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Pakistan–Russia Relations in Transition: Strategic Shifts, Economic Constraints, and Prospects for Energy, Defence and Trade Cooperation (1991–2021)

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan and Russia's relations began after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 and have since evolved through two phases: from 1991 to 2008, marked by fluctuations and relative stability after 9/11, and from 2008 to 2021, when cooperation expanded more rapidly, particularly in energy, defence, trade, and tourism. Despite these developments, the research problem identified in this study is the limited progress in bilateral cooperation, especially in the energy and trade sectors, where structural and political constraints have restricted investment and resulted in a low volume of imports and exports. To address this issue, the study employed a qualitative research method based on secondary sources, including books, journals, newspapers, reports, and online materials, to analyse the evolution of relations and assess opportunities and challenges. The findings suggest that although Russia has demonstrated growing interest in Pakistan's energy sector and other areas of collaboration, progress has been inconsistent due to economic barriers and lack of institutional mechanisms. Nevertheless, since 2008, both countries have moved closer in strategic and economic terms, indicating untapped potential for deeper engagement. In conclusion, the study recommends strengthening cooperation in energy and trade as vital avenues for enhancing Pakistan-Russia relations in the future.

Keywords: *Bilateral Relations; Defence; Energy Cooperation; Pakistan; Russia; Trade; Conflict.*

1. INTRODUCTION

No state in the contemporary world is entirely self-sufficient; the global order is increasingly characterized by interdependence, which compels nations to shape their external relations based on political, economic, strategic, and security needs. Even global superpowers such as the United States and China cannot function in isolation and require cooperation with smaller or developing states to safeguard their long-term interests and ensure stability in regions of significance. For developing countries like Pakistan, interdependence is not merely a choice but a necessity, as it enables access to technology, trade opportunities, defense cooperation, and foreign investments. In this context, Pakistan's foreign relations have historically been influenced by larger geopolitical currents, with Russia playing a pivotal, though fluctuating, role.

When Pakistan emerged as an independent state in August 1947, the Russian Federation was still known as the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Following the conclusion of the Second World War, the international system was divided into two dominant blocs, led by the United States of America (USA) and the USSR. This ideological and political rivalry, later termed the Cold War, began almost simultaneously with the independence of India and Pakistan in 1947 and shaped the global balance of power for decades (Sattar, 2017). The Cold War was not a direct military confrontation, but an indirect conflict fought through alliances, proxy wars, and diplomatic maneuvering. Pakistan, as a newly independent state with limited resources and fragile institutions, found itself compelled to align with one of these powers. Consequently, Islamabad's decision to join U.S.-led security pacts in the 1950s, such as SEATO and CENTO, was perceived by Moscow as an unfriendly gesture, leading to early strains in Pakistan-Soviet relations. This mistrust continued to define much of their interaction until the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991.

The emergence of the Russian Federation after the Soviet collapse provided a fresh opportunity to redefine its foreign policy orientation, including towards Pakistan. Russia, weakened economically but still militarily powerful, sought to recalibrate its external relations by building new partnerships while maintaining traditional alliances. Pakistan, on the other hand, faced regional security dilemmas, particularly the instability in Afghanistan and its enduring rivalry with India, both of which shaped its outreach towards Moscow. Particularly after the events of 9/11, when global security dynamics shifted significantly, both Pakistan and Russia began to recognize the importance of cooperation in pursuit of shared objectives. Counterterrorism, regional stability, and economic engagement became common grounds for partnership. As Lord Palmerston aptly noted, "there are no perpetual allies and enemies, but permanent national interests" (Yaseen, 2017), a maxim that aptly reflects the changing trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations.

