Russian strategic interests in South Asia

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Abstract

South Asia is an important region in global politics. Two of its states are nuclear powers and have utmost importance in balancing regional security. Russian strategic interests in South Asia are three dimensional. One is of its gas pipeline routes through South Asia, the second is security factor related to Afghanistan including entrance of militants in Central Asian Republics and drug trafficking and the third one is to get access to the Arabian Sea and oil rich Middle East. South Asia can provide shortest trade routes to three regions of the world; Middle East, Europe and Africa. Seeking ways to achieve strategic, economic and political gains is a prime objective of Russian policy in which South Asia is of utmost importance. Russia has been experienced super power status and even after its disintegration, its major power quest did not vanish. Russian policies should now be focused mainly on its economic stability. Unfortunately Russian ties with China have generated perceptions that its foreign policy has band-waggoned with China and playing second-fiddle to it. China and Russia are although trade partners with a shared goal of challenging US hegemony, but past disputes and competing interests complicate their relationship. Russia needs to materialize its policies independently by maintaining its economic stability peacefully without entering into more conflicts or competitions.
**Key words**

Russia, South Asia, economic integration, Great Game, regional security.

South Asia is an important region with regard to its geography and the significance of its states in global political issues. It has also been considered as the most dangerous place on earth. Internal political dynamics are shaping the external scenario of the states in South Asia. Russia has been under crucial sanctions by the West but it has never ended up pursuing the great power status. After the implementation of Western sanctions which affected its financial markets and military industry, the Russian government has focused on boosting ties to new partners in Latin America, East Asia and South Asia. Thus South Asia plays a crucial role in Russia’s upcoming political strategies. Russia’s relations to the region are rooted in troubled historical links. Soviet Union encircled Afghanistan. It propped up pro-Soviet governments in Kabul, maintained close relations with India, while Pakistan always used to look Russia suspiciously. Although the region was long blemished by poverty and volatile political environments, India is an emerging power and its markets share of the global economy is expected to rise substantially in future. Pakistan is also important state due to its role in war on terror and geo-political location. West pursues a strategy of alienating Russia from
its old allies and thus its strategic interest in South Asia are important dynamics to analyze. The basic reasons of Russian stagnant economy has been its unattractive investment climate, limited use of the country’s plentiful human and natural resources, excessive dependence on energy and other natural resource exports, unstable national currency. Thus seeking ways to achieve strategic, economic and political gains is a prime objective of Russian policy in which Asia is of utmost importance. I am giving basic research question regarding my study.

**Research Questions**

1: Why regional stability for Russia matters more than before after a long time of negligence?

2: Why Russia has been supportive and cautious of Afghanistan integration into Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)?

3: Is the process of enormous economic integration of Russia with Eastern states intensified under Putin administration?

**Hypothesis**

1: Russian moves to make its economic ties strengthen in the region after years of neglect can be explained as part of its efforts to increase regional influence and
pressure as the US is preparing to alleviate its footprints and more possibly as a response over growing concerns about China’s rapid economic growth in Central Asia, South Asia and the Greater Middle East. The possibility of a North-South economic corridor is enhanced by greater regional stability. Russia will definitely try to be the Northern partner of choice for Central Asian states.

2: Russia’s approach towards Afghanistan’s integration with SCO rather than OSCE is cautious and dominated by its efforts to protect its own and Central Asian territories which border its territory from the cross-border jeopardizes such as entrance of terrorist groups from Afghanistan and drug trafficking.

**Research Objectives**

- To analyze Russia’s strategic interests in South Asian region, and its efforts to be a Northern partner for Central Asian states.
- To focus on Russia’s requirements in South Asia mainly in Afghanistan due to its security threats and integration with SCO.
- To study Russia’s efforts to take advantage of shifting global investment trends to become an alternative for global financing architecture through this region.
**Literature Review**

For making a detailed research on my topic I have consulted books, articles and newspapers. The books I have consulted are based on Russian threat perception, its strategies and historical analysis of its relations with other regional states. ‘Asia-Pacific in 1990s: Soviet Security Perceptions’ by Vladimir I. Ivanovo and Victor A. Vrevsky is a famous book having a detailed analysis (in the years of 1990s) of structural organization of Asia-Pacific region and its deep-rooted conflicts. It also covers the era when military efforts were increased by East-Asian states. Russian policy of Perestroika and the defense and security program during Gorbachev is also discussed in the book. This book concludes that Russia needs to make its security policy more skillful in order to establish diplomatic and public relations better.

