



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Pakistan–Russia Relations: Kashmir and the Primakov Doctrine**

**Sheila Khalid**

Ph. D Scholar, School of Politics and International Relations, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan

| PAPER INFO  | ABSTRACT  |
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| <p><b>Received:</b><br/>March 25, 2022</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b><br/>June 20, 2022</p> <p><b>Online:</b><br/>June 22, 2022</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b><br/>Balancing,<br/>BRICS,<br/>Geopolitics,<br/>Kashmir,<br/>Primakov Doctrine,<br/>Ukraine</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b><br/>sf.ktk92@gmail.com</p> | <p>The objective of this study was to analyze Pakistan-Russia relations in the specific context of the Kashmir dispute. The question asked is whether Russia will change its pro-India position on Kashmir. Pakistan and Russia's relations have been on a positive trajectory since 2010. Their military ties have strengthened, and Russia has acknowledged Pakistan as an essential actor in regional issues. Pakistan has declared neutrality on Russia's actions, such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Primary sources such as interviews with policy experts have been used and the available literature. Document analysis has also been carried out. Pakistan should not expect Russia to change its pro-India position on Kashmir but it should also continue balancing itself against India by maintaining relations with Russia.</p> |

**Introduction**

Russia and Pakistan's relations have been on a positive trajectory since 2010. There is a convergence of interests on essential issues such as the war on terrorism and military ties (Khan, 2021). However, regardless of the many positive milestones achieved by Pakistan and Russia, there are several regional issues where the perception is that Russia will not damage its relationship with India at any cost. One regional issue is identified in the changing global scenario that includes the United States' withdrawal from Afghanistan, the rise of China and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The question is asked if Pakistan can ever have a stronger position compared to India in Russia's foreign policy calculus: the Kashmir dispute.

**Literature Review**

Since 2010, there have been many advances in Pakistan-Russia relations, highlighted by joint military exercises, joint anti-terrorism drills and an uptick in trade. The Kashmir dispute is the only issue where Russia does not change her pro-India position. In 2019 India wanted to bring up the Pulwama issue in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), of which both India and Pakistan had attained membership. Russia and China declined and suggested that the matter be resolved bilaterally. Pakistan saw this as a sign of its developing relationship with Russia, but then the latter voted in favour of an Indian-sponsored move in the United Nations Security Council to declare the head of Jaish-e-Muhammad an international terrorist. This could be construed as a Russian balancing role between Pakistan and India (Khan, 2021).

Despite Russia maintaining a relationship with both Pakistan and India, a continuity in Russia's position over Kashmir has been identified. Besides a few changes over a short

period, Russia has followed a pro-India line. The changes occurred in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, where the new Russia found itself in a place of instability and uncertainty regarding its exact position in the international arena. In addition, domestically, there were competing ideologies that would come to influence its Kashmir policy, such as being pro-Western or focusing on the near-abroad (Mahapatra, 2004).

The Soviet Union, until 1951, maintained indifference towards the Kashmir issue. It even abstained from voting on the UN resolution calling for a plebiscite. After the arrival of Nikita Khrushchev into power, the Soviet Union showed an interest in India. The UN resolutions began to be depicted as Western interference in the matters between two Third World countries, and Pakistan's military pacts with the west were publicized. Only during the 1965 conflict did the official Russian media refer to Kashmir as a dispute, thus for the first time acknowledging Pakistan's position (Naik, 1968).

Analyzing Russian foreign policy is necessary to understand Russia's position on Kashmir. The underlying blueprint of Russian foreign policy is the Primakov Doctrine, named after former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov. The key elements are that a unipolar order led by the United States is unacceptable to Russia. Instead, the aim should shift towards a multipolar order managed by significant powers as identified by Russia: itself, China, India and even the United States. The argument favoring multipolarity was that it would provide checks and balances on unilateral and arbitrary uses of power by the hegemon (Rumer, 2019).