Another crucial factor that brought Pakistan and Russia closer was the convergence of U.S.-India relations, which accelerated after the early 2000s. Washington's growing strategic partnership with New Delhi, particularly in defence, nuclear cooperation, and technology transfer, reduced Pakistan's centrality in American foreign policy. This shift created diplomatic space for Moscow to engage Islamabad more meaningfully, especially after the restoration of democracy in Pakistan in 2007. Despite Russia's enduring strategic partnership with India, Pakistan retained geostrategic importance for Moscow, primarily due to its proximity to Afghanistan and its role in regional counterterrorism. Russia's historical aspiration to gain access to warm waters—evident during its 1979 intervention in Afghanistan—once again revived interest in Pakistan's Gwadar Port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), both of which provide vital connectivity to the Arabian Sea.

Moreover, the emergence of the Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK) after 2014 created a mutual security concern, as Moscow acknowledged Islamabad's indispensable role in countering extremism and ensuring peace in Afghanistan (Khan, 2014). Russia increasingly viewed Pakistan not only as a stabilizing force in South Asia but also as a gateway to the Central Asian Republics (CARs), which remain crucial for Moscow's energy trade and strategic outreach. From Pakistan's perspective, greater Russian Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in sectors like energy, defense production, and infrastructure could reduce its dependence on Western aid and open avenues for long-term economic stability.

Furthermore, President Vladimir Putin's pragmatic and multi-vector foreign policy facilitated the revival of ties between the two countries. Unlike the rigid ideological posture of the Soviet era, contemporary Russian foreign policy under Putin has been characterized by adaptability and a willingness to cooperate with diverse partners, including those with whom Moscow once had adversarial relations. In this sense, Pakistan's renewed engagement with Russia symbolizes not merely a shift in bilateral diplomacy but also reflects broader transformations in the international order, where pragmatism, economic interdependence, and security considerations override past hostilities.

1.1. Objectives of the study

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the historical evolution of Pakistan-Russia relations with particular emphasis on the period between 2008 and 2021. It seeks to identify the main areas of bilateral cooperation—such as energy, defence, economy, and counterterrorism—as well as the challenges that have hindered stronger engagement. Additionally, the study examines how broader geopolitical shifts, including U.S.-India, Sino-Pak, Pak-Afghan, and Afghan-Russia relations, have influenced Pakistan-Russia ties.

1.2. Significance

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to understanding the gradual yet steady evolution of Pakistan-Russia relations. By analyzing cooperation and conflict within the context of shifting global and regional dynamics, the study highlights the potential of bilateral ties in promoting regional stability and reducing Pakistan's dependency on Western alliances. Moreover, it emphasizes Russia's strategic interest in South Asia and its pursuit of economic opportunities in Pakistan, particularly in relation to CPEC and access to warm waters. This analysis is relevant for policymakers, scholars, and regional actors seeking to assess how evolving Pakistan-Russia relations may reshape power configurations in South and Central Asia.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly work on Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Central Asian Republics (CARs) and the Russian Federation is fairly extensive. Numerous research articles and reports discuss bilateral relations and highlight agreements signed between the two countries. However, much of this literature remains fragmented, with materials dispersed across reports, reflections, and general accounts that lack depth. Studies often present references and surface-level descriptions but fail to provide a systematic analysis of the historical evolution of Pakistan-Russia ties, their cooperative domains, and the recurring sources of conflict. This limitation provides the basis for the present study, which attempts to fill these gaps.

Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan examined economic, defence, and political collaboration between Pakistan and Russia. Following the disintegration of the USSR, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Asif Ahmad Ali visited the Russian Federation in 1992, followed by Foreign Secretary Akram Zakki's visit in 1994 to rebuild relations (Mahmood, 2014). Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, in 1999, established a joint commission for economic and political issues, while Russia expressed interest in Pakistan's role in combating narcotics, terrorism, and extremism. Yet, Moscow accused Pakistan of involvement in Chechnya and the Caucasus, prompting ISI Chief General Mahmud Ahmad's visit to reassure Russian leadership of Pakistan's non-involvement. Defence cooperation expanded with the 2001 purchase of MI-17 helicopters under General Musharraf's government (Azad, 2016).

