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Pakistan – Russia Relations: The Chinese Link

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Abstract

The trajectory of Pakistan–Russia relations has historically been shaped by Cold War dynamics, with Pakistan leaning toward the United States while Russia fostered close ties with India. However, in the post–Cold War and especially post–9/11 era, significant transformations have occurred in the strategic calculus of both states. The growing influence of China as a global power has emerged as a pivotal factor in reshaping Pakistan–Russia relations. China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has not only deepened Sino-Pakistan cooperation but also created avenues for Moscow to seek integration with regional connectivity projects. Russia’s interest in balancing India’s tilt toward the United States, its desire to expand its role in Eurasia, and Pakistan’s search for diversified partnerships beyond Washington have facilitated a pragmatic rapprochement. This study critically examines the “Chinese link” as the key catalyst in the evolving Pakistan–Russia partnership, analyzing its implications for regional security, energy cooperation, and the emerging multipolar order in Asia.

Keywords: Pakistan–Russia Relations; China Factor; Sino-Pakistan Strategic Partnership; CPEC; Eurasian Geopolitics; Multipolarity; South Asia Security; Belt and Road Initiative

"С волками жить - по-волчьи выть"

"When you live with wolves, you have to howl like a wolf."

Goes a Russian proverb attributed to Nikita Sergeyevich Khrushchev, former Prime Minister of Soviet Union. For Pakistan such must be the policy in dealing with post-Soviet Union Russia. The article will implore the Russian proverb for Russo-Pakistan relations by evaluating the works of Alexander Dugin and critically look through China Pakistan Relations, to emphasize that the recent Russian interest in Pakistan is only due to CPEC.

Alexander Dugin: Putin’s Rasputin

Famously dubbed as Putin's Rasputin philosopher [Alexander Dugin](#) made headlines when his daughter was [assassinated](#) by a bomb planted in their car. [The aghast face of a father](#) –who probably switched cars, and was initially believed to be the main target –made a very captivating image.

But Dugin, has been in highlights even before that. He is a philosopher of Heideggerian descent, an ultra nationalist, with works like *Foundations of Geopolitics*, where he outlines strategies for Russia to gain over the lost Soviet territories. His theories are rooted in tradition, orthodoxy and multipolarity. His fourth political theory finds a place in the world of [Post Democracy](#) and [Why we hate Politics](#). He creates a new political theory for when Marxism, socialism, fascism and Liberalism has failed everyone. For his contribution, Dugin asks why the world doesn't toast in jubilation over his discovery of a new political order. No cheers yet.

He finds a follower in form of Dr. Michael Miller, who [tries to bring Dugin as a serious philosopher to world](#), but a reading of Dugin's work through a Pakistani's eyes bring merit to the label of [fascist ideologue](#) ascribed to him. Dugin's Russo-centric [Eurasian Mission](#) outlines its relationship with neighbouring countries into three great spaces:

- Countries of CIS like Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan
- Great space of Continental Islam that include Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan Pakistan
- 3rd great space of Hindustan which Dugin underscores as a self-sufficient civilization zone

It's worth noting the language Dugin uses for India and he also looks forward to a Moscow-Tehran cooperation that will have two purposes:

- An access to warm water ports
- Political and religious reorganisation of Muslim countries of CIS and Pakistan and Afghanistan

Dugin believes Iran's influence can turn Pakistan - Afghanistan area according to Russian needs ([Eurasian Mission](#), p 49). Such words could only be an ideologue's manifesto.

In a work entitled [The Religious factor in Russia's Foreign Policy](#), Alicja Curanovic calls Dugin the number one proponent of Russian new Eurasianism who looks at everything with the religious bent as not every religion and not every orthodoxy is according to Dugin's taste. Dugin classifies Muslim countries into five categories:

- Wahabism (Saudi Arabia)
- Enlightened Islam (Pakistan and Turkey)
- Mystic Shiitism (Iran)
- Islamic socialism (Saddam's Iraq and Libya)
- Continental Islam (Tatarstan)

In Dugin's Eurasian vision Wahabism and enlightened Islam does not play any role while in the diplomatic arena Dugin divides countries into four labels:

- Well known neighbours (Post Soviet Muslim countries)
- Strategic partners (Iran and Turkey)
- Favourites (Malaysia and Indonesia)
- Trouble makers (Pakistan and Afghanistan)

Although Dugin calls Turkey a strategic partner, he despises the Enlightened Islam that is purports. But in recent times his dislike for Erdogan peaked after the dismissal of Assad's regime in Syria and he the [warned](#) Erdogan of consequences of going against Russia and Iran, which few months later is becoming true as there is rise of anti-Erdogan protests in Turkey.