The Primakov Doctrine explains Russia's position over Kashmir and the current Ukraine crisis. As far back as 1997, Primakov told his counterparts that Nato's admission of Ukraine would cross a "red line". In the 2000s, Russia's opposition became more vocal when Ukraine and Georgia's membership bids became more publicized. Western states saw this as an attempt by Russia to assert its influence over their alliance-making and did not heed Russia's demands. (Charap, 2022). Regarding Ukraine, in line with India's security interests which involve maintaining positive relations with Russia to counterbalancing Chinese hegemony in the region, it has not condemned Russia's actions (Roy, 2022).

India's United Nations Security Council abstention over the Ukraine crisis is merely a continuation of its policy in this regard. In March 2014, India abstained in the vote on the United Nations General Assembly resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine after Russia annexed Crimea (Topychkanov, 2014).

Crimea has invited comparisons with Kashmir, and it has been suggested that Russia should apply the same principles to its position over the Kashmir dispute as it has to Crimea. The people's will through a plebiscite should be respected. However, Russia has not appreciated this (Korybko, 2019).

Russia's position over Kashmir can be traced to India's importance in its Foreign Policy Concept Papers. These are documents produced regularly by the Russian Ministry of External Affairs and provide an insight into the workings of Russian foreign policy. The running theme is the shifting world order towards multipolarity and the rejection of a unipolar one.

The Concept Papers serve as markers of Russia's evolving understanding of international relations and a consistent reminder of its ambition to regain international stature. In addition, while Russia and the West have identified common challenges in international affairs, the nature of the problems, their causes and approaches to resolving them are differently understood, preventing true cooperative partnership between the two sides (Monaghan, 2013).

The available Foreign Policy Concept Papers from 2008, 2013 and 2016 have been selected, and in all three, India is seen as a valuable partner in the emerging multipolar order, while Pakistan is only mentioned in the context of bases of international terrorism. It is important to note that the 2013 and 2016 Foreign Policy Concept Papers do not reflect the uptick in Russia-Pakistan relations since 2010.

### **India's Importance rooted in Russian History**

In 1923, Vladimir Lenin had a clear idea as to which countries would lead the world. "In the last analysis, the outcome of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China, etc., account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe. And during the past few years, it is this majority that has been drawn into the struggle for emancipation with extraordinary rapidity, so that in this respect there cannot be the slightest doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be. In this sense, the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured" (Lenin, 1923).

While Lenin had the supremacy of socialism in mind, today, Russia is pushing toward a multipolar world in cooperation with India and China. From an Indian perspective, there are convergences on many issues regarding India, Russia and China. These include support for an enhanced and meaningful role for the UN, condemnation of NATO's actions in Kosovo, being sensitive to violations of national sovereignty, for Russia, its Chechnya, China, Taiwan and India claims sovereignty over the disputed region of Kashmir, and to Islamic threats as each country has a sizeable Muslim population and neighbouring Muslim countries, as well as support for multilateral institutions such as BRICS, the SCO, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Alam, 2019).

### **The Primakov Doctrine**

Named after former Foreign Minister Yevgeny Primakov, the Primakov Doctrine posits that a unipolar world dominated by the United States is unacceptable to Russia. It offers the following principles for Russian foreign policy: Russia should strive toward a multipolar world managed by a concert of major powers that can counterbalance U.S. unilateral power; Russia should insist on its primacy in the post-Soviet space and lead integration in that region. Partnership with China in this regard is thus fundamental. Russia should also oppose NATO expansionism. These principles are now the pillars of Russian Foreign Policy (Kainikara, 2019 ; Rumer, 2019).

This doctrine is the core of Russian Foreign Policy and was defined in the aftermath of NATO's bombing of Belgrade during the Balkan Wars. Before that, Russian Foreign Policy had veered towards the West, in line with Mikhail Gorbachev's policy. However, once it was relayed to the Foreign Minister Primakov that NATO planned to bomb Serbia in March 1999, he canceled his visit to Washington in mid-air and went back to Moscow in protest. (Rumer, 2019) The Primakov Doctrine is also credited with laying the foundation for creating the multilateral groupings of RIC (Russia-India-China) and, subsequently, BRICS (Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa) (Simha 2015).