Mikhail Fradkov, Prime Minister of Russia, visited Pakistan in 2007, focusing on drug control and economic cooperation, coinciding with Russia's offer of RD-93 jet engines for China's JF-17 Thunder project (Maitra, 2012). Later, President Asif Ali Zardari emphasized reviving bilateral ties during his 2011 visit, stressing Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process (Hanif, 2013). Although President Vladimir Putin's 2012 visit was postponed, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov clarified that it was due to rescheduling rather than Indian pressure, while condemning U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan (Dickshit, 2012).

In 2014, strained Russia-Ukraine ties complicated Pakistan-Ukraine defence agreements, leading India-friendly lobbies to question Pakistan's reliability. However, Lavrov stressed that Russia and Pakistan share common goals, especially regarding Afghanistan (Haroon, 2018). The same year, Russia's Defence Minister signed agreements with Islamabad to expand defence cooperation, including beyond Mi-35 helicopters (Khan, 2019). In 2015, Moscow signed the \$2 billion North-South Gas Pipeline (NSGP) project with Pakistan, although delays persist (Syed, 2016). Military exercises under "Druzhba-2016" were launched despite Indian objections (Abbas, 2016). Another significant milestone was Pakistan's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), facilitated by Russia and China, finalized in 2017 (Abbas, 2016). Despite these contributions, existing scholarship does not systematically examine the dual aspects of cooperation and conflict in Pakistan-Russia relations, nor does it integrate these dynamics into a broader geopolitical context.

2.1. Research gap

Although considerable literature exists on Pakistan-Russia relations, most of it remains fragmented, descriptive, and event-specific. Prior studies have focused on isolated visits, agreements, or defence deals (Mahmood, 2014; Azad, 2016; Maitra, 2012; Hanif, 2013; Syed, 2016), but they lack a sequential historical analysis and a comprehensive evaluation of both cooperation and conflict. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to the influence of broader geopolitical variables, such as India-US ties or Afghanistan's security dynamics, on shaping bilateral relations (Abbas, 2016; Haroon, 2018). As shown in Table 1, this study addresses these gaps by offering a chronological account of Pakistan-Russia relations, systematically analyzing cooperation and conflict, and situating bilateral ties within wider regional and global contexts.

Table 1: Identified research gaps in the existing literature on Pakistan-Russia relations and proposed solutions by the present study

Identified Gap	Evidence from Literature	Proposed Solution by Current Study
Lack of sequential historical analysis of bilateral relations	Literature focuses on isolated visits/events (Mahmood, 2014; Azad, 2016; Maitra, 2012)	Provide chronological study of ties, especially 2008–2021
Fragmented treatment of cooperation domains (economy, defence, energy)	Studies highlight visits and agreements but without synthesis (Hanif, 2013; Khan, 2019; Syed, 2016)	Analyze cooperation comprehensively across sectors

Limited attention to areas of conflict (Chechnya, terrorism, Indian influence)	Brief mentions without systematic analysis (Dickshit, 2012; Haroon, 2018)	Study cooperation and conflict together for balanced insight
Weak link between regional/global shifts and bilateral ties	Overlooks variables like India-US, Pak-Afghan, and Afghan-Russia dynamics (Abbas, 2016; Haroon, 2018)	Explore external geopolitical factors shaping relations
Scattered, descriptive literature lacking academic framework	Data dispersed across reports and media sources	Consolidate into structured academic framework with policy implications

2.2. Research problem

Pak-Russia relations from 2008-2021 has been analyzed in this study. The foreign policy of both countries changed generally towards the whole world and particularly towards each other by post-cold war. There are some elements that are involved in deteriorating the bilateral ties of the two countries like, India better relations with Russia and India's interference in Afghanistan and Pakistan's internal affairs, Pakistan's relations with US, and her worse historical background with Russia before 9/11 incidents. The effects of the above-mentioned elements on relations of both states were explored during the period of 2008-2021. Furthermore, the growing relations of both countries were also explored in this study. This study also focused on the areas of concerns between the two countries from 2008 to 2021.

