

PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS: A RESET IN THE MAKING?

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Abstract

Although Pakistan and the Russian Federation did not directly have antagonistic relations, they were unable to develop mutually beneficial political, economic, and trade links ever since diplomatic ties were established. Despite an unenviable past marred by lost opportunities and misplaced and unrealistic expectations, there exists a vast potential in the development of Pak-Russia bilateral cooperation in the fields of diplomacy, trade, energy, science, technology, mining, curbing drug trafficking, extremism, and terrorism. This paper highlights the wasted opportunities and their causes while looking towards future opportunities in light of recent positive developments between the two countries. The first visit, in November 2014, of the Russian Defence Minister to Pakistan, since 1991, resulted in the signing of a defence agreement. The agreement has provided the much-needed impetus to defence, economic, and trade ties between the two countries. Following closer India-US ties, neighbouring arch-rival, Pakistan, has begun conducting joint military exercises, Druzhba (Friendship), with Russia. Closer defence ties with Russia may pave the way for Pak-Russia cooperation in the fields of science, energy, economy, mining, trade, education, medicine, history, topography, hydrography and culture as well.

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Regional Studies, 36:2, Spring-Summer 2018, pp.36-87.

پاک روس تعلقات: کیا ایک نیا آغاز ہو رہا ہے؟

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خلاصہ

اگرچہ پاکستان اور روس کے مابین تعلقات کبھی بھی براہ راست خراب نہیں رہے، دونوں ممالک باہمی فائدہ مند سیاسی، اقتصادی، تجارتی اور سفارتی تعلقات قائم کرنے میں ناکام رہے ہیں۔ باوجود ایک ناقابل رشک ماضی کے جو کہ مواقع کھونے اور غلط اور غیر حقیقی پسندانہ توقعات رکھنے سے منسوب ہے۔ سفارت، تجارت، توانائی، سائنس و ٹیکنالوجی، کان کنی، منشیات کی اسمگلنگ کی روک تھام، انتہا پسندی اور دہشتگردی کے تدارک کے شعبوں میں پاکستان اور روس کے دوطرفہ تعاون کی ترقی کے وسیع مواقع موجود ہیں۔ یہ مقالہ دونوں ممالک کے درمیان حالیہ مثبت پیش رفت کی روشنی میں مستقبل کے مواقع کی طرف دیکھتے ہوئے ماضی میں ضائع ہونے والے مواقع اور ان کے اسباب پر روشنی ڈالتا ہے۔ نومبر 2014 میں کسی بھی روسی وزیر دفاع کے 1991 کے بعد پاکستان کے پہلے دورے میں ایک دفاعی معاہدے پر دستخط ہوئے۔ معاہدے نے دونوں ممالک کے مابین، دفاعی، اقتصادی اور تجارتی تعلقات کو انتہائی ضروری بڑھاوا دینے میں اہم کردار ادا کیا ہے۔ بھارت اور امریکہ کے مابین قریبی تعلقات کے پیش نظر اس کے قریبی حریف پاکستان نے اس کے ساتھ مشترکہ فوجی مشقوں، درژبہ (دوستی) کا آغاز کیا ہے۔ روس کے ساتھ قریبی دفاعی تعلقات سائنس، توانائی، معیشت، کان کنی، تجارت، تعلیم، طب، تاریخ، ہائیڈرو گرافی اور ثقافت کے شعبوں میں پاکستان اور روس کے مابین تعاون کے لئے بھی راہ ہموار کر سکتے ہیں۔

The first Foreign Minister of Pakistan Sir Zafarullah Khan (1893-1987)¹ opened negotiations with Deputy Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union Andrei Gromyko in April 1948, regarding the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. On 1 May 1948, Pakistan and the Soviet Union recognised each other and decided to exchange diplomatic missions. On 31 December 1949 Pakistan appointed its ambassador to Moscow. On 18 June 1949, His Highness, M. Ivan Nikolaevich, Soviet Ambassador to Afghanistan, was designated Ambassador to Pakistan.² The national press in Pakistan warmly welcomed the decision to establish diplomatic relations between the two neighbourly countries.³ Nikolaevich's appointment, for reasons not disclosed, could not materialise, instead, Alexander Georgievitch Stetsenko (1950–55), who had earlier worked as Chancellor at the Soviet Embassy in Great Britain, arrived at Karachi, on 15 March 1950, to assume charge.⁴

Pak-Soviet relations, from 1947 to 1966, were characterised by ups and downs. For instance, the Soviets invited the first Prime Minister of Pakistan Liaquat Ali Khan (1895–1951) to pay an official state visit to the USSR.⁵ In 1956, the Soviets offered Pakistan technical and economic assistance to build a steel mill in Pakistan. The Soviet Deputy Premier, in 1956, during an official state visit to Pakistan, called for the resolution of the Kashmir dispute, keeping in view the aspirations of the people of Kashmir.⁶ In 1961, Russia granted Pakistan a loan worth \$3 million for technical assistance in oil exploration. Both countries agreed to cover air service operations, exchange cultural delegations, assisting mechanisation of agriculture, undertake power projects, and promote technological and scientific knowledge. In 1966 the Soviet Union played a mediating role to enable India and Pakistan sign the Tashkent Declaration.⁷

Both countries, Pakistan created on the basis of religion and the Soviet Union on a revolutionary socialist ideology, did not have much in the form of common interest. Actions undertaken by Pakistan

alienated the Soviet leadership. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan visited Washington instead of Moscow where he had been invited.⁸ An international economic conference in Karachi and Tehran in 1949 was seen by the Soviet Union as an attempt to establish an anti-Soviet bloc. Other steps taken included the promulgation of the notorious Public Safety Act in Pakistan, in 1951, and the arrest of many anti-imperialist working class and Communist Party of Pakistan leaders on the lame excuse of involvement in the linguistic riots in former East Pakistan.⁹ The Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case of 1951 resulted in the arrest of communists including Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Pakistan became a member of the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), both military alliances aimed against the Soviet Union. Actions taken against the National Awami Party considered to be pro-Soviet by Ayub Khan and the downing of the U-2 spy plane further strained relations between the two countries.¹⁰

However, during 1965-69 period, trade, educational, and cultural exchanges between the two countries began to increase¹¹ as a result of President Ayub's first visit to the USSR in 1965 and the visit of Premier Kosygin to Pakistan, in 1969.¹² Pakistan and the Soviet Union entered into cultural and scientific agreements in 1964, 1965, and 1968.¹³ Between 1967 and 1971, steps including the closing down of US military bases on Pakistani soil, Ayub Khan's second visit of the Soviet Union, and an increase in the volume of bilateral trade, were taken.¹⁴ In 1970, following General Yahya Khan's visit to Moscow, Russia promised \$200 million to implement Pakistan's Fourth Five-Year Plan. (1970-75).¹⁵ The Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in 1971 enabled India to get \$300 million annually from the USSR.¹⁶ Pakistan declined the Soviet offer to join the Asian Collective Security setup, which was ostensibly aimed against China.¹⁷ Instead, Pakistan facilitated Henry Kissinger's secret visit to China.¹⁸ Soviet efforts to improve relations received a setback when the Soviet Union criticised Pakistan's position

in 1971 and advised the country to find a political solution to the situation in East Pakistan instead of a military one.¹⁹

Pak-Soviet relations were the lowest ebb when Z. A. Bhutto came to power in Pakistan in 1972. In this period (1972-77), however, the Pak-Soviet Friendship Society was officially launched and bilateral visits of ministers to strengthen closer relations between both the countries were conducted. To improve Pak-Soviet relations, Bhutto paid two official visits to the USSR in 1972 and 1974. As a result, both countries agreed to restore Pak-Soviet cooperation in geological prospecting, power engineering, building metallurgical works in Karachi, and enhancement of trade.²⁰

In the 1970s, Pakistan improved its relations with the Soviet Union and other socialist states applying the concept of 'bilateralism' in foreign policy.²¹ However, following the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the late 1970s, Pakistan and the US formed an alliance against the former Soviet Union. Pakistan not only served as a conduit for US weapons in the war against the Soviets in Afghanistan but also became the main source of providing manpower and ideology. The US war against the USSR was depicted as Pakistan's war against the Russian infidels and 'access to warm waters' theory was extensively used to promote this purpose.²²