‘Soviet Military Doctrine; Continuity, formulation and dissemination’ by Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott focuses on Russia and NATO relations moreover the regions which had pivotal interests regarding NATO expansion and their significance for Russia. Several other issues which Russia faced in Asian region such as major energy issues, hydrocarbon supply, especially the regional commodity gas and limited mutual investments of regional organizations with Russia are discussed. The importance of this book regarding this study is that it reveals Russian historical relations with regional organizations including South
Asia. It also described Russian major interests such as becoming a key player in the global gas market and to increase its energy efficiency.

‘Russian Foreign Policy in the 21st Century’ by Roger E. Kanet is based on Soviet Military Science that is based on the theory of enhancing military art. The book revolves around the theme that Russian qualitative improvement of means to attack is increasing combat readiness of other related regional states.

‘The Soviet Art of War; Doctrine, Strategy and Tactics’ by Harriet Fast Scott and William F. Scott is focused on the idea that what was the position of Afghanistan, Gulf states and the Middle East in Russian perception. In order to spread communism, Russia’s focus were several third world states. It was not only the spread of an ideology but also a pursuit of strategic gains in competition with its competitor US.

‘Soviet Power: The Continuing Challenge’ by James Sherr is based on Russian forward policy in the third world states. It includes Lenin’s theory of imperialism while defining class differences of the democratic societies. Discussing South Asia, the book describes Russian relations with India and support for it regarding Kashmir issue in United Nations. It also defines Russian diplomatic techniques such as its support for Vietnam in order to improve its relations with China and other ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) countries.
‘Soviet Foreign Policy Since World War II: Imperial and Global’ by Alvin Z. Rubinstein describes Soviet foreign policy in Cold War era. In the concluding chapters, it analyzes Russian involvement in Afghanistan and its impacts on South Asian region and its security. It discusses the drastic shift in Russian policies after Stalin and its impacts on their economy.

Articles are also consulted for this study such as ‘Issues in South Asia’ by Anirudha Gupta,
‘Conflicting and Converging Trends in Present-Day South Asia’ by Dieter Braun,

**Historical context of Russian strategic policy in South Asia**

Strategically Russia is located on the northern part of Eurasia. It has fourteen countries sharing borders but its sea roots and extreme weather conditions are not
favorable for global trade and mobilization. Russia has few of its cities very rich and untouched with regard to their precious resources but it needs mobilization trade ways. South Asia, Latin America, Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa are characterized by transient alliances and systematic instability and so have attracted super power attention and rivalry. For Russia, long-term implications of the gains and losses of this region are important because of the ideological and strategic reasons.

The region of South Asia mainly consists of seven states: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Its population is around 1.4 billion people which are more than 20 percent of the world population (http://www.leksika.org/tacticalanalysis/2014/12/30/russias-role-in-south-asia). Thus it is likely to say that about one-fifth of humanity lives between the western reaches of Afghanistan and Pakistan on one side and on the other side the eastern reaches of Bangladesh and India. It is a region that lies between the sea routes of the Indian Ocean (Persian Gulf and the Asia-Pacific) and the land routes of Central Asia which connects Europe to the East. It is a large source of natural and human reservoirs. Such precious geographical leverages make it a prime target for finance capital, a money-spinning market for trade and a source of cheaper raw material. It also sits at the proximity of the richest sources of oil, gas, rubber, manganese, copper, gold, tea, cotton, rice and jute. It is the transit point for most of the
resources and manufactures that pass out to the world. Moreover, this region is important with regard to its political scenarios. It is the most heavily militarized and bureaucratized region of the world and has a variety of complex and violent prehistoric ethnic groups.

Historically, South Asia had been the finest passage of invaders from Central Asia, Persia, the Arab world and even Greece for thousands of years. The basic focus of Russia's geo-political attention in South Asia has mainly remained on India and Pakistan. Russian involvement in Afghanistan is also a hallmark of history. It not only worsened Russian relations with Pakistan but also weakened its position in South Asia. Russia had better relations with India comparing Pakistan. Its relations with Pakistan portrayed the most dramatic form and witnessed the ebb and flow of historical processes. Between India and Russia there remained an abiding continuity of interests. In mid-fifties, the curve of Indo-Russian friendship began to rise and Russia established itself as an important external player in the region (Rubinstein, 1989). At the time of the Indo-Pak War of 1965 and 1971, when the theatre of hostilities was in close proximity of the Soviet borders, it expressed its own security doctrine emphasizing on its special interest in the region and therefore involved its security interests.
According to a careful analysis of military industrial cooperation between Russia and India, the annual total volume of their trade amounts to 1.5 billion dollars, and consists mainly of weapons trade. India is the only state with whom Russia conducts a long-term program of military industrial cooperation. In 2004, Russia and India signed a 1.6 billion dollars deal of the renovation of Russian aircraft carrier, fighter jets, and helicopters. The Indian navy and air force are equipped with Russian weapons. India not only restricts itself to the mere purchase of Russian armaments but also manufactures Russian weapons under license and there are a number of joint development projects underway (Martin, 2004).