2.3. Novelty of paper

This paper makes a novel contribution by moving beyond fragmented and descriptive accounts to offer a systematic and chronological study of Pakistan-Russia relations. While earlier works analyze specific visits or agreements—such as Nawaz Sharif's 1999 commission (Mahmood, 2014), Musharraf-era defence procurement (Azad, 2016), or the 2015 NSGP project (Syed, 2016)—this study integrates them into a comprehensive narrative. It uniquely examines both areas of cooperation (energy, defence, counterterrorism, economy) and areas of conflict (terrorism accusations, Indian pressure, Chechnya issue) in tandem.

Additionally, by situating bilateral relations within broader geopolitical shifts—including the rise of the Islamic State of Khurasan (Khan, 2014), evolving India-US ties, and Pakistan's accession to the SCO (Abbas, 2016)—this study provides a deeper understanding of how external dynamics shape Pakistan-Russia relations. The paper's originality lies in presenting a holistic framework that traces the evolution of bilateral ties from 2008 to 2021, while identifying drivers of cooperation and sources of discord, thus filling a major scholarly gap.

3. Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design aimed at exploring the evolution of Pakistan-Russia relations with particular emphasis on the period between 2008 and 2021. A qualitative approach was selected as it enables an in-depth and contextualized understanding of bilateral cooperation and conflict, while also allowing the integration of historical and geopolitical variables.

The study relies exclusively on secondary data sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, official documents, government reports, and credible online

resources. News archives, think-tank publications, and institutional reports were also consulted to capture a comprehensive account of events and agreements between the two states (Khan,2019). These diverse materials were essential for tracing the sequential development of Pakistan-Russia relations and situating them within wider international contexts (Naqvi,2019).

The collected data was analyzed using a thematic and chronological approach. First, historical developments were arranged in sequence to map out the trajectory of bilateral relations from the post-Cold War period to 2021. Second, thematic categorization was applied to identify areas of cooperation (defence, energy, economy, and counterterrorism) and conflict (terrorism allegations, Chechnya, Indian influence). Finally, the analysis incorporated regional and global variables—such as India-U.S. relations, Pakistan-Afghanistan dynamics, and Russia’s engagement with Central Asia—to assess how external factors influenced the bilateral relationship (Akhtar & Iqbal, 2023), (Farooqi, 2023).

To ensure validity, data was cross verified by consulting multiple sources on each event or agreement. Reliability was enhanced by relying on well-established academic publications (e.g., Mahmood, 2014; Azad, 2016; Syed, 2016) and triangulating them with contemporary reports and official statements.

The scope of this study is limited to the period between 2008 and 2021, focusing on areas of cooperation and conflict as well as the broader geopolitical context. Limitations arise from the reliance on secondary sources, which may reflect the biases of their authors or institutions. However, triangulation of multiple sources mitigates this limitation and strengthens the credibility of the findings. Table 2 is the detailed analysis of the research methodology (Badawi, 2024), (M D et al., 2023).

Table 2: Structured research framework outlining approach, scope, variables, and analytical method for examining Pakistan–Russia relations (1991–2021)

Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative (exploratory and descriptive)
Time Frame	1991–2008 (evolution of relations) and 2008–2021 (bilateral cooperation and challenges)
Data Sources	Secondary data (books, journal articles, newspapers, reports, online databases)
Unit of Analysis	Pakistan–Russia bilateral relations in political, economic, defense, and energy cooperation
Key Variables/Themes	Historical relations, areas of cooperation, areas of conflict, energy partnerships, trade ties
Analytical Method	Thematic content analysis with comparative historical review
Framework Basis	Identification of gaps, analysis of cooperation & conflicts, and recommendations for future ties

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Findings

The findings of this research reveal that Pakistan–Russia relations evolved in three distinct phases as shown in table 3. The first phase (1991–2001) was marked by inconsistency, reflecting the lingering mistrust inherited from the Cold War era. Relations during this period neither advanced significantly nor collapsed entirely, largely due to shifting geopolitical

circumstances. The second phase (2008–2021) witnessed a steady improvement, particularly after 2007, when democratic governance in Pakistan coincided with Russia’s increasing interest in South Asia. Both countries gradually moved beyond historical mistrust, recognizing the need to strengthen bilateral ties in light of regional and global dynamics (Khatoon et al., 2023), (Zia, 2018).