The Post-Cold War Era

Dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the emergence of the Russian Federation as the successor to the USSR bestowed opportunities to both Pakistan and the Russian Federation to come out of their ideologised rigidities and transform bilateral relations by focusing more on mutually beneficial fields of trade, commerce, security, and economy. These relations strengthened during the rule of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, following his visit to Russia in April 1999.²³ This visit gave Pak-Russia relations a new turn.²⁴ However, institutionalisation in Pak-Russia relations occurred in June 2002. During General Musharaf's rule, three Joint Working Groups (JWGs)

were established to hold regular meetings.²⁵

Surprisingly, on 13 April 2007, the Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov paid an official visit to Pakistan, 38 long years after Kosygin visited in 1969.²⁶ The three-day official visit of Mikhail Fradkov to Pakistan reactivated relations between Pakistan and the Russian Federation. Mikhail Fradkov held 'in-depth discussions' with former president General Pervez Musharraf and former Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz and deliberated upon improving bilateral relations with a particular emphasis on increasing economic cooperation.²⁷ Exploring prospects of collaboration in the oil and gas sectors led to the signing in Moscow of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by Pakistan's Petroleum Minister on 19 November 2007.²⁸ The annual turnover of trade between Moscow and Islamabad was abysmally low, i.e., \$700 million, defence relations were almost non-existent, barring an odd helicopter deal, in 1969.²⁹ As late as 2010, Russia has been shy in developing strategic and military ties with Pakistan, because strategic and military ties with India seemed vital. In 2011, following the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, a change in Russian policy became visible when President Putin publicly endorsed Pakistan's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) declaring Pakistan an important Russian partner in South Asia and the Muslim world.³⁰

Postponement of President Putin's Planned Visit to Pakistan

President Vladimir Putin's visit to Pakistan was postponed in October 2012. This planned visit had raised expectations on both sides anticipating a great leap forward in Pak-Russia relations.³¹ The postponement of the visit produced shockwaves in Islamabad leading to introspection concerning the impact upon bilateral relations. This postponement did not follow the announcement of any new date, raising speculations whether the visit may ever happen, further multiplying Pakistan's distress. The decision to postpone President

Putin's visit not only annulled the Quadrilateral Summit,³² involving Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan, perhaps a lesser worry for Pakistan, but more importantly generated an alarm in Islamabad regarding the direction in which Pak-Russia relations were heading.

The reason Russian President chose not to visit Pakistan, i.e., Russian displeasure, may be discerned. Delay in Islamabad's response to several energy sector projects, construction of North-South Gas Pipeline, Russian interest in the transmission of power during offseason CASA from Tajikistan to Pakistan, Pakistan's diminishing interest in the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline (already completed inside Iran with Russian aid), and Islamabad's reluctance in terms of awarding contract to Russia without advertising tender, presumably under American pressure.³³

Thus, sufficient reasons did not exist to provide substance to President Vladimir Putin's visit to Islamabad. "The problem is that usually the purpose of the visit is not participation in ceremonies. The visit should have some substance,"³⁴ argued Russian Ambassador, Alexey Dedov at a talk on Pak-Russia relations at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). "As soon as the substance is ready we can discuss the visit," he stressed.³⁵ In view of the Russian envoy, 'substance' stood for 'signing of documents' and 'preparation of plans' for expansion of ties.³⁶ It had to be kept in mind that none of the Russian/Soviet Presidents has ever visited Pakistan, stressed the Ambassador.³⁷ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov did visit Pakistan to explain the cancellation of the presidential visit.³⁸

After the 2013 General Elections, a renewed talk of betterment in Pak-Russia relations began gaining currency. This has been referred to as a 'paradigm shift', by some strategists in Pakistan.³⁹ Russia reaffirmed its desire to improve relations in a letter addressed to the then President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari. It stated that the two countries shall "jointly enhance our efforts" to have "mutually beneficial trade and economic projects."⁴⁰ Moscow has begun to assert

its role in Southwest Asia by providing military support to Syria and has examined the situation in South Asia carefully in order to readjust its policy towards India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. Therefore, it needs Islamabad's attention. Pakistan aims at diversifying allies, providers of credit, military equipment, trade opportunities, and strengthening of cooperation in the field of Science, technology, education, and culture with Moscow.

Pak-Russia Joint Working Groups

Pakistan and the Russian Federation, in 2002, agreed to institutionalise ties by forming three joint working groups aimed at dealing with the probable threats to regional stability and to pave the way for further strengthening mutual ties. These include the following:

1. Pak-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability
2. Pak-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism
3. Pak-Russia Intergovernmental Commission

Regular meetings of these groups are held alternatively in Islamabad and Moscow.

Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability

Russia and Pakistan reiterated their resolve to collaborate closely in bilateral and international forums on strategic stability. The first-ever strategic dialogue between Islamabad and Moscow in January 2003, during the inaugural meeting in Moscow of the Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability, therefore, acquires monumental importance. The agenda included an overview of the global and regional situation, disarmament and conflict resolution, threat perceptions, and regional tensions. Earlier, Moscow held such consultative group meetings with only G-8 members and a few others whom Russia considered global players. Meeting alternately in Moscow and Islamabad every year indicates a thaw in relations leading to a Pakistan-Russia strategic partnership.⁴¹ On 22

December 2004, at the Pak-Russia two-day strategic dialogue on nuclear non-proliferation, terrorism, and bilateral cooperation, the leader of the Russian delegation, Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Kislyak vowed to jointly fight terrorism.⁴²

On 24 January 2011, during the Pak-Russia Consultative Group's sixth meeting on Strategic Stability in Islamabad, the two sides exchanged views concerning the international and regional security situation and discussed cooperation in the fields of science, technology, energy security, and multilateral forums.⁴³ They reaffirmed their commitment to deepen the relationship.⁴⁴

On 11 January 2012, in Moscow at the seventh meeting of the Group on Strategic Stability, both countries discussed arms-control, nuclear disarmament, and non-proliferation.⁴⁵ Ambassador Zamir Kabulov, Head of the Second Asia Department, and Special Representative of the President of Russia on Afghanistan underlined that the Foreign Minister of Russia looked forward to the then Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar's visit as an opportunity to review and further strengthen bilateral relations.⁴⁶

A series of high-level bilateral state visits to Islamabad of Russian Chief of Ground Forces, Chief of Air Force, Special Envoy to Afghanistan, and Foreign Minister and to Moscow of Pakistan's then Chief of Air Force, Tahir Rafique Butt, Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar, and Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) General Kayani occurred prior to the eighth meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Consultative Group on Strategic Stability, held in Islamabad on 28 April 2013. The motives of the Russian engagement strategy with Pakistan, previously having a 'privileged' and 'special' relationship with India, could be discerned. Should India be concerned about the prospects of this new growing equation? The latest bond between Russia and Pakistan has been founded on 'economics of trade and energy' and the need for security and stability in South and Central Asia, primarily Afghanistan. An interesting interplay of several geopolitical factors may work

underneath, however, developments in Afghanistan seemed a key reason of increased Russian engagement with Pakistan.