### **Pakistan and India in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept Papers**

In the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept Paper, India comes across as a strategic partner while Pakistan is mentioned in a cluster of countries with which Russia would like to improve its relations. Russia affirms that an essential track of its foreign policy in Asia involves friendly relations with India and China. "While deepening strategic partnership with India, Russia keeps by its principle aimed at strengthening interaction on topical international issues and comprehensive strengthening of the mutually advantageous

bilateral ties on all fronts, particularly in ensuring a substantial growth in the trade and economic sphere" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2008).

Pakistan is merely mentioned amongst a cluster of Muslim states. "Russia intends to further develop its relations with Turkey, Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Libya, Pakistan and other leading regional States in bilateral and multilateral formats." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2008).

Now 2010 onwards, there was a marked difference in Russia's approach to Pakistan, which reflected the changing geopolitical scenario. In early 2010, Russia organized a four-nation summit in Moscow on Afghanistan that involved Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan but not India. In 2011, Army Chief General Ashfaq Kayani visited Moscow and tried to convince Russia to reconsider its policy of proscribing arms sales to Pakistan. This was followed by Pakistan Air Chief Marshal Tahir Rafiq Butt's visit in August 2012 and Russian Air Chief Viktor Bondarev's reciprocal visit to Islamabad in April 2013. Finally, despite India's protests, Moscow lifted the arms embargo on Pakistan (Khan, 2021).

In the 2013 Foreign Policy Concept, Pakistan is not mentioned once despite the uptick in Russia and Pakistan relations. At the same time, India is seen as a foreign policy priority and a key player in the emerging multipolar order, including China. Russia reiterated how it is "committed to strengthening privileged strategic partnership with India, improving collaboration on relevant international issues" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2013, para. 81).

As noted in Monaghan (2013, p.5), the 2013 Concept Paper prominently features regional groupings of which significant emphasis is given to BRICS. In fact Russia published a separate concept of its participation in the BRICS to relay its importance (Kremlin, 2013).

In November 2014, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu visited Pakistan in a groundbreaking development and signed a defense cooperation agreement. In 2015, Pakistan Army Chief Raheel Sharif visited Moscow; three months later, Russia signed a deal for Pakistan to purchase Mi-35M Hind-E assault helicopters. In another significant development, in September 2016, Russia and Pakistan conducted their first major joint military exercise (Khan, 2021).

However, none of these developments are mentioned in the 2016 Foreign Policy Concept Paper. India is mentioned multiple times concerning its role in a multipolar order and Russia's extraordinary commitment to it "Russia is committed to further strengthening its special privileged partnership with the Republic of India based on shared foreign policy priorities, historical friendship and deep mutual trust, as well as strengthening cooperation on urgent international issues." (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, para. 85)

Despite all the milestones achieved, Pakistan is only mentioned once. That too, unflatteringly, as a potential base for Islamic State. "The global terrorist threat has reached a new high with the emergence of the Islamic State international terrorist organization and similar groups that have descended to an unprecedented level of cruelty in their violence. They aspire to create their own state and seek to consolidate their influence on a territory stretching from the shores of the Atlantic Ocean to Pakistan" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2016, para. 15).

Therefore, it is clear that no matter what milestones are achieved in relations between Russia and Pakistan, these are not adequately expressed in the Foreign Policy

Concept Papers. In addition, Russia's commitment to maintaining its relationship with India is more than evident.

### **The Soviet Position on Kashmir**

The Soviet Union, until 1951 cultivated an indifferent attitude towards the Kashmir issue, so much so that it even abstained from voting on the UN resolution calling for a plebiscite. (Naik, 1968, p. 51) When Russian media promoted the idea that Western powers planned on encircling the Soviet Union with Kashmir as one position, did the Soviets take some interest. Even then, they took no sides and demanded that the issue be resolved between India and Pakistan. After Stalin died in 1953 and the arrival of Khrushchev, the Soviet Union showed an interest in India. The UN resolutions began to be painted as Anglo-American interference in the matters between two Third World countries, and Pakistan's military pacts with the West were highlighted (Naik, 1968).

Finally, in December 1955, when a team of Russian officials, including Khrushchev, visited Srinagar, the Soviet pro-India policy on Kashmir was announced. It was painted as a reaction to the imperialist designs of the Anglo-American powers, which were only claiming to help Pakistan but just wanted to target the Soviet Union by creating military bases (Naik, 1968).

