilateral military cooperation should have a great practical focus and contribute to increasing combat efficiency of our armed forces” was met with much appreciation in Islamabad.³⁵ Reportedly, Russia gave its “political approval” to a deal to sell twenty MI-35 helicopters to Pakistan.³⁶

The significance ascribed to this new opening in Pakistan illustrates the great importance attached to cooperation in the military sector in this country. These developments also show how change in Pakistan-Russia relations reflects wider changes in world politics. Since 2014, the deterioration of Russia’s relations with Western states because of the crisis in Ukraine and the economic sanctions posed against it have alienated Russia from the Western liberal world order. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the triumph of this order had been made manifest in the foreign policy and international relations debates that claimed that the “end of history” (that is, the coming of Western liberal democracy and a downplaying of all differences making matters political) and “complex interdependence” were now the order of the day.³⁷ In South Asia, specifically, it is India’s increasing collaboration with Western states—its move closer to the West through its multi-billion-dollar arms deal with a number of Western countries, its deals on civilian nuclear cooperation, and the development of a strategic partnership with the U.S.—which has pushed Russia to re-evaluate its policies and to move closer to Pakistan, which is a crucial player in the “end-game” in Afghanistan.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Baqir Sajjad Syed, “Pakistan, Russia sign landmark defence cooperation agreement,” *Dawn*, November 21, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1145875>.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ These are the broad political implications of the debates which, in research literature, crystallize in works such as Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (Toronto: Maxwell, 1992) and Joseph S. Nye Jr. “What New World Order?,” *Foreign Affairs* 71, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 83–96.

Future Prospects

From Russia's perspective the possibility to exchange information and intelligence with Pakistan is extremely important to its prospects for controlling the processes shaping the region. Russia has repeatedly voiced its anxieties to Islamabad about the possible chaos that threatens to destabilize the borders of Central Asian regimes and also spill across the southern borders of Russia. These concerns were summarized by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey A. Ryabkov when he visited Pakistan on January 24, 2011:

“The ultimate objective of Pakistan and the Russian Federation is to combat the growing menace of terrorism and militancy, and to sabotage the nexus between transnational terrorist organizations. The transnational militant organizations have been undermining both states' internal security. The link among al-Qaeda, Afghan Taliban, Tehrik-i-Taliban, the Islamic movement of Uzbekistan and militants from the North Caucasus and other Muslim Russian regions has been devastating and destabilizing for both Pakistan and Russian Federation.”³⁸

Pakistan, too, is deeply concerned over the developments on its own border with Afghanistan—the Durand line, which even without the current pressures is extremely problematic. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) movement has been fighting Pakistani armed forces in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) since 2007, and the erosion of the writ of the Pakistani state in the tribal areas adjacent to Afghanistan keeps Islamabad on alert. Pakistani military forces have launched a major military operation, *Zarb-e-Azb*, in these areas with the stated goal of eliminating all those terrorist groups fighting against the Pakistani state. Thus, whilst Pakistan is fighting for the unity of its own state, it is also working to prevent the kind of anarchy (the “Coming Anarchy”)³⁹ that, within the liberal world order, is seen to result from a decay of state structures in many non-Western parts of the world and prepare breeding grounds for terrorism. At the same time the border is far too much of a political and ethnic mosaic, and the inter-state relations in the region too conflicted, for any consistent and all-encompassing front against militant insurgency to develop. The strong reactions of the

³⁸ Cited in Khan, “New Trends in Pak-Russian Relations.”

³⁹ Robert D. Kaplan, “The Coming Anarchy,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 273, no. 2 (February 1994): 44–77.

Pakistani government against the U.S. drone strikes in its western regions illustrate policies that emphasize formal sovereignty; yet, they also show just how much the Pakistani government needs the support of the large populations living in the north-western regions and the wide stretch of land along the border with Afghanistan. Because it is highly problematic for Pakistan to participate in the U.S.-led global war against terrorism on its own territory, its fight against the anarchy in which the self-image of the Western liberal order crumbles cannot but be fraught with contradiction.

Due to this very complex border problematique, any development in Afghanistan will immediately impact the political and ethnic mosaic in the unsettled border areas of Pakistan and stir the pieces into the form of a new puzzle. The revival of the Pashtunistan issue between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been one of the perennial problems for Pakistani leaders. If the Taliban were to achieve victory in Afghanistan, the TTP, which already claims the border areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan, would be further emboldened: a separate enclave along the border could be demanded, thereby also reviving the dispute over an independent Pashtunistan. Other possible courses of development are the maintenance of the status quo; the eruption of a full-scale civil war between the contending groups, or at the least a form of prolonged chaos; and the reaching of an agreement over a broad-based power-sharing formula amongst the contending groups. Each of the above alternative developments has different implications for Afghanistan and the wider Central Asian region, and also for Pakistan-Russia relations.⁴⁰

The enthusiastic turnout of voters in the presidential elections in Afghanistan in 2014 gives hope that perhaps the status quo can hold even after the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO-led forces from Afghanistan. In September 2014, Ashraf Ghani, the new president of Afghanistan following these elections, agreed to the Bilateral Security Assistance Pact with the U.S. which his predecessor Hamid Karzai had been reluctant to sign. President Ghani has visited Pakistan to seek improved relations and he has undertaken an initiative to bring the Taliban into negotiations. However, the maintenance of the status quo seems unlikely in the case of the Western military almost entirely (leaving hundreds rather than thousands of troops in place) withdrawing from the country. The Afghan National Army would be

⁴⁰ Seth G. Jones and Keith Crane, "Afghanistan After the Drawdown," *Council on Foreign Relations*, Special Report no. 67 (November 2013).

unlikely to withstand the onslaught of Taliban insurgents for a longer period of time. The regime may hold for some time; but it would eventually start to crumble as a result of desertions from the national army and shrinking international support.