On 15 January 2015 and 2 March 2018, during the 9th and 12th meetings on Strategic Stability held in Moscow both sides expressed commitment to significantly strengthen the consultative mechanism on strategic stability and contribute to developing a revitalised, comprehensive, and long-term partnership.⁴⁷ The two sides had a comprehensive exchange of views on regional and global developments including arms control, disarmament, and non-proliferation.⁴⁸ They still moved very cautiously on nuclear cooperation. Moscow supported India's effort to become a member of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and did not oppose Pakistan's candidature, but has not opened a discussion on nuclear cooperation yet. The two countries still lag far behind in trade and economic cooperation too.⁴⁹

Pak-Russia Joint Working Group on Counter-Terrorism

In Moscow, in December 2002, the Pak-Russia joint working group on counter-terrorism agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation and sharing of information to effectively counter threats to national and regional security. The third meeting in Moscow on 13 June 2006, exchanged information on anti-terror measures undertaken in Russia and Pakistan, including measures to perfect national legislation and the system of bodies engaged in the suppression and prevention of terrorism and related threats. They agreed to enhance dialogue among civilisations and faiths to counter terrorist ideology, propaganda, and recruitment calling upon the international community to intensify joint efforts to surmount factors capable of feeding extremist sentiments and terrorism, particularly, in conflict settlement and exchange information and views on problems in anti-terrorist and anti-drug efforts in Afghanistan.⁵⁰ The Russian and Pakistani delegations agreed to cooperate in counteraction against

terrorism at bilateral and multilateral forums and prepare the UN draft for a comprehensive anti-terrorism strategy.⁵¹ The fifth meeting, on 27 January 2014, and the seventh on 21 March 2018, in Islamabad expressed 'grave concern' over the growing threat of the militant Islamic State (IS) group⁵² and observed, "The returning IS fighters from the conflict zones to countries of origin or third countries constitute a major security threat to various parts of the world, including this region."⁵³

Pak-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC)

The Pakistan and Russia Inter-Governmental Commission was established, in 2002, to promote economic, trade, scientific, and technical cooperation. On 10 September 2012, discussing trade, economic and cultural development, priority areas of business and investment cooperation were identified.⁵⁴ On 28 November 2014, the Russia-Pakistan Government Committee for Trade and Scientific Cooperation observed that Russia-Pakistan partnership developed under uneasy circumstances, bilateral trade increased symbolically, i.e., 1% in 2013 to \$547.1 million. In 2014, decreased to \$379.7 million, falling 16% in the third quarter compared with the same period of 2013. Russian exports to Pakistan were \$118.1 million, down 25%, Russian imports from Pakistan, were \$261,6 million, down 11%.⁵⁵ Both sides agreed to take serious steps to rectify the situation. They signed the Final Protocol of the Russia-Pakistan Government Committee for Trade and Scientific Cooperation.⁵⁶

On 20 November 2015, the fourth plenary session of the Russia-Pakistan Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation in Islamabad, discussed issues including energy, finance, science, technology, and cooperation in anti-drug operations. Russia stressed cooperation in electric energy, expanding the presence of the Russian energy companies in the Pakistani market.⁵⁷ They expressed the hope to reach a mutually

acceptable solution and also to sign an agreement on unsettled mutual financial obligations, which is a major obstacle in the development of economic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan.⁵⁸

Pakistan has been Russia's 73rd largest trade partner in 2017, up from 82nd in 2016, accounting for 0.0911% of Russia's total trade, up from 0.0739% in 2016 and Russia's 78th largest export market, in 2017, up from 87th in 2016, accounting for 0.0861% of Russia's total exports, up from 0.0466%, in 2016.⁵⁹ Defence Minister Engineer Khurram Dastgir Khan noted substantive improvement in bilateral relations since 2013⁶⁰ and increased bilateral trade.⁶¹

Pak-Russia Trade and Business Relations

Both public and private sector organisations including national and provincial chambers of commerce and industry, the Boards of Investment, and businessmen in manufacturing and agriculture have been taking a keen interest in Pak-Russia trade and business relations. On 26 December 2017, the Minister of Finance Senator Ishaq Dar at the first Pakistan-Russia Investment Forum, organised by the Board of Investment,⁶² informed that steps to resolve old trade disputes amicably had been taken in the Pak-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC).⁶³ Miftah Ismail, Chairman of the Board of Investment declared that Pakistan sought a strategic partnership for Pakistan Steel and urged sixty Russian potential investors, participants of the Forum to take advantage of the opportunity and improve business-to-business linkages.⁶⁴

Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) requested Chairman Pakistan-Russia Business Council (PRBC) to formulate a strategy to enhance trade ties, joint ventures, and investment opportunities with Russia.⁶⁵ The Russian consumer goods market is worth \$2.7 trillion and needs to be exploited by Pakistan.⁶⁶ Afzal planned to organise single country exhibitions in Karachi and Moscow in closer cooperation with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), Ministry of Commerce and Trade Missions of both

the countries.⁶⁷ Pak-Russia trade expanded slowly, trade volume did not reflect trade potential. In 2016-17, Pakistan exports were \$131.68 million compared to \$151.41 million in 2015-16, a 13% decline. In FY2017, Pakistan's imports from Russia increased by 28%, i.e., \$188.11 million against \$146.79 million in FY2016. Bilateral relations will improve after signing of Preferential and Free Trade Agreements between Russia and Pakistan.⁶⁸

Table 1
Pak-Russia Bilateral Trade (US\$ Million)

Year	Pak Exports	Pak Imports	Total	Balance
2010-11	183.57	162.42	346.99	+21.15
2011-12	189.61	202.05	391.67	-12.44
2012-13	207.31	277.17	484.48	-69.89
2013-14	187.04	235.08	422.11	-48.04
2014-15	183.84	206.45	390.29	-22.61

Source: Retrieved from http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/2-SS_Almas_and_Yasir-_No-4_2017.pdf

Russian Ambassador Alexey Yurievich Dedov addressing the business community at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KPCCI) argued that "Moscow and Islamabad can come closer by improving bilateral trade. He informed that Pakistani traders and businessmen, especially of KP, had many opportunities to invest in Russia. Our traders and businessmen are also keenly interested in investing in Pakistan."⁶⁹ The KPCCI president called for an increased exchange of business delegations and to improve people-to-people contacts.⁷⁰ He lamented the decline of \$65.13 million in bilateral trade between Pakistan and Russia that stood at \$419.34 million in 2013-14, against \$484.47 million in 2014-15. The decline mainly resulted due to falling Pakistani exports to Russia (10.36%).⁷¹ In 2014-15, the trade

further fell to \$390.29 million, a source of anxiety.⁷² The KPCCI President lauded the Russian Federation's decision of decreasing custom duty on Pakistani goods by 35% in the wake of devastating floods in 2010.⁷³ "The Russian Federation can import agricultural products and fruits from Pakistan, and export fertilizers and petrochemical products to Pakistan,"⁷⁴ he believed.

Pakistan's exports 12.5% of the Kinno crop to Russia.⁷⁵ Exports fell to 350,000 tonnes, the target is 400,000 in 2015.⁷⁶ The target in 1916-17 was reduced to 250,000 tons, keeping in view issues and restrictions in the Russian market. All Pakistan Fruit and Vegetable Exporters, Importers, and Merchant Association (PFVA) reported that export target of 300,000 tons could not materialise and decreased it to 280,000 tonnes. Exports of 375,000 tonnes in 2014-15 fell to 300,000 tonnes in 2015-16.⁷⁷ Import valuation of Pakistani kinno has been higher by \$3/10 kg, making it impossible to compete with Egypt, Morocco, and Turkey in the Russian market,⁷⁸ Apart from research and development to improve kinno quality, freight subsidy of \$2,500/export container is required to enable exporters to compete with Egypt, Turkey and Morocco.⁷⁹

Pakistan exported 370,000 tonnes of kinno worth \$222 million, the highest in terms of volume, during 2017-18 (between December 2017 and May 2018).⁸⁰ Kinno continued to face issues of high valuation from the Russian customs authorities leading to higher cost, the actual value of Pakistani kinno is around \$6-7/10 kg whereas the Russian authorities assess it at \$9.5/ 10 kg increased after February to \$10.5/10 kg, making it even harder to compete. PFVA has pertinently been raising this issue with Pakistani and Russian authorities. Consequently, the Russian authorities expressed a willingness to reduce the rate of valuation for the kinno. The association demands a decrease in local taxes and levies (DLTL) of the \$250/export container to increase kinno exports to Russia from the Pakistani authorities.⁸¹

The Sindh government entered into a cooperation agreement

with St. Petersburg, to promote partnerships in trade, business, education, science, and technology and signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)⁸² to facilitate exchanges between the regions in business, culture, art, tourism, and technology, bringing the two countries closer.⁸³ Chairperson of Sindh Board of Investment (SBI) stressed collaboration in textiles, light industry, medical industry, power machines, and energy sector.⁸⁴ The Russian delegates representing 15 companies dealing in power, oil and gas, pharmaceutical, chemical, spare parts, metallurgical, textile, especially polyester and yarn producers, engineering and aviation held meetings with Pakistani counterparts at Karachi on 24 April 2018. Chairperson of the SBI, Naheed Memon recalled MoU signed with Government of St. Petersburg in October 2017 that facilitated this visit to boost trade.⁸⁵ On 18 March 2017, Rustam Minikhanov, President of Tataristan discussed matters of mutual interest in Lahore at the Punjab-Tataristan Business Forum, including promotion of bilateral relations in different sectors⁸⁶ including skill development, petrochemical technology, banking, Halal food, production of cement, automobile industry, pharmaceuticals technology, culture and education, mining, agriculture, livestock, tourism, and sports.⁸⁷