Thus the unconditional support for India in the United Nations began, and the Soviet Union went on to veto any resolution calling for a plebiscite. Kashmir, according to the Soviet Union, was an integral part of India. Only during the 1965 conflict did the official Russian media refer to Kashmir as a dispute, thus acknowledging Pakistan's position for the first time (Naik, 1968).

And in 1966, it was through the Soviet Union's good offices that the Tashkent Declaration between India and Pakistan came about. After this declaration, the Soviet position on Kashmir was the following: Kashmir under Indian control should belong to India and Kashmir under Pakistani control should continue with Pakistan (Naik, 1968).

### **Russian Position in 1992**

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a qualitative shift on the Kashmir issue was noticed. During his visit to Pakistan in December 1991, Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi indicated a significant change in the Russian stand on the Kashmir question when he said that the right of self-determination of the Kashmiri people should be decided under the United Nations auspices and by its resolutions.

The Russia-Pakistan Joint Communiqué issued on 22nd December 1991 declared, "The Russian side acknowledge Pakistani position and expressed the hope that the issue would be resolved peacefully through negotiations between Pakistan and India on the basis of international agreements" (Mahapatra, 2004). This was clearly against the Indian stand on the Kashmir issue. This position was also against the provisions of the Shimla agreement. Thus, by abandoning the former Soviet Union's stand that Kashmir was an integral part of India, Vice President Rutskoi reciprocated Pakistan's decision to accord diplomatic recognition to Russia and Central Asian Republics. Vice President Rutskoi came to discuss the Afghan situation in the wake of Russian troops withdrawal to discuss the release of Russian soldiers who were taken prisoner by Hikmatyar's outfit. Soon after Rutskoi's visit, Russia's spokesperson, in a complete departure from the Soviet position that Kashmir was an integral part of India, stated that Russia believed that Kashmir was an outstanding dispute between India and Pakistan and that the dispute needed to be peacefully resolved by the two countries (Khattak, personal communication, May 27, 2020)

## **Pulwama Crisis**

Following a suicide bomb attack in Indian Occupied Kashmir in February 2019, in which Indian troops in Pulwama were killed, Indian and Pakistani air forces exchanged fire after India violated Pakistani sovereignty. Barring China, no other country condemned this violation (Karamat, 2019, p. 4) The Pulwama attack was condemned by the United Nations and Russia voted in favour of an Indian-sponsored move in the United Nations Security Council to declare the head of Jaish-e-Muhammad an international terrorist (Khan, 2021).

## **The BJP and Kashmir**

In August 2019, the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government ended Jammu and Kashmir's semi-autonomous status under the constitution's Article 370 and redrew the state's internal boundaries. New Delhi also revoked the constitution's Article 35A, which meant that non-permanent residents from all over India would be allowed to own immovable property, vote in or contest elections in the state, and seek employment in local government. Early in 2020, the government passed a new domicile law, allowing Indian citizens from elsewhere in the country to become permanent residents of Jammu and Kashmir for the first time. In essence, the BJP paved the way to change the region's religious and ethnic makeup, which has till now been predominantly Muslim. In other moves, the BJP removed some Muslims from the local government (Raising the Stakes in Jammu and Kashmir, 2021).

Russia's reaction to this involved being the first P-5 country to accept the abrogation of Article 370 as India's internal matter (Roy, 2022). Via e-mail, Andrew Korybko explained Russia's position as "just the continuation of Soviet-era policy towards the issue, made all the more important in the present day because Russia needs India's business deals (military, energy, commercial, etc.) more than the reverse, so it's not in a position to challenge it on Kashmir even if it wanted to (it doesn't, nor will likely ever anytime soon). I don't believe that it's possible for Russia to come closer to Pakistan on this issue, it's a red line of sorts for Russia, and Islamabad should simply accept this limitation and formulate policy around it instead of hoping that it'll ever change." (A.Korybko, personal communication, October 23, 2019). Later, in June 2020, Russia recommitted to India's candidature for a permanent seat at the U.N. Security Council (Roy, 2022).