Table 3: Two distinct phases in the evolution of Pakistan–Russia relations (1991–2021)

Phase	Period	Key Features	Nature of Relations
Phase I	1991–2008	Initial relations after USSR’s disintegration; marked by mistrust, Cold War legacies, and limited engagement. Post-9/11 balance brought cautious diplomacy without major breakthroughs.	Fluctuating with neither strong progress nor decline
Phase II	2008–2021	Rapid evolution in relations with growing cooperation in energy, defense, and trade. Recognition of mutual potential and increased diplomatic engagements.	Noticeable improvement, new initiatives, and expanded collaboration

One of the central findings concerns sectoral cooperation, especially in energy, defense, trade, and tourism as shown in table 4. The energy sector emerged as a major focus, with Russia expressing interest in investment and infrastructure development projects. However, bureaucratic hurdles, financial constraints, and political instability in Pakistan limited the scale of cooperation. Similarly, while Pakistan has long relied on U.S. defense supplies, the study finds considerable scope for enhancing defense collaboration with Russia, particularly in arms procurement, technological transfer, and joint production. This shift could reduce Pakistan’s overdependence on Western defense markets.

Table 4: Major findings across key sectors of cooperation

Sector	Findings	Evidence/Examples
Energy	Russian investment limited despite interest	North–South Gas Pipeline delays
Trade	Trade volume remains low	< \$1 billion annually
Defense	Increased cooperation post-2014	“Druzhba” joint exercises
Tourism/Culture	Untapped potential in exchanges	Limited people-to-people diplomacy
Technology	Russia’s strength in science could benefit Pakistan	Space, defense, engineering sectors

The research also highlights that trade between the two countries has remained underdeveloped, with low import–export volumes despite their economic complementarities. Factors such as weak institutional linkages, logistical barriers, and Pakistan’s reliance on Western aid have prevented the realization of full economic potential. Nevertheless, Russia’s interest in accessing Pakistan’s markets, as well as the possibility of integration with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), offers new avenues for strengthening bilateral economic engagement.

Geopolitical factors have significantly shaped Pakistan–Russia relations. The war on terror, the rise of Islamic State of Khurasan (ISK) in Afghanistan after 2014, and shared concerns over

regional security have pushed both countries closer. The findings suggest that cooperation in counter-terrorism and Afghanistan's stability is a key driver of convergence. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has provided an effective multilateral platform for collaboration, while Pakistan's potential role in supporting Russia's entry as an observer state in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) could create additional opportunities for regional integration.

Despite progress, the study identifies several persistent challenges as shown in table 5. The historical legacy of mistrust, rooted in Cold War rivalries, continues to cast a shadow on relations. Differences in foreign policy priorities, competition with India–Russia relations, and bureaucratic inefficiencies in Pakistan have slowed momentum. Moreover, the relatively low scale of bilateral projects demonstrates that Pakistan and Russia still face structural obstacles in building long-term trust and cooperation.