Pak-Russia Political and Diplomatic Cooperation

Pakistan and Russia have a long history of cooperation at the UN's General Assembly and Security Council on international and regional issues of peace and stability. Afghanistan has been an important issue since both, at times, hold competing positions on it. On 14 April 2017, to discuss the Afghan situation and peace negotiations with the Taliban, 12 countries, including Pakistan, gathered at a summit in Moscow to develop a regional approach for peace in Afghanistan. The Afghan government and the Taliban also participated.⁸⁸ However, the United States decided to stay away, saying it had not been clear regarding Russia's objectives.⁸⁹ The process of informal consultations began initially amongst Pakistan,

China, and Russia in December 2016 and expanded to six-nations by mid-February 2017, including, Afghanistan, India and Iran. Invitations were extended to the US, Central Asian states, and the EU by March 2017. Afghan Taliban officials also signalled towards possible participation, if invited to the Moscow Summit. "Our response would be positive if we get a formal invitation," two Taliban officials declared.⁹⁰ Initially, Kabul disagreed with the Russian proposal of inviting political representatives of the Taliban from the 'Qatar Office', but later welcomed Russian diplomatic efforts for peace and stability.⁹¹



Source: Retrieved from, [https://www.google.com/search?q=Friends, +enemies,+friends+again+daily+dawn+April+1,+2017+cartoon&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6M1MWJYqfC9PkM%253A%252CPnEVxi1ooXemqM%252C_&usg=__DdanUqwAokxaZbrdoBOIfmnMwtU%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj14N6Py-PZAhXP1qQKHQzRBLEQ9QEIPzAC#imgsrc=6M1MWJYqfC9PkM:](https://www.google.com/search?q=Friends,+enemies,+friends+again+daily+dawn+April+1,+2017+cartoon&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=6M1MWJYqfC9PkM%253A%252CPnEVxi1ooXemqM%252C_&usg=__DdanUqwAokxaZbrdoBOIfmnMwtU%3D&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj14N6Py-PZAhXP1qQKHQzRBLEQ9QEIPzAC#imgsrc=6M1MWJYqfC9PkM:) accessed on 11 March 2018.

Afghanistan also hailed the Russian Foreign Ministry's statement, asking the Taliban to "lay down their arms, cut their ties with terrorist groups and join the peace talks to ensure durable peace and stability and end fighting in Afghanistan."⁹²

Earlier, on 17 March 2017, Afghan National Security Advisor, Hanif Atmar had visited Moscow and threw his weight behind Russia's peace efforts in Afghanistan. During his meeting with the

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov and Secretary of the Russian Security Council Nikolai Patrushev Atmar received confirmation that "Moscow [was] committed to the facilitation of peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan and in the region. Both Russia and China supported Afghanistan's legitimate government,"⁹³ reported Sputnik news agency. The Taliban seemed open to diplomatic efforts after the two major powers announced a trilateral meeting in Moscow in December 2016 to help lift UN sanctions on Taliban leaders. China hosted the Taliban political representatives after the trilateral talks in Moscow. Pakistan, which had long been pressing Russia to host the long-awaited trilateral meeting, has recently again "conveyed to the Taliban to join the peace process."⁹⁴ On 6 November 2017, Chairman, State Duma Committee, International Affairs, Russian Federation, Leonid Slutsky called on Speaker, National Assembly, Ayaz Sadiq at Speaker's House.⁹⁵ Russian Ambassador, Alexey Y. Dedov was present too.⁹⁶ The Speaker specifically underlined the prevalence of cross-party support, rather consensus, amongst the parliamentarians to develop friendlier relations with Russia.⁹⁷ Stressing the prerequisite to increased mutually profitable Russian investment in Pakistan, he argued, "Russia can take advantage of the Pak-China 'trade corridor', spreading from the Chinese border to Gwadar port, as an alternative route for Russia to link with the Middle East."⁹⁸ "We want a multi-dimensional relationship with Russia in the fields of trade, defence, energy, infrastructure, culture and other spheres,"⁹⁹ the Speaker added. He called for international multi-dimensional legislative and political steps to mitigate the challenges of terrorism and extremism.¹⁰⁰ Leonid Slutsky discussed strategies for substantial increases in business and trade between the Pakistan and Russia, including agriculture, textile, leather goods, sports goods, etc., and investment of Russian businesses in the energy sector.¹⁰¹

Meanwhile, a well-connected leading businessman of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been appointed Honorary Council of Russian

Federation for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA, in Peshawar. The Russian Ambassador, Alexey Y. Dedov read the appointment order signed by Russian President V. Putin during an official ceremony held in the Embassy of the Russian Federation in Islamabad, Pakistan. "Opening of the Russian consulate in Peshawar is a very significant event since it is a gateway to Eurasia region."¹⁰² The ambassador also admired the efforts and work of Habib Ahmed, Honorary Consul of Russian Federation in Lahore.¹⁰³ Speaking to Chief Editor, *Vipusnik*, the Russian Honorary Consul in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Arsala Khan opined that his main aim would be promoting trade and tourism between the two countries. He would also strive to attract investment in Russia-Pakistan joint ventures in addition to improving bilateral trade links. "Our province has tremendous potential for economic development and it offers good opportunities to foreign investors".¹⁰⁴ Habib Ahmed, Honorary Consul of the Russian Federation at Lahore, congratulated Arsala Khan and remarked, "Opening of the Russian Consulate in Peshawar is a great achievement of Russian Federation."¹⁰⁵

In Peshawar, on 19 February 2018, Governor Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Engineer Iqbal Zafar Jhagra termed the establishment of Honorary Consulate of Russian Federation in Peshawar a sign of the beginning of a new chapter, an impetus to renewed relations between the two countries. "Pakistan and Russia are looking at each other as complementary partners for regional balance, growth and partnership for the well-being of the respective people,"¹⁰⁶ he remarked. On 20 February 2018, Alexey Y. Dedov commemorating Seventy (70) Years of Pak-Russia Diplomatic Relations as Chief Guest, at a Seminar, jointly organised by the Area Study Centre (Russia, China and Central Asia), University of Peshawar, and the Honorary Consul General Russian Federation for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA, lauded economic trade and defence cooperation between the two countries and termed the increased visits of both political and defence leadership, a welcome sign. Prof. Dr Sarfraz Khan, Director, Area Study Centre stressed the

need for increased cooperation to rid this region of terrorism, extremism and promote peace and economic cooperation. Instead of promoting rivalries, a paradigm shift is needed to take into account the interest and wellbeing of the people of the Af-Pak region, working together to reduce tension, promote peace and economic cooperation.¹⁰⁷

Mr Arsala Khan, Honorary Councilor General Russian Federation for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA, informed participants regarding the establishment of Russian Honorary Consulate at Peshawar in order to facilitate Pak-Russia cooperation: the signing of new, reviving of previously signed, Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with various Russian Academic Institutions besides promoting trade and culture.¹⁰⁸