India has been the center of attention for Russia and its policy towards South Asia has consistently recognized the centrality and geo-political significance of India. Pakistan was not ignored by Russia but their relations have been affected badly by some misunderstandings from the beginning when Liaqat Ali Khan was invited by Russia but he preferred visiting USA. But Russia never lost sight of the geo-political importance of Pakistan which is the second major South Asian state. Previously Pakistan was sharing the 40km wide Wakhan corridor which separated Soviet-Tajikistan from Pakistan. Russia favored India on the issue of Kashmir which was of dire importance for Pakistan as well but there was no stage when the door totally shut on Pakistan by Russia.
Pakistan remained important for Russia in its scheme of things. Russia continuously faced economic hardships and declined with political uncertainties, it was natural that it could not maintain its presence as a super power in South Asian capitals. Russia lifted arms sales embargo on Pakistan and agreed to sell weapons to it. Pakistan and Russia started making energy infrastructure investments in 2015. The development of relations increased with first-ever Pakistan-Russia military exercises. Other South Asian countries were not that favorably prominent in Russia's geo-political calculations thus relations with them were mainly trade focused and were likely to be governed by purely commercial considerations.

In its relations with the other states of the subcontinent like Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and others it is significant that Russia was consistently guided by its friendship with India. Thus, it desisted from siding with these states in their disputes and grievances against India. The Himalayan Kingdom of Nepal is always regarded as quite important strategically. Russia’s basic purpose of involvement in South Asian states have mostly been a counter-effort against the influence of USA such as the initial objective of Russian diplomatic effort in Nepal was the same.

There have been very drastic changes in Russia’s economic policy with the passage of time such as policies of Khrushev, Kozyrev and Gorbachev. In the post-cold war era, when Russia was facing economic crisis, it was becoming
increasingly clear that the West would not shoulder the burden of the economic conversion of Russia. The need to pursue a more balanced approach towards the countries of the West and the East was increasingly realized. Criticism was growing among Russia’s strategic community for the totally submissive Pro-West, and particularly Pro-US policy of Kozyrev and his team.

Russia’s relations with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been shrunken, but trade with them continued although not at a high level. Sri Lankan tea is all the rage in Russia and constitutes a major export item. Moreover Bangladesh emerged as a major exporter of ready-made garments but as far as Nepal is concerned, Russia maintained only a symbolic diplomatic presence in Nepal. There was no significant trade or commercial relations between the two.

**Russian strategic interests in South Asia**

Russia’s intelligence agencies have always been very much concerned about South Asian security, its military industrial complex is the most powerful domestic influencer and implementer in the region. South Asia is the biggest arms market for Russia. Arms sales to India have long been the backbone of the bilateral Russian-Indian economic relations. However, with the ever changing scenario of the world, nature of this cooperation is unclear because recent Indo-US nuclear deal has threatened Russia’s interests in South Asia. The much peddled Indo-
Russian strategic partnership appears much on rhetoric basis rather than reality. Russia’s firm foothold in the Indian arms market is threatened by growing Indo-US ties.

Russia has deep strategic interests with regard to its engagement in Afghanistan that is why even after the defeat in Soviet-Afghan war, it did not completely leave the region. Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was not intended to score strategic gains by moving closer to oil and sea lanes only but instead was to avoid a substantial loss for the Soviets: the overthrow of an existing Communist government in a country bordering the USSR by an insurgency that could lead to trouble among Central Asian residents of the USSR itself. The basic beneficiaries of Russian engagement with Afghanistan had been Russian Railroads and heavy-lift air carriers like Volga-Dnieper. The purpose behind such developments was a favoring war ground in future that would play crucial roles in NATO/ISAF capacity to support their forces on War Theater. Russia started rebuilding Afghanistan’s economic infrastructure, especially those 150 major projects built by the Soviets during the Cold War. It is likely to say that Russian statements about their economic engagement with Afghanistan are typically embedded in the post US withdrawal Afghanistan situation.