A Taliban victory would spell disaster for the region as it would revive fears in Russia, China, the Central Asian states, India, Iran, and Pakistan over the potential instability of their borders. Although the Taliban are less likely to spread beyond Afghan borders out of fear of international reaction, their victory within the country would create a backlash from other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. This situation would be very difficult for the Taliban to handle and, therefore, the third possible scenario for future developments is the re-eruption of civil war between the major ethnic groups of Afghanistan. These groups would seek the help of their international supporters, possibly recreating the scenario of the 1990s when Pakistan was supporting Pashtun groups and Tajik, Hazaras and Uzbeks were being supported by India, Russia, the Central Asian states, and Iran. A new civil war could also bring about the balkanization of Afghanistan and lead to the creation of separate ethnic enclaves. The fourth possibility for the future would be that Afghanistan's ethnic groups could devise some broad power-sharing formula amongst themselves without involving outside parties. Such a solution could not only bring peace to Afghanistan but also stabilize the wider region. However, when power-sharing formulas are incomplete and do not work to the satisfaction of all parties, the only option that remains for those opposing the regime is to move across the borders and start preparing a new round in the conflict. This is a common pattern in many states of the region and can only be prevented if Afghanistan grows to become a strong state, both internally as well as externally. Today, just as much as it was in the wake of 9/11/2001, this is an unachievable mission if foreign forces are not prepared to sustain the Afghan state militarily and economically.

Conclusion

At present the relationship between Pakistan and Russia is no longer hostile for ideological reasons that could be perceived as threatening Pakistan from the inside and forcing it to crumble along its land borders. On the contrary, a

convergence of interests in respect to Afghanistan and its potentially destabilizing effects on Central Asia and parts of southern Russia has induced Russia and Pakistan to cooperate with each other. However, the fact that substantive cooperation has only recently developed despite its preparation at the declaratory level over the years, tells us that Russia continues to consider its policies towards Pakistan in relation to its policies with other countries and, especially, its relations with India. If India increasingly integrates into the world order of the Western states, its strategic partnership with Russia will relatively come to weigh less, and Russia in turn will be willing to explore new markets in the region and to look for them also in Pakistan. The fact that China also fears the possible spillover effect of Islamic militancy in Afghanistan that could destabilize its already potentially restive Xinjiang region may further promote Pakistan-Russia cooperation in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The Chinese or “Sinic” world order is expanding in Central and South Asia, and the practical implications of this process depend on how this order takes shape within China’s internal discourses: whether or not China should act as a “strong state,” and whether it should follow a pragmatic policy or, rather, more aggressively pursue a nationalist policy.⁴¹ Indic and Islamic world orders are also waxing in the region and can be similarly identified through the identity debates that prescribe alternative visions of the world for action (for different foreign policy strategies).⁴² Thus, while the Western withdrawal means that the influence of the Western liberal world order enjoys fewer prospects in the region, its retreat is not due to radicalized militant Islam. Although Afghanistan is the pivotal point of a deeply “civilizational” struggle, the impacts of Islamic, Indic and Sinic culture will be increasingly felt in the economies and everyday lives in the region quite independently of such a struggle. In this setting, Russia’s possibilities to gain influence depend on its collaboration with other countries and its ability to connect with especially the Islamic, Indic, and Sinic world orders (arguably, it is already connected with the Western liberal order). These orders, as

⁴¹ Edwin O. Reischaur, “The Sinic World in Perspective,” *Foreign Affairs* 52, no. 2 (January 1974): 341–48; Suisheng Zhao, “Chinese intellectual’s Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s,” *The China Quarterly*, no. 152 (December 1997): 725–45; Wang Jisi, “China’s Changing role in Asia,” *The Atlantic Council of the United States*, January 2004.

⁴² Amin, “World orders in Central Asia.”

already emphasized, are not given entities; rather, they are sets of practices embodied in action and discourse.

One such discourse is the “Clash of Civilizations,” which together with those already mentioned (and many others not mentioned) are symbolic representations of the Western liberal world order.⁴³ We conclude this chapter by calling attention to the practical implications of this concept which basically puts traditional realist “struggle for power” in the frame of “culture.” Although the conflict between Islamic religious forces and secular (mostly authoritarian) governments in Central and South Asia is very much a “clash” of “civilizational” proportions, it is far from being a conflict between cultural entities with distinct boundaries. Under present circumstances when the Taliban, its associates and, more recently, also the Islamic State is preparing to strengthen their positions in Afghanistan, images like this can obstruct our identification of real problems. The question for the coming years is whether the fear of transnational militant Islam, which in recent years has been on the rise in the region of our focus due to the developments especially in northern Afghanistan, can bring about a broad-based collaboration against these specific forms of Islam. Such a “new great game” puts Pakistan in a pivotal position and requires wise policies which avoid treating different groups as simply “enemies.” Unless such a “front” can be built on the ground, any international cooperation on it remains ineffective. Concerning the role of Russia specifically, the policies which deepen the conflict between Pakistan and India can best be kept under control if “multipolarity”⁴⁴ as a basis of communication is chosen from amongst the many discourses articulating the Western liberal order.

⁴³ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and Remaking of World Order* (London: Simon & Shuster, 1996).

⁴⁴ “Multipolarity” is a term that provides a nexus between Russian foreign policy discourse and the realist discourse in the study of International Relations which developed largely in the decades following World War II in reflection of the interests of the U.S. as a “rising Power.” More recently, multipolarity has been discussed in J. J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001).