Earlier, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif, in line with Pakistan's efforts to court Russia in order to counter intense US pressure that demanded acceleration in the fight against terrorism, proceeded on a three-day visit to Russia on 19 February 2018. "Russia enjoys a special place in our foreign policy,"¹⁰⁹ declared Foreign Office, an unparalleled expression, for a country with whom Pakistan previously held acrimonious relations. The two sides also share a common perspective on Afghanistan and believe that road to peace and stability goes through the sustained dialogue process with the Afghan Taliban. Russia increasingly feels concerned over the rise of IS in Afghanistan and fears terrorist outfits may endanger her security too. Therefore, not only China and Pakistan but Russia also push for a political solution to the Afghan conflict.¹¹⁰ Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared that Russia would continue assisting Pakistan to reinforce its counterterrorism capabilities and forming of a commission for military cooperation by the two countries.¹¹¹ He reaffirmed Russia's willingness to increase Pakistan's counterterrorism capacity, considering it in the interest Central and South Asia.¹¹² Lavrov argued that fighting terrorism had been a priority area for

cooperation, along with bilateral trade and economic cooperation with Pakistan, especially in the energy sector. Asif stated that the spread of militant Islamic State (IS) terrorists in Afghanistan caused alarm in Pakistan since repositioning of IS terrorists from West Asia to northeastern Afghanistan posed a threat to Pakistan, Central Asia, and Russia.¹¹³ For him, the number of IS terrorists in Afghanistan had far surpassed the Taliban. Both Kabul and Washington never acknowledged such a huge existence of Daesh in Afghanistan.¹¹⁴ Asif argued that Pakistan stressed a negotiated settlement, considering it the only solution to the Afghan conflict. However, the prevalence of Daesh has definitely been “alarming for us because they are not a party to negotiations in Afghanistan.”¹¹⁵ Pakistan supports the “role played by Russia in developing a regional approach to Afghan”¹¹⁶ quagmire and “commendable” Russian efforts to eliminate IS. Asif reaffirmed Pakistan’s commitment to fighting terrorism in cooperation with the international community, including Russia, despite heavy human and material losses, including more than 70,000 servicemen and citizens.¹¹⁷ Pakistan opposes the imposition of unilateral sanctions against any country including the Russian Federation “especially when these are politically motivated,”¹¹⁸ Asif declared. During consultations, satisfaction was expressed over growing cooperation and the two agreed to deepen cooperation in various spheres of mutual interest.¹¹⁹ The two ministers concluded that there exists no military solution to the Afghan dispute and to diligently synchronise processes concerning peace in Afghanistan.¹²⁰

Regarding the Afghan conflict, Lavrov opined that they were preoccupied with the situation in Afghanistan and “expansion of IS influence.”¹²¹ He termed the presence of IS in the north and east of Afghanistan a ‘serious’ threat “already amount[ed] to a thousand people.”¹²² He expressed Moscow’s concern of security threat created for the Central Asian Republics and the Russian Federation.¹²³ Lavrov

said that IS had organised attacks inside Afghanistan including at a luxury hotel in Kabul on 20 January 2018.¹²⁴

Energy Economics: Pak-Russia Cooperation

Several projects in meeting Pakistan's energy needs were initiated by the two countries, including the Pakistan-Russia LNG Pipeline Accord, CASA-1000, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Oil and Gas Company Limited (KPOGCL), besides TAPI and IPI. The then Petroleum Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, sidestepping normal bidding requirements, signed on 16 October 2015, a government-to-government agreement as a deal in Islamabad with Russian Energy Minister, Alexander Novak. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the signing ceremony.¹²⁵ Moscow was to provide a loan of \$2 billion in return for the award of the contract to the state-run Russian firm RT Global, an arm of the Russia State Corporation. The Russian firm RT Global was to lay 1,100 km-long North-South Pipeline capable of carrying 12.4 bcm per annum connecting LNG terminals in Karachi with consumption centres near Lahore.¹²⁶

Pakistan and Russia inked this agreement confirming that the latter lay a \$2.5 billion worth pipeline to carry imported LNG from Karachi to Lahore. The contract signed with Russia may be considered premature in the absence of a formal agreement to import LNG from Qatar or any other country.¹²⁷ Closer inspection of the deal by many analysts suggests the immensely favourable terms granted to the Russian company. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Sharif had agreed earlier, in Ufa, to award the contract to the Russian firm without bidding and extension of finance by the Russian government. Details of the financing terms are not available. The project indicates the Russian desire to supply LNG to Pakistan at some point and Pakistan's efforts to diversify economic and trade relations.¹²⁸ Pakistan will provide 15% and the Russian company 85% equity, investing \$2 billion. Russian firm will run the project on build, own, operate and transfer basis for 25 years, to recover cost and profit and hand it over to a Pakistani

entity.¹²⁹ The Government of Pakistan shall provide the sovereign guarantee.



The News.

The Price Negotiating Committee approved by the Economic Coordination Committee (ECC)¹³⁰ agreed upon a fee of 85cents/million British thermal units (mmbtu), “the ideal rate for gas transmission”¹³¹ instead of the \$1.2 mmbtu initially demanded fee.¹³² Local gas utilities are paid 85 cents per mmbtu too for gas transmission through their pipeline networks. The Russian company RT Global, under US-imposed sanctions, was to implement the project. In the revised plan, Russia registered a special purpose vehicle, a local company, in Pakistan to deal with the pipeline project. It has been argued that “Foreign Office played a key role in finalising the gas price with Russia ahead of BRICS summit on 17 October 2015, in order to muster Moscow’s support against Indian influence,”¹³³ and “India has abandoned Russia” to join US camp, stimulating Pakistan to forge stronger ties with Moscow and attain much-needed support to avoid international isolation.¹³⁴ Russian President Vladimir Putin declined to endorse Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s standpoint that Islamabad allegedly sponsored terrorism.¹³⁵ The Russian investment in LNG pipeline may open avenues to invest in

the energy sector including oil and gas exploration; power production and electricity export to Pakistan.¹³⁶ It has been argued that despite a perceived lack of incentives to deepen the relationship, Moscow has been keeping Pakistan engaged for strategic and political compulsions such as the situation in Afghanistan, terrorism, and anti-narcotics collaboration.¹³⁷ The Russian Ambassador referred to the 'unrealised potential' of the ties, but also noted that Pakistan was "seen [in Russia] as an important and reliable partner with whom relations could be developed."¹³⁸ He also referred to the geo-strategic position of Pakistan, challenges and interests shared by the two countries motivating Moscow to deepen bilateral relations.¹³⁹ The resolution of a longstanding economic dispute which had resulted in the freezing of Russian assets worth \$120 million in Pakistan, a major hurdle in economic cooperation between the two, enabled meeting all 'pre-requisites', and laid the foundation, increasing the chances of success.¹⁴⁰ Dedov viewed the helicopters' sale, as a 'pilot deal'.¹⁴¹

Pakistan invited the Russian Federation to join CASA-1000 for non-hydro electricity since there has been a vacant slot to transmit from October to April.¹⁴² Russian deputy minister informed that discussions on the possibility of Russia joining CASA-1000 transmission line at off-peak hydrogenation period with Tajikistan were held and that the latter was willing to facilitate. The Russian government is opening discussions with Kyrgyzstan on this matter soon.¹⁴³ Parallel discussions whether the electricity import from Russia would be a commercial or a government-to-government deal were held. Dagha reported, that work on CASA-1000 to transmit hydro electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan from May to September had already been started.¹⁴⁴ This will boost regional connectivity and greater regional cooperation. The feasibility of a 600MW gas-fired power plant at Jamshoro with Russian investment has already been conducted and the project document is ready for approval. He termed it as the 'most viable project' for immediate investment by Russia.¹⁴⁵

Russian companies carrying substantial surplus capacities in thermal and nuclear power plants having rich experience in the energy sector are eager to invest in Pakistan's energy sector¹⁴⁶ to enable Islamabad to overcome energy shortages once political and commercial agreements are finalised.¹⁴⁷

A Russian consortium of investors concluded an agreement with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Oil and Gas Company Limited (KPOGCL) to inaugurate an oil refinery with a refining capacity of 200,000 barrels oil/day needing an investment of Rs.35 billion. The consortium comprises Russian companies Inter-Rao Engineering and Himmash Apparat in partnership with Orpheus Energy.¹⁴⁸ Chief Planning Officer KPOGCL Zainullah Shah and Yoroslav of Himmash Apparat signed the deal at Khyber Pakhtunkhwa House Islamabad on 31 January 2018.¹⁴⁹

Imran Khan, Chief Minister Pervez Khattak, and Muhammad Atif, Provincial Minister for Energy were also present at the signing ceremony.¹⁵⁰ Currently, crude oil production is 54,000 barrels/day and will increase up to 70,000 barrels/day.¹⁵¹ The province will get a 10% share in profit in refineries, without any investment.¹⁵² Provincial Energy and Power Minister Muhammad Atif Khan said that the Russian consortium had a vast experience in the oil and gas sector and would help KPOGCL fulfil its goal of achieving self-sufficiency in the energy sector.¹⁵³