Pakistan along with Afghanistan has always been a source of menace for Russia, Dugin claims and adds that Pakistan has been harbouring Muslim extremists. [At least Pakistan has done one great thing in post cold war world that is to combine US and Russia in their baseless accusations against Pakistan.]

Pakistan since its independence took a geopolitical choice of aligning with United States, which culminated in fall of USSR. Reading Dugin stresses the fact that Pakistan's role in this debacle is a hurdle for a sustainable relationship. And has been highlighted by other [authors](#) as well. In present times, it is worth noting what brings Russia to have a strategic relationship with Pakistan is its ally, China.

China – Pakistan Relations

Pakistan became a friendly country on the directive of Mao in 1951 and since then despite Pakistan's association with US, the relations haven't faltered. In 1966, the Karakoram Highway connected Xinjiang to Gilgit Pakistan, China provided aid and developed heavy industry in Taxila. China was first to side with Pakistan, soon after its admission in United Nations in 1971. And since then, strategic, economic and diplomatic ties have kept growing.

[CPEC](#) touted by Premier Xi Jinping in 2013 now brings billion of dollars of investment in Pakistan with its plan of connecting Gwadar to Kashghar that covers 3000kms. The plan includes laying of road, oil pipeline and railway tracks. Assistance in building information network, energy sector, industries and agriculture

China in Russo-Pakistan relations

In 2024, Russia and China have celebrated seventy-five years of diplomacy. Although there has been past disputes, and they were no formal allies, the relationship of Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin in recent times see a [deeper strategic connection](#). Despite the fact that [EU](#) urges China to stop helping Russia, a Russian warship has visited the Chinese port of [Qingdao](#), that sets a landmark in Sino-Russia relations despite its historical [distrust](#).

As this [article](#) stipulates, the long history of Pakistan's standing with United States is too deeper to make Russia invest whole heartedly in Pakistan and also Russia would not want to disrupt its Indian Market. But the recent SCO summit in Pakistan has welcomed a second largest delegation of Russia after China. There was agreement to further strengthen [bilateral ties](#). Earlier Russia also bid to support Pakistan's membership in [BRICs](#).

A [research institute](#) in Islamabad had a round table on Pakistan Russia relations where important thinkers of two countries deliberated on various diplomatic, educational and military connectivity matters between the two countries. But concluded that Pakistan should maintain Foreign Relations with equal footing with Russia and US. Apriori, that can never be the case.

This article emphasize that the reason Russia is approaching Pakistan is for the bread crumbs China is laying in the region. It sees Pakistan sceptically anyway. The interest of Russia in

Pakistan is the Chinese influence of its Belt and Road initiative deep within whole Asia and parts of Africa. And its aim is to benefit in resources involved in Sino-Pak affiliation.

Recently a delegation of [the Institute of China and Contemporary Asia of the Russian Academy of Sciences](#) was in Islamabad, where it visited leading think tanks and institutes like Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Strategic Vision Institute, National Institute of Maritime Affairs, National Defense University and Quaid-i-Azam University. The visit hallmarks the shifting political and intellectual interest of Russia in Pakistan.

Alexander Vorobyov also highlight Pakistan's [deep association with China](#) and the CPEC bounties and make it a probable reason for Russia's cordial relation with Pakistan despite the shared ambivalent history.

Conclusion

Pakistan needs to track its relation with Russia with cautious diplomacy as the distrust of Pakistan by Russian government and people, goes very deep, as they still link Pakistan with US and the disintegration of USSR. The only reason we are seeing a Russian diplomatic influx is because of Pakistan's association with China and the future benefits of CPEC. CPEC that will connect China through road and infrastructure deep into Asia and parts of Africa. Russia is trying to capitalize on this factor although Sino-Russian history is also written in distrust.

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