Gazprom’s (Russian energy company) interest in South Asia is principally framed by its desire to ensure that Turkmenistan’s and Iranian natural gas is not exported
to their traditionally most important competitor market, Europe. Russia is also interested on the part of TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) pipeline to South Asia.

After Indo-US nuclear deal Pakistan being a front-line ally of US, felt insecure and thus tended towards Chinese and Russian blocs. One of the basic reasons of newly emerging ties with Pakistan is the strategic imperative to manage Afghanistan after 2014 US withdrawal. From the Russian perspective not only Afghanistan situation but also some other crucial factors are necessary to handle in co-ordination with Pakistan such as counterterrorism and smuggling/anti-narcotics efforts. Public is usually less informed on these efforts beyond routine attestations by Russian and Pakistani diplomats. There have been less specific reports of intelligence sharing, training and capacity building, and even joint operations against poppy crops and drug-processing labs between the two states.

Russia’s geo-political realities are shifting that is why it is pursuing a multi-vectored policy in South Asia. As for as post-2014 security situation is concerned,

1: Russia is seeking new markets for defense exports

2: Russia is seeking Pakistan’s assistance in controlling domestic militancy in Russia
3: Russia seeks to assert a leadership role in its immediate sphere of influence and beyond, including in South Asia

4: Russia is preparing to counter US influence in that sphere of influence (Kuchins, 2014).

**Importance of BRIC**

BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) summit is a recent invention. China and Russia established the summit to take advantage of shifting global economic (prominently investment) interest, hoping to appear as an alternative to the global financial architecture by the US economy and dollar’s hegemony. Ultimately, both forums enabled Russia and China to promote their personal regional interests and also their combined interest in countering US dominance in the international system. Russia saw the group as a potential political security bloc which was a way for it to guarantee regional security while maintaining interests in South Asia and Central Asia. It was likely to be guessed that the group would also ease China to provide greater weight in dealing with the US. China too, wanted the grouping to strengthen its position globally but it saw the SCO more as a potential economic bloc. SCO was considered as the bloc that would help China to take full advantage of the region's natural resources. Russia and China’s differences made any plans to expand the SCO's purview or accept

The gradual evolution of BRICS and SCO into more meaningful organizations reflected the current positions of Russia and China moreover their relationship to one another and their mutual relationship with the US. The sanctions on Russia, coupled with the low global oil prices, have held back the Russian economy. This is one of the basic reasons that Russia reached out to China as an alternative market for its energy exports. Russia is also using Chinese credit agencies and as a consequence Chinese investment is flooding into Russia. Hold over South Asia and Central Asia is an invisible rift between Russia and China. The construction of Gawadar Port in Pakistan will firm China’s feet into the region more deeply and Russian dependence over China could increase in the years coming. The China-Russia energy negotiations have favored China's terms. China has long wanted to invest into its most large neighbor but has previously been blocked but with a weaker Russia, China can expand into their shared region of resource full Central Asia and Gulf region South Asia.

The SCO and BRICS organizations' are increasingly focused on each other’s changing needs. But while it appears as if Russia and China have found common ground as a bloc within these organizations, their underlying perceptions of power
and risk continuously leave them mistrustful of one another. Russia dislikes China's economic investment because of its expected dependency on it. On the other hand, China mistrusts Russia's military actions even though they keep the US distracted in Europe. But both major powers are agreed on common need to counter the dominant US and mutual economic interests in Asian region that draws both into closer cooperation once again.

**Putin administration**

Russian President Vladimir Putin has led this export campaign. In his presidential address in early December 2015, he confirmed that a Russian led ASEAN summit in 2016 will be hosted. He additionally projected finding out whether or not to pursue an enormous economic integration project that will cover the members of ASEAN, the SCO, and also the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union ([http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/putins-perennial-pivot-problem/](http://thediplomat.com/2016/01/putins-perennial-pivot-problem/)). In Russia, individuals normally consider Asia ‘the Orient’ or ‘the East’. Russian civilian businesses, in contrast to arms exporters, have typically did not realize their naturally alcove commercialism which is higher in quality product than China but however at a lower cost than Western competitors.