To further witness signs of enhanced mutual collaboration in the field of energy, Pakistan and Russia inked, on 27 September 2018, an Inter-Governmental Agreement to initiate feasibility research of constructing the Russia-Pakistan Offshore Gas Pipeline worth \$10 billion. Russia aims at capturing the energy-starved Pakistani market and diversify its gas exports. In Moscow, Sher Afgan, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Energy and Petroleum Division, Pakistan, and Anatoly Yanovsky, Deputy Prime Minister, Government of Russia, signed the MoU. Gazprom, a state-owned Russian Energy Company will pay expenses of the feasibility study to assess the economic

viability and cost of the project. Inter-State Gas Systems (ISGS), a state-owned company of Pakistan with a mandate to build gas pipelines, would look after it from the Pakistani side.¹⁵⁴

Pakistan brings to South Asia and Eurasia regional connectivity owing to its geo-strategic location. New vistas of land and sea routes can be linked across regions shortening the distance for the rapid movement of economic goods and services. By increasing connectivity, Pakistan can link energy deficient regions through new energy corridors with energy surplus regions. Pakistan's invitation and the Russian Federation's acceptance of joining the CASA-1000 Project is a good example to cite. Power generation in Tajikistan has already started.¹⁵⁵ In 2017, Pakistan initiated an agreement with Russia to construct a 600MW Natural Gas Combined Cycle (NGCC) power plant at Jamshoro. Both Pakistan and the Russian Federation are in contact regarding the execution of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) pipeline project, worth \$2 billion and a 1,100 km 'North-South Pipeline Project' which will transport gas from Karachi (Sindh) to Lahore (Punjab) and help reduce shortage of gas in the country. The change of government and expiry of LNG agreement with Qatar, coupled with the increased demand for energy in Pakistan may pave the way for acceleration of work on the projects mentioned above.

Moscow-Islamabad Rapprochement: Enhanced Defence Ties, A Paradigm Shift?

In times of waning US influence over Islamabad, former antagonist, Moscow, attempts at erecting security, political and commercial ties that may overturn older groupings in this region and open up a fast-emerging hydrocarbon market to Russian businesses dealing in energy. The Russian embrace of Pakistan occurs when Pak-US relations unravel over the conflict and war in Afghanistan, a 180° turnaround from the 1980s. Although the Moscow-Islamabad rapprochement is in its embryonic stage, China has been filling the resultant void left in Pak-United States relations, however, a swing in

energy deals and growing military cooperation portends a closer Russia-Pakistan relationship. "It is an opening,"¹⁵⁶ said Defence Minister, Khurram Dastgir Khan. The warmth in diplomatic ties was felt in Afghanistan, where Russia began developing ties with the Afghan Taliban fighting US troops and having firm links to Islamabad to encourage intra-Afghan peace negotiations.¹⁵⁷ Moscow fears the growth of Islamic State (IS) inside Afghanistan and the spread of its fighters towards Central Asia, contiguous to Russia. IS claims of having carried out major attacks in Pakistan makes it a common enemy. On most issues we have convergence,¹⁵⁸ declared Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, and the relationship will grow significantly in the future.¹⁵⁹ The plan to establish a commission to combat IS militarily in the region and to continue annual military training exercises begun in 2016, the acquisition of 4 Russian attack helicopters, and of Russian engines for Air Force JF-17 fighter jets being assembled in Pakistan are some of the areas of common interest.¹⁶⁰ India, a Soviet ally during the Cold War, previously having closer relations with Russia bought Russian arms, elevated to a 'strategic partner', of the US¹⁶¹ may become anxious in case the Russians begin sponsoring Pakistan politically, argued Sushant Sareen, a leading expert on India and Pakistan Afghanistan relations.¹⁶²

Russian propositions to Pakistan provide much needed diplomatic respite in times of mounting pressure by Western powers over its alleged links to Afghan militants. The decision to place Pakistan on the watchlist of countries having inadequate terrorist-financing controls by the global financial watchdog, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) in January 2018 is considered by Pakistan as an attempt to severely hurt Pakistan's fragile economy, a step initiated by the US with the assistance of Britain, France and Germany. The US has suspended \$2 billion in military assistance to Pakistan. For Khawaja Asif, the nation made a historic error by 'tilting 100%' to the West and must build alliances closer to home with China, Russia, and Turkey.¹⁶³

"We want to correct the imbalance of our foreign policy over the past 70 years,"¹⁶⁴ Defence Minister, Dastgir Khan said. Pakistan, heavily reliant on US military weapons and aircraft previously, might have no option but to purchase from Russia.¹⁶⁵ A cooling relationship with the West has been pushing Islamabad towards China, investor of around \$62 billion in developing infrastructure in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Wary of becoming overly dependent diplomatically upon Beijing, Pakistan, one amongst several states that fell out with Washington is being courted by Moscow. Russia's long-term aims, however, are unclear to Pakistan, argues Petr Topychkanov, senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.¹⁶⁶ For him, the issue of change in relations with Pakistan is not well known in Russia.¹⁶⁷ Debate on or explanation of what Russia wants from Pakistan is missing in public or media.¹⁶⁸ The Russian foreign ministry does not even respond to queries/comments regarding its growing closer relations with Pakistan.¹⁶⁹

Khawaja Asif has maintained that the improvement of Pak-Russia ties is neither against nor at the cost of relation with any other country. He brushed aside notions that the Russian defence minister's November 2014 visit to Pakistan could annoy New Delhi and Washington. Terming it, 'Pakistan's independent diplomacy', he declared, "Russia is a great regional power and Pakistan cannot ignore it."¹⁷⁰ In the wake of US/NATO forces' surge/withdrawal, security will become a colossal challenge for Afghanistan, he opined, and welcomed Russian engagement in the Afghan peace process. "We must forget what Russia did in the past and look forward to a new beginning in the region."¹⁷¹ Terming Russian and Chinese presence in the region a source of peace and stability, therefore, he mentioned that the three were getting closer on strategic matters.¹⁷² Khawaja Asif also briefed his Russian counterpart, General Sergey Shoygu on relations with India.¹⁷³ He termed the briefing given to Gen Shoygu, ahead of Russian President Vladimir 'visit to India as very

significant.¹⁷⁴ Russia has moved Pakistan up to category B from D, easing Russian arms sales to Pakistan,¹⁷⁵ Asif revealed. Shoygu called upon former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, who declared, "Pakistan is keen to enhance its multi-dimensional relations with Moscow, including defence."¹⁷⁶ Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif thanked the visiting minister for supporting Pakistan's bid to become a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) reaffirmed Pakistan's resolves to increase cooperation with states in the region, to counter terrorism and drug trafficking.¹⁷⁷

Earlier, in 2012, the Russian Ministry of Defence began hosting the Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS) annually, on the pattern of the Munich Security Conference.¹⁷⁸ The Conference has been a combination of official diplomacy, international display, and an opportunity provided to the Russian national security establishment to interact with mainly defence ministers of non-Western countries. It has become an institutionalised forum to advance the Russian policy agenda and present new issues in international security to revise familiar grievances.¹⁷⁹ Seven such Moscow Conferences on International Security have been held till today and Pakistan participated in 4th, 6th and 7th.¹⁸⁰

Pakistan was invited to, for the first time, and participated in the 4th Moscow Conference on International Security held in 2015.¹⁸¹ On 15 April 2015, Khawaja Asif, argued that the conference will bring together defence ministers of Russia, Pakistan, Armenia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Argentina, Indonesia, Iran, Serbia, and South Africa, besides heads of international organisations.¹⁸² The event, organised by the Russian Defence Ministry, enables states to rebuild trust in the military-to-military interaction and discusses joint efforts to counter terrorism.¹⁸³ The minister exchanged views on cooperation related to the defence sector with Sergey Shoygu in Moscow.¹⁸⁴ The Russians appreciated steps taken by Pakistan in the war against terrorism, prevention of drug smuggling, and action

against pirates. The joint declaration stated that both Pakistan and Russia will conduct joint military exercises;¹⁸⁵ exchange information on politico-military issues, cooperate in promoting international security, intensify counter-terrorism, arms control activities, strengthen collaboration in the military field, education, medicine, history, topography, hydrography, culture, and share experiences in peacekeeping operations.¹⁸⁶ Excitement regarding defence agreement, notwithstanding, no specific project, on procurement or joint venture, materialised. The Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, Alexey Dedov, argued 'Politically Approved' by Moscow, the deal to purchase MI-35 helicopters, had raised hopes of reaching a major agreement during the defence minister's visit".¹⁸⁷ Both sides agreed that bilateral military cooperation would not only focus on practically contributing to increase combat efficiency of both armed forces but also bolster other aspects of bilateral cooperation, according to *ITAR-TASS*.¹⁸⁸ Similarly, "both sides will translate this relationship in tangible terms and further strengthen military to military relations,"¹⁸⁹ reciprocated Khawaja Asif.