## **First Mention of UN Resolutions**

While the Russian official positions have throughout stressed on bilateral track basis for political and diplomatic means only, there was a considerable variance in 2019 after the UN closed-door session on the Kashmir issue. To begin with, Russia had allowed it to go ahead, not treading on China in the process, which had brought it up in the UN Security Council (Roth, 2019).

After the meeting, where China's effort to issue a public statement had been blocked, Russia's First Deputy Permanent Representative Dmitry Polyanskiy's tweets caught attention. Apart from reiterating Russia's wish to resolve the issue on a bilateral track with mention of the Simla Agreement 1972 and Lahore Declaration of 1999, he also mentioned the following: the UN Charter and relevant UN resolutions. No Russian official after this brought up UN resolutions again, but the fact that a Russian official had, in a similar fashion to Chinese officials, indicated that perhaps there was a more pro-Pakistan subtext than met the eye (Mitra, 2019).

## **Pakistan and Crimea**

Pakistan, for its part, abstained from condemning Russia over the annexation of Crimea. It maintained a policy of positive neutrality. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Ms.

Tasnim Aslam stated that Pakistan hoped that political crisis in Ukraine would be resolved through peaceful means” (Pakistan Urges Peaceful End to Ukraine Crisis, 2014).

The Ukrainian embassy in Islamabad took a benign view of this. “The principle position of Pakistan concerning the resolution of interstate conflicts, which is determined by such principles as respect for the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of states as well as resolution of disputes between them exceptionally through peaceful political means, defines the positive neutrality of Pakistan with regard to the Russian aggression against Ukraine and temporary occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea.” (Embassy of Ukraine to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 2014) Ukraine, for its part, did not want to sabotage its military sales to Pakistan. Ukraine manufactured the engines used in Pakistan’s Al-Khalid (MBT-2000) series of tanks. About 500 of these tanks have been used by the Pakistani military since 2009 (Panda, 2014).

The Government of India was the first significant country to recognize the annexation of Crimea and abstained from a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine, justifying its decision by saying it was the people of Crimea’s choice. When asked for India’s official assessment of the events in Ukraine, National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon responded: “We hope that whatever internal issues there are within Ukraine are settled peacefully, and the broader issues of reconciling various interests involved, and there are legitimate Russian and other interests involved.... We hope those are discussed, negotiated and that there is a satisfactory resolution to them.” (Keck, 2014).

### **Comparing Crimea and Kashmir**

For political consistency, Russia should accord Kashmir the same concern it has shown for Crimea. Both are contested regions that arose due to imperial divisions. Kashmir was accorded a UN resolution calling for a plebiscite. In 1991, no such consideration was given to the people of the Crimea who would have joined Russia. While Russia took definitive action over Crimea in 2014, it should consider the humanitarian crisis in Kashmir because of the Indian military occupation. While Pakistan has not condemned Russia on the issue of Crimea, Russia has chosen to support India over its occupation of Kashmir, thus highlighting a contradiction in its policy regarding self-determination. (Korybko, 2019). In addition, Kashmiri independence activists immediately demanded after the annexation of Crimea why their right to self-determination was not being respected (Faysal, 2014).

### **Pakistan and the Current Ukraine Crisis**

At the commencement of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Pakistan declared neutrality. Along with India and China, it abstained from UN resolutions condemning Russia (Gul, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

Since 2010, Pakistan and Russia’s relations have grown exponentially. However, this has had no qualitative bearing on Russia’s policy on the Kashmir issue. Only a temporary change was observed in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and Russia has actually continued with its pro-India line. This falls well within its Primakov-inspired foreign policy objectives. Russia has recognized Pakistan’s importance in the changing geopolitical scenario, with Afghanistan being a mutual field of interest, but it has not declared this in any of its Foreign Policy Concept Papers. Its positive relationship with India is reflected better as it has announced its unflinching commitment. In this vein, India’s reluctance to condemn Russia over its invasion of Ukraine is understandable. As for Pakistan, in a mature understanding of its heightened geopolitical relevance, it has declared neutrality. As always, in international relations, national interests come first.

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