Table 5: Key obstacles to stronger Pakistan–Russia relations

Obstacle	Description	Implication
Trust Deficit	Historical mistrust due to Cold War alignments	Hinders strategic cooperation
India–Russia Relations	Russia's strong ties with India	Pakistan's strategic insecurity
Weak Institutions	Pakistan lacks strong trade/energy frameworks	Missed opportunities for long-term deals
Geopolitical Constraints	US pressure, Afghan war spillovers	Distracts from bilateral agenda
Economic Barriers	Low exports, weak logistics, tariff issues	Limited market access

4.2. Discussion

The overall discussion of this study demonstrates that Pakistan–Russia relations have been characterized by a gradual transition from historical mistrust toward cautious engagement, but this shift remains incomplete and fragile. The evidence presented in this research confirms that the bilateral relationship has been shaped less by bilateral dynamics alone and more by broader geopolitical and regional developments. In other words, Pakistan and Russia have been “reactive partners” rather than “proactive allies,” adjusting their level of cooperation according to the fluctuations in global and regional politics. This broader structural dependency explains why periods of progress—such as the post-2008 phase—have still failed to result in sustained institutionalization of ties as shown in table 6.

One of the most striking findings that emerges in the discussion is the asymmetry in foreign policy priorities of the two states. For Russia, Pakistan is not among its top strategic partners, as Moscow continues to prioritize relations with China, India, and Central Asian states. Conversely, for Pakistan, Russia represents an important but secondary alternative, as its foreign policy has traditionally revolved around the United States, China, and Gulf countries. This divergence in strategic prioritization makes their engagement episodic and dependent on external triggers such as the U.S.–Pakistan rift, instability in Afghanistan, or Russia's strained relations with the West. Unless both states elevate each other as sustained foreign policy priorities, the risk of inconsistency in their relations will remain high.

Another critical dimension highlighted in this research is the persistence of historical baggage and trust deficit. Decades of Cold War antagonism, especially Pakistan's alignment with the United States and role in supporting Afghan Mujahideen, continue to shape Russian perceptions. Similarly, Pakistan has historically viewed Russia as an ally of India, given Moscow's extensive military and economic support to New Delhi. Although recent years have witnessed attempts to overcome this legacy through diplomatic visits, military exercises, and trade agreements, the underlying mistrust remains visible in the limited scale and cautious nature of cooperation. The discussion therefore underscores the importance of deliberate confidence-building measures, both at the governmental and societal levels, to gradually dilute this psychological barrier.

From a theoretical perspective, the evolution of Pakistan–Russia relations can be explained through the lens of realism and balance of power theory. Both countries have demonstrated behavior consistent with states seeking to maximize security in an uncertain regional order. Pakistan's outreach to Russia reflects its desire to diversify partnerships and reduce dependency on the United States, while Russia's willingness to engage with Pakistan illustrates its strategy of counterbalancing Western isolation and expanding influence in South Asia. Yet, realism also explains the constraints: Russia's long-term strategic partnership with India continues to act as a counterweight to its engagement with Pakistan, limiting the extent of its cooperation. This suggests that unless a structural shift occurs in South Asian geopolitics, the partnership is likely to remain pragmatic rather than transformational.

The findings also highlight the underutilization of economic and institutional mechanisms. Unlike Russia's partnerships with countries like India or Turkey, where energy, defense, and trade agreements have been institutionalized through long-term contracts and joint ventures, Pakistan–Russia cooperation lacks similar binding frameworks. This weakness has prevented the two countries from translating political goodwill into concrete outcomes. For Pakistan, this gap also reflects broader structural challenges such as weak governance, inconsistent policy frameworks, and a volatile investment climate, which collectively discourage sustained foreign investment. Therefore, the discussion emphasizes that any meaningful improvement in bilateral ties will require not only diplomatic goodwill but also domestic reforms in Pakistan to build institutional resilience.

Furthermore, the study situates Pakistan–Russia relations within the regional context of Afghanistan, Central Asia, and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Afghanistan has served both as a source of convergence and as a reminder of past antagonism. While Pakistan and Russia today share common concerns regarding terrorism and regional instability, the Afghan conflict also carries the historical baggage of Soviet intervention and Pakistan's counter-role. In contrast, CPEC represents a forward-looking opportunity, offering Russia potential access to warm-water ports and enabling Pakistan to diversify its strategic partnerships. However, the lack of clarity in Russia's policy toward CPEC reflects both its cautious approach and its balancing act between India and China. Thus, regional dynamics provide opportunities for cooperation, but they also constrain the speed and depth of progress.