Tasneem Aslam, the then Foreign Office spokesperson, opined that Pakistan considered Russia an 'important global player' that had a stake in peace and stability of the region. She expressed satisfaction over growing cooperation and the strengthening of bilateral relations not solely in defence but in diverse fields and welcomed greater Russian contribution towards economic development projects and investment in Pakistan.¹⁹⁰ Thirty countries participated in the sixth Moscow International Security Conference held on 26-27 April 2017. The forum concentrated on fight against international terrorism, security issues in Europe and the Asia-Pacific region, role of military departments in enhancing security, counterterrorism and counter radicalism in the Middle East, security of information space, Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) implications, and security in Central Asia.¹⁹¹ The Russian Defence Minister, General Sergey Shoygu and Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, spoke on the occasion. The UN's Under-Secretary-General, Jeffrey

Feltman read the welcome address of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres.¹⁹² Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif highlighted challenges faced by Pakistan and success achieved during the war on terror.¹⁹³ Russia, China, and Pakistan's attempts at restoring peace in the war-ravaged Afghanistan have not succeeded but the US, despite being invited to Moscow to participate in the peace talks, declined. To rub salt in the wounds, the US blamed Russia for arming the Taliban but at the same time dropped the 'Mother of all bombs' on Afghanistan.¹⁹⁴

On 3 April 2018, the Defence Minister, Engineer Khurram Dastgir Khan, in the seventh two-day Moscow International Security Conference 2018, discussed the security issues facing Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The Defence Minister declared on 4 April 2018 that Pakistan would cooperate with Russia to establish sustainable peace in Afghanistan and peace that could only be ensured by encouraging an Afghan-led peace process.¹⁹⁵ Referring to Pakistan's matchless sacrifices in the war against terrorism, he stressed, "There is no space for terrorists and their networks in the country."¹⁹⁶ He appreciated the Russian role in combating ISIS in Syria, warning, "non-state actors, representing conflicting interests in the region, will continue to threaten the fragile peace process in Syria."¹⁹⁷ He supported Russian efforts to develop a regional approach to the cessation of hostilities and conflict in Afghanistan, arguing for, "an Afghan-owned and Afghan-led internal reconciliation process," as a sole viable option of sustainable peace in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁸ The Minister viewed with concern the presence of IS, use of drug money financing terror, and phenomenal rise in poppy cultivation in Afghanistan.¹⁹⁹

On 14 June 2015 the then Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Raheel Sharif arrived in Moscow on a three-day official visit against the backdrop of realignments taking place in the region. His spokesperson, accompanying the COAS, reported that General Sharif was given an "elegant guard of honour" at a ceremony held at the

Kremlin. Laying of Floral Wreath at the Tomb of Unknown Soldier, sight of Russian band playing Pakistani National Anthem had perfectly been heartwarming for Major General Asim Bajwa, DG, ISPR.²⁰⁰

The COAS briefed Russian authorities on the current regional situation, practising proactive diplomacy launched by Pakistan to reach out to regional countries in the wake of realignments in the region.²⁰¹ "In the last two years, we have had more high-level visits between the two countries than in the past many years,"²⁰² Tariq Fatemi, Minister of State Foreign Affairs declared in a policy speech. "These have included ministers of power, energy, petroleum, finance, defence, foreign affairs, the army chief, and the chiefs of the other services,"²⁰³ General Sharif and the Russian military leadership announced plans to hold the first-ever joint military exercise, and signed MoUs providing Pakistan with the opportunity to acquire defence equipment from Moscow.²⁰⁴ The softening up between two cold war rivals seemed a "natural outflow of Russia's concern about what is going to happen to Afghanistan."²⁰⁵ In case of instability in Afghanistan, militancy, and Muslim radicalism and terrorism is bound to spread to the weaker neighbouring states. China and Iran are not weak states, but the Central Asian states around Afghanistan mostly having porous borders, weaker governments, a variety of autocracies, and vulnerability to instability and ethnic conflicts are.²⁰⁶ Militants belonging to these states have already been operative both in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Kofman views Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan as great targets.²⁰⁷ Russia, maintaining a military presence in these countries besides a huge military base in Tajikistan, possesses a sizeable Muslim population of its own, has not faced severe radicalisation and militancy yet but is not immune, in case neighbouring states fall victim. Russian overtures towards Pakistan may also be to gain leverage over the Afghan Taliban via Islamabad in case the elected Afghan government falls. Russian

security services firmly believe that Pakistani intelligence services and Pakistani establishment have very strong links with the Afghan Taliban,²⁰⁸ argues Nandan Unnikrishnan. Russia may also view Pakistan as an untouched market direct defence trade of which with Russia has been far lower than its potential, merely \$22 million, compared to billions of dollars with India. Pakistan has been getting Russian equipment via China, not known for manufacturing aircraft engines, rather known to use unauthorised Russian engines in planes. Eliminating China as a conduit may benefit Pakistan in trading with Russia “and save a lot of money,”²⁰⁹ opines Kofman. China-Pakistan joint production, the JF-17 Thunder aircraft equipped with Russian engines, that has been in receipt of its first foreign order serves as the best example. The extent of defence cooperation between these two countries will be determined by Pakistan’s capacity to spend, since “Russia, at the end of the day, is not in a position, like the United States, to subsidise defence deals,”²¹⁰ he argued. Stability in Afghanistan and facilitating peace talks between the Afghan Taliban and the government of Afghanistan and role Russia and China can be an added reason.²¹¹

The Russian Commander-in-Chief, Oleg Salyukov proclaimed on 23 January 2016, that Russian ground forces will hold “the first ever Russian-Pakistani special drills in mountainous terrain.”²¹² A total of 200 troops took part from both sides, drills took place at the Army High Altitude School at Rattu²¹³ and at a Special Forces Training Centre, situated in Cherat during the first large-scale Russian-Pakistani Druzhba-2016 exercise (24 September-10 October 2016).²¹⁴ On 30 March 2107, a delegation of the Russian military was invited to pay a rare visit to North Waziristan to witness the success of the Pakistan Army’s operation Zarb-e-Azb that combed and cleared this region of terrorists.²¹⁵

The Russian military delegation demonstrated increased Russian interest in combating militancy in the region and Afghanistan.

The scheduled visit of the delegation to Wana, South Waziristan, did not materialise due to bad weather.²¹⁶

Hosting Russian Deputy Chief of General Staff, Colonel General Isakov Sergi Yuryevich's visit to North Waziristan led analysts to point towards 'a new friendship in the making', an 'interesting and unusual' development between Pakistan and Russia.²¹⁷ Sanctioned by the military, the relations between the two have been 'growing rapidly' but not gone so forward yet to be called 'an alliance',²¹⁸ viewed Brigadier Saad, former military Attaché of Pakistan to Afghanistan.