The Russian government has chosen to extend its integration with Asia for offensive and defensive reasons. This
integration represent achieving reciprocally advantageous economic ties, most importantly developing Japanese Siberia and bolstering Russia’s diplomatic influence on important Asian problems such as raising its profile in Asian regional organizations and promoting multi-polarity by restricting US influence in the region. Russia’s main tools to comprehend this strategy has been to affirm its typically unnoted Asian identity, investment of its arms exports and energy material resource and adopting a restrained neutral position on Asian territorial disputes.

Russia’s military strategy towards South Asia is outlined in two documents. The first one is the National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 which notes that the negative impacts such as the situations in Afghanistan and on the international climate. The second one is Maritime Doctrine of the Russian Federation to 2020 which states that Russia is interested in a course focused on the conversion of the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace, stability and good neighborly relations. Russia has tried to maintain versatile diplomatic and economic ties with political indifferent attitude towards countries’ domestic politics. It has tried not only to tighten ties with China but also conjointly attempted to sustain relations with long partners like India and Vietnam, whereas cultivating new partnerships with Japan and therefore the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to bolster its leverage and choices. In recent years, Russia has hosted the Asia-Pacific
Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit and also joined the East Asian Summit. Like their peers elsewhere, Russian analysts see demographic, economic, and different trends creating the Asia-Pacific the foremost necessary economic region within the coming back decades. Rising share of Russia’s arms and energy exports square is already progressing due to Asian customers.

**Russian Great Game in Asia**

Throughout the 19th century, UK was obsessed by the worry that one in all the opposite European powers would make the most of the political decay of Asia. Initially it absolutely was France and then Russia that captive on the caravan routes of the previous conquerors and vulnerable to establish a replacement world monocracy on the ruins of the traditional ones. British governments were upset by the implications of the continued march southward by the Russian empire in Asia. Czarist armies over ran Central Asia then the attention shifted to Persia, to Islamic State of Afghanistan and to the mountain passes of the chain of mountains. By the half-moon of the nineteenth century, it absolutely was a standard assumption in Europe that future inevitable war was progressing to be the ultimate confrontation between UK and Russia (https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-asia/1980-03-01/great-game-asia).
The Great Game was basically the strategic, economic and political rivalry between the British Empire and the Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia at the expense of Afghanistan and Persia. Russia’s turn towards the East and qualitative intensification of political, trade and economic relations with Asian countries has already become one among the foremost vital parts of the country’s national strategy. The center of the global economy and politics is objectively shifting to the Asia-Pacific region, there emerges an enormous potential for cooperation with Asian countries in implementing Russia’s 21st century national projects. In the coming years, three major political factors are likely to be crucial for forming and implementing Russia’s strategy in Asia.

First, Russia and the West have entered into a protracted conflict within Asia (especially after Russia-Turkey conflict). Within the next few years they will be requested to cut off tentacles and fill the vacuum at the regional (Eurasia) level and, partly, at the global level.

Second, the strategic collapse of political and presumably economic relations between China and US has become irreversible. It ends up in competition within the field of international security and the emergence of negative consequences for peace and stability within the Asia-Pacific region.

Third, there is demand for a general and comprehensive state policy of Russia to implement in the 21st-century in the Asia-Pacific (Bordachev, 2015).
Russia has been steadily yet consistently reorienting itself towards Asia. The change is about to occur mainly due to the behavioral leniency and diplomatic cunningness of leaders as for example at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum in June 2013, President Vladimir Putin said that Russia would be able to boost its growth only if it redirects its exports to growing Asian markets (Bordachev, 2015).

**Policy Improvements**

Despite of facing the same difficulties, Russian government has stepped up to improve its policy in achieving harmonious social and economic development and build an export-oriented economy in South Asia. Russia’s strategy towards Asia ought to resolve the subsequent two tasks.

- To enhance trust and confidence between Russia and Asian countries at state, market and human levels. Trust is necessary for investment and development in the region.

- Deterioration of Russia-West relations has badly affected Russian economy. Russia is steadily reducing technological and monetary prices resulting from the deterioration of Russia-West relations in order to achieve economic stability.
Summary