Another layer of the overall discussion is the role of non-traditional sectors such as culture, education, and tourism. While these have often been sidelined in strategic analyses, the research identifies them as potential drivers of long-term trust-building. For instance,

academic exchanges, joint research initiatives, cultural festivals, and tourism promotion could create a societal foundation for bilateral relations that extends beyond governmental interactions. Historically, people-to-people diplomacy has played an important role in strengthening international partnerships, and the absence of such efforts between Pakistan and Russia remains a significant gap. The discussion thus recommends that both states invest in soft power diplomacy as a means of consolidating long-term goodwill.

In conclusion, the overall discussion underscores a paradox: while the strategic logic of cooperation between Pakistan and Russia is strong, the structural, historical, and institutional constraints continue to limit its realization as shown in table 6. This research argues that for the partnership to mature, both countries must move beyond episodic, reactive engagement toward proactive, sustained, and institutionalized cooperation. This would involve diversifying areas of collaboration, building confidence at both governmental and societal levels, and embedding economic relations within binding frameworks. If these steps are taken, Pakistan–Russia relations have the potential not only to overcome the shadows of history but also to contribute meaningfully to regional peace, stability, and economic integration in the Eurasian context.

Table 6: Broader discussion of findings in geopolitical and economic context

Theme	Key Insights	Implications for Policy
Strategic Balance	Pakistan diversifying beyond US; Russia cautious	Episodic rather than deep partnership
Economic Potential	Limited trade; big energy prospects	Requires structured agreements
Defense Sector	Increasing exercises, arms potential	Can reshape Pakistan's defense imports
Regional Dynamics	Afghanistan, SCO, Central Asia	Cooperation possible under multilateralism
Soft Diplomacy	Weak cultural/academic ties	Investing in people-to-people trust needed

5. Conclusion

This study examined the evolution of Pakistan–Russia relations from 1991 to 2021, highlighting two distinct phases shaped by shifting geopolitical dynamics and mutual interests. While the first phase (1991–2008) was marked by fluctuations and limited engagement due to Cold War legacies, the second phase (2008–2021) brought renewed cooperation in energy, defense, trade, and strategic affairs. Despite persistent challenges such as mistrust and low investment volumes, both countries have identified promising opportunities for collaboration, particularly in energy, defense production, and regional connectivity. Strengthening defense ties could reduce Pakistan's reliance on costly U.S. imports, while Russia's expertise in science, technology, and infrastructure offers avenues for long-term partnership. Moreover, cooperation through regional platforms such as the SCO and ECO can enhance stability in Afghanistan and promote broader economic integration. Overall, the research underscores that, despite historical obstacles, Pakistan and Russia possess significant potential to expand their bilateral cooperation in diverse sectors, paving the way for more balanced and mutually beneficial relations.

5.1. Future recommendation

Building on the findings of this research, several recommendations can be proposed to strengthen Pakistan–Russia relations in the future. First, both states should institutionalize regular high-level dialogues to reduce mistrust and ensure continuity in policy frameworks. Second, expanding cooperation in the energy sector—particularly through joint ventures in oil, gas pipelines, and renewable energy—can enhance energy security for Pakistan while securing new markets for Russia. Third, defense collaboration should be diversified, focusing not only on arms trade but also on technology transfer, joint training programs, and co-production of equipment. Fourth, trade and investment relations can be deepened by establishing preferential trade agreements, reducing tariff barriers, and promoting business-to-business interactions, especially in agriculture, textiles, and technology. Fifth, people-to-people contacts, academic exchanges, and cultural diplomacy should be encouraged to foster mutual understanding and long-term goodwill. Finally, both countries should utilize multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to jointly address regional challenges, particularly in Afghanistan, and to enhance regional connectivity. Implementing these steps could help Pakistan and Russia move beyond historical limitations toward a stable and mutually beneficial partnership.

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