The relationship began to mend following the visit to Pakistan, in November 2014, of the Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shogu and the signing of the Defence Cooperation Agreement.²¹⁹ Naval forces of both countries had participated in 'Arabian Monsoon' exercises in 2014 and 2015.²²⁰ Gen. Talat Masood referred to the changing relations with Russia as qualitative. To him, President Putin was in pursuit of a clever and aggressive policy of improving diplomatic relations. The current Russian policy may neutralise Indian designs against Pakistan and save the country from isolation.²²¹ The Russian Ambassador to Pakistan called upon the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) General Qamar Javed Bajwa at General Headquarters (GHQ) and lauded the launch of Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad.²²² He acknowledged Pakistan Army's undeterred efforts in the fight against terrorism and commendable economic initiatives, reported ISPR.²²³ COAS Bajwa thanked the Russian Ambassador for expressing concern over the loss of lives in Pakistan and cooperation of the Russian army with the Pakistan Army. Enhanced military to military cooperation between the two countries positively impact on the regional security situation, he declared.²²⁴

A contingent of Pakistan Army landed in Russia for the 2nd round of the bilateral 'Druzhba' Special Warfare exercises.²²⁵ The military drill centring on counter-terrorism operations, including hostage and rescue and cordon and search operations lasting for 228

weeks,²²⁶ will definitely enhance military ties between the two countries.²²⁷ The exercises took place at a time when Pakistan had been recalibrating its foreign policy options in the wake of the new strategy announced by President Donald Trump for Afghanistan and South Asia. Pakistan has been considering Russia as a key regional player in an altered chessboard to counterbalance the potential negative consequences of President Trump's new roadmap. Pakistani and Russian positions have been converging on Afghanistan.²²⁸

COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, upon arrival at Moscow on 24 April 2018, met Commander of the Russian Ground Forces Colonel General Oleg Salyukov in the Kremlin Palace.²²⁹ During the talks, the Russians offered to expand existing military-to-military cooperation and defence and security ties with Pakistan. With 'geo-strategically important' Pakistan, Russia "is keen to expand"²³⁰ ties, a significant development at a time, when Islamabad's relationship with Washington continues to deteriorate. The Russian military commander acknowledged Pakistan's achievements in fighting terrorism and its contribution towards regional peace and stability. In contrast, the US, especially after Trump's victory, has repeatedly been accusing Pakistan of not doing enough against terrorism in Afghanistan. The Russians understand and appreciate the critical role Pakistan can play as a geo-strategically important country, hence, desire to expand its existing bilateral military to military cooperation expressed by the Russian Commander of Ground Forces.²³¹ General Bajwa reciprocated by expressing Pakistan's willingness to enhance bilateral military engagements.²³² He termed the role of Russia positive, capable of resolving the complex situation in the region, to continue efforts of Pakistan for keeping conflicts away from this region and "seek approaches which bring regional convergences into play rather than the divergences."²³³ On the second day of his visit, i.e., 25 April 2018, General Bajwa met Chief of General Staff of Russian Armed Forces, General Valery Vasilevich Gerasimov and declared, "Pakistan has no

hostile designs towards any country and desires to come out of the zero-sum dynamics of the Cold War era prevalent still in South Asia."²³⁴ Pakistan will keep on working towards a cooperative regional framework based on sovereign equality and mutual progress through connectivity.²³⁵

Prior to Bajwa's visit to Moscow, the National Security Advisor Lt Gen (Retd) Nasser Khan Janjua led a ministerial delegation to Russia comprising: National Security, Strategic Planning Divisions, Ministries of Defence, Interior, Defence Production, Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO) and intelligence officials. The Russian side, led by Nikolai Patrushev, secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, included the Commander-in-Chief of Land Forces of the Russian Federation, senior representatives from the Russian Security Council, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Rosoboron Export, Federal Security Services, Federal Service for Military-Technical Cooperation and Roscosmos. Details of the talks were not made public, however, Pakistan's National Command Authority in December 2017 stated the vision and potential of the National Space Program 2047.²³⁶ The Pakistani search for a military hardware supplier, along with China, to replace the US as the major source of arms supply, can provide some context for understanding the agenda.²³⁷

Conclusion

During the 70 years of diplomatic relations, Pakistan and Russia could not develop a steady and mutually beneficial relationship. The relations between the two countries, estranged previously during the Cold War era, have been improving since 2007, following the renewal of ties. The fast-evolving geo-strategic, geopolitical, and geo-economic, regional environment, particularly India's increasing intimacy with the US, the Afghan quagmire, threat perception from terrorist outfits, including IS, drug trafficking, energy economics,

coupled with security cooperation, might be counted as major contributors towards stimulating a convergence of interest.

In 2002 the Joint Working Groups began identifying and discussing a range of contemporary issues of mutual interest. Resultantly, a flurry of bilateral visits occurred that led to cooperation not only in diverse fields, such as trade, energy, defence, science, technology, agriculture, education, health, and information technology but also paved the way for holding the first-ever joint defence drill. Pakistan and Russia got the opportunity to translate high-level military engagements into tangible outcomes. Increased economic and security ties at bilateral and multilateral levels allude towards the direction of foreign policy, i.e., both countries are willing and prepared to cooperate after learning from the lost opportunities in the past. Although security and economic relations have to be the top priority for both, Pakistan's full membership of SCO will open for it new vistas not limited to security and economic cooperation with Russia. The distinct Indo-Russian security, economic, and political relations stretched over seven decades appear altering, following emerging fissures that led to the opening of new opportunities for security/military cooperation between Pakistan and Russia. Both Russia and Pakistan, having earlier supported rival factions in Afghanistan began demonstrating a convergence of interest by supporting a negotiated peace to Afghanistan. The reason is that both want to prevent the spread of extremism and terrorism, emanating from Afghanistan to Pakistan, Central Asia, and Russia.

Both countries are interested in trade, economic, and energy cooperation, however, a rapprochement in the form of developing security/military ties has been projected as a paradigm shift. Increased security/military ties may kickstart and strengthen cooperation in other fields too. The narcotics trade originating from Afghanistan, a major concern for Russia, and energy supply/generation, a major Pakistani concern, may serve to further cement the relationship.

President Vladimir Putin's visit to Pakistan was postponed at the eleventh hour in October 2012, for the absence of substance. Putin, recently re-elected President for another 6-year term, may now find enough substance to visit Pakistan. No Russian or Soviet President has ever paid an official visit to Pakistan.

Russian and Pakistani geo-strategic, geopolitical, and geo-economic interests have amazingly been converging on numerous international and regional issues, including peace and tranquillity, negotiations and reconciliation in Afghanistan, and the rising threat of IS to both countries, and its spread to Central Asia. Russia intends to contain the IS away, at least, from the River Amu. Pakistan wants to prevent its infiltration into FATA and adjoining areas. Having developed a better understanding of Afghanistan, the Russian leadership does regularly host Pakistani and the Afghan leaders in Moscow to resolve the Afghan conflict. Post-conflict Afghanistan may render assistance in building bridges between Eurasian states and become a harbinger of peace for the entire region, allowing projects such as Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India Pipeline (TAPI) to implement. Interestingly, Russia has been supporting Pakistan in major international forums and dialogues and President Putin's Russia does not encourage Baloch dissidents and insurgents.²³⁸ The key to better relations between the two still has been security/military ties, coupled with energy economics. It is, therefore, hoped that this paradigm shift may not intensify major power rivalries, a regional 'great game', rather reduce tensions, resolve conflicts, and further develop economic integration and cooperation in the region.

Both Russia and Pakistan seem fully aware and conscious of possible threats to their growing relations emanating from international/regional powers, neighbouring states, and non-state actors. Therefore, civil and military officials of both countries regularly organise and meet in Joint Working Groups on security to curb international terrorism and advance strategic stability for more than a

decade now. Factors limiting faster growth of Pak-Russia relations may include India. Moscow's long-standing ties with India are considered a hurdle in the way of Pakistan-Russia relations because they may offend New Delhi and jeopardise Russo-India cooperation. However, Russian experts tend to believe that Russian MiG-35 jet fighters can be purchased by Pakistan without causing displeasure in India. Moscow has been concerned about the security of personnel and investment in Pakistan. Interest in developing infrastructure projects, promoting South Asian stability, such as transportation and energy, may increase and materialise if the security of Russian personnel and investments is ensured and guaranteed on a permanent basis. Russian companies are reluctant to send employees even on business trips to Pakistan fearing terrorist attacks and the precarious security situation in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Investors from Russia question the capacity of Pakistan in providing protection to their investments in case it upsets other partners of Moscow or Pakistan. Some confidence-building measures are required with neighbours too. Locating the grave sites of missing in action Soviet soldiers during the Afghan conflict in Pakistan may help build a better foundation. Greater exchange of information with Warriors-Internationalists Affairs Committee, a Russian charity and Pakistan on events of 1979-89 for a joint research project may help to heal the wounds of the past and enhance mutual trust. It will lead to increased investors' confidence and improve relations between Moscow and Islamabad enabling Russian businesses to invest in Pakistan.

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