South Asia is a region that lies between the sea routes of the Indian Ocean (Persian Gulf and the Asia-Pacific) and the land routes of Central Asia which connects Europe to the East. It has enormous strategic value for the major powers. Russian interests in South Asia are mainly related to its security because the military industrial complex of this region is the powerful domestic influencer and implementer. Economically this region is the biggest arms market for Russia. The backbone of Russo-Indian bilateral relations is their arms export. Russia’s firm foothold in the Indian arms market is threatened by growing Indo-US ties. Afghanistan’s stability and internal security is of value for Russia because it borders to Central Asian states which are territorially linked to Russia. Russia’s geo-political realities are changing and it is pursuing a multi-vectored policy in South Asia such as seeking new markets for defense exports, seeking Pakistan’s assistance in controlling domestic militancy and terrorism in Afghanistan, asserting a leadership role in its immediate sphere of influence and preparing to counter US influence in that sphere of influence. President Putin also projected policies for enormous economic integration project that’s in the coming years which will cover the members of ASEAN, the SCO, and also the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). Russia and China have found common ground as a bloc within these organizations; but their underlying perceptions of power and risk
continuously leave them mistrustful of one another. Russia has been steadily yet consistently reorienting its Great Game policies towards Asia. In order to achieve social and economic development in South Asia, Russia needs to build trust on domestic levels especially in the South Asian states which have not previously been its ally. Russia also needs to increase its arbitrary role in the region and to decrease technological and armaments prices in order to firm its feet in Asian markets.

Findings

- South Asia region is going to be a source of threats to Russian security in the long-term mainly due to its political instability, internal conflicts, threat of terrorism and drugs trafficking (through Afghanistan mainly).
- In order to overcome these threats Russia is required to pursue closer bilateral relations with South Asian countries and play an active role in multilateral political forums mainly regional organizations.
- Integration process in South Asia is regarded important for Russia for an organized security mechanism and economic stability such as BRIC and SCO (in which India and Pakistan are also members now).
- Russia has clearly defined priorities in South Asia in which India is privileged strategic partner, Afghanistan a close neighbor, and Pakistan
a leading regional power having shared borders with Afghanistan and with regard to its security threats.

- Russia aims to ensure an ample level of military presence in the region. According to the Russian Military Doctrine of 2010, Russia will contribute troops to the Collective Rapid Reaction Force of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to ensure a rapid response to threats and to achieve other objectives set out by the CSTO Collective Security Council.

- The withdrawal of the US and its allies from Afghanistan will persuade Russia to play a more energetic role in maintaining regional security. However that does not mean that Russia will have to directly involve in events taking place on Afghan territory. The objective of Russian foreign policy is to protect its own interests by using political instruments in Afghanistan and in relations with its neighbors, especially India, Iran, and Pakistan.

**Suggestions**

- In order to maintain great power status, Russia should work vigorously in South Asia which represents its basic security frontier. Russia’s diplomatic efforts will help to establish successful working relationships with all the regional powers.
Russia needs to increase its arbitrary role in regional politics therefore scaling up involvement in regional affairs to meet the demands of the third world countries.

Russian ties with China have generated perceptions that its foreign policy has band-waggoned with China and playing second-fiddle to it. Russia needs to maintain its economic instability peacefully without entering into more conflicts or competitions.

South Asia’s importance is often ignored in studies because Central Asia has now become the focus of attention with regard to its strategic value and enormous resources. South Asia is mainly important with regard to its geography and the significance of its states in global political issues. It has also been considered as the most dangerous place on earth. Its close proximity to Middle East makes it more vulnerable to global terrorism. Internal political dynamics are shaping the external scenario of the states in South Asia. Russian interests towards South Asia are related to Gazprom’s (Russian energy company) principally framed by its desire to ensure that Turkmenistan’s and Iranian natural gas is not exported to their traditionally most important competitor market, Europe. Russia is also interested on the part of TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India) pipeline to South Asia. Afghanistan integration with SCO is important for Russia because
Afghanistan borders to Central Asian states which are territorially linked with Russia and can become a direct threat to it in case of any terrorist vulnerability.

South Asia plays a crucial role in Russia’s upcoming political strategies. Russia’s relations to the region are rooted in troubled historical links. Soviet Union encircled Afghanistan. It propped up pro-Soviet governments in Kabul, maintained close relations with India, while Pakistan always used to consider Russian alignment suspiciously. Although the region was long blemished by poverty and volatile political environments, India is an emerging power and its markets share of the global economy is expected to rise substantially in future. Pakistan is also important state due to its role in war on terror and geo-political location.

Russian moves to make its economic ties strengthen in the region after years of neglect can be explained as part of its efforts to increase regional influence and pressure as the US is preparing to alleviate its footprints and more possibly as a response over growing concerns about China’s rapid economic growth in Central Asia, South Asia and the Greater Middle East. The possibility of a North-South economic corridor is enhanced by greater regional stability. Russia will definitely try to be the Northern partner of choice for Central Asian states.
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