

PAK-RUSSIA RELATIONS IN THE EMERGING GEO-STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

There are no perpetual friends or foes in the international diplomatic realm. Instead, the ever-changing global dynamics and regional geo-political realities not only forge new alignments but also wash away older animosities. A case in point is the revival in the Pak- Russia relations and its impact on the regional status quo namely, the state of affairs between Pakistan and India. Also, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) now falls well within this context. The present study focuses on the growing ties between Islamabad and Moscow, and the risks and opportunities that may precipitate subsequently. The qualitative and quantitative data is dealt analytically to determine how Pakistan can get the most out of this momentous development.

Key words: CPEC, Pak-Russia relations, Eurasian region, South Asian regional dynamics, Geo-strategic importance of Pakistan,

A state aspires to uphold its interests amidst diplomatic dynamism and the upsurge in Pakistan-Russia relations validates this principle. Historically, however, the deterioration in Pak- US relations in the last decade has brought Islamabad and Moscow on the same page. Since China and India already have deeper ties with Russia, the addition of Pakistan in this equation will surely consolidate Russian influence in South Asia. As in the words of Yuri Fedorov Russia wants to see itself as “an influential centre of a multi-polar world”¹, hence Pakistan is a part of Russian broader strategy for Central Asian countries.

¹ Yuri Fedorov, “Russia: ‘New’ Inconsistent Nuclear Thinking and Policy” in Muttiah Alagappa, ed., *The Long Shadow: Nuclear Weapons and Security in 21st Century Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 137.

In 2012, Pakistan's export to Russia was only \$210 million which comprised of 0.04% of total Russian import. During 2010-2011, Pakistan was the biggest potato exporter to Russia and exported 125,000 tons of potato. Apart from potato, Pakistan also exports orange, vegetables, textiles, leather goods and other fruits to Russia in bulk. The major issues in establishing healthy trade relations are bureaucratic hurdles, unprofessional attitude and low-quality products. Unlike the past, the economic relations between Pakistan and Russia are improving. Now the trade volume has grown and reached \$ 660 m in the first ten months of 2018.³⁰

The Russia-Pakistan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, which was created to aid the development of mutual cooperation in the fields of trade and economy, science and technology and education, has been playing a constructive role in this regard. To date, five meetings have been held between the officials of the two countries - the last being held in November 2017, in Moscow, where both sides agreed to deepen cooperation on matters of mutual interest.³¹

During the visit of the then Prime Minister of Pakistan Mian Nawaz Sharif to Russia in April 1999 the Intergovernmental Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation was signed. One of the main results of the signed agreement was establishment of the effective institutional mechanism for bilateral interaction – the Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.³²

In its 4th session which was held in Islamabad on November 18-20, 2015, it proved very important in terms of further development of Russia-Pakistan trade and economic ties. This session has also initiated discussion on opening an FTA between Pakistan and Eurasian Economic Commission

³⁰ Nazir Hussain & Quratulain Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," *Central Asia*, no.72 (June 2015): 6; *The Express Tribune*, December 29, 2018.

³¹ Almas Haider Naqvi & Yasir Masood, "Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernible Trends and Future", *Strategic Studies* vol.37, no.4 (Winter 2017): 30.

³² <http://issi.pk/issue-brief-on-pakistan-russia-strategic-partnership-new-horizons-for-cooperation/>

(EEC) within the areas of energy exploration, education, power generation, agriculture, drugs control and financial sector.³³

Within the IGC framework the First Pakistan Russia Investment Forum was held in which over 80 Russian businessmen, officials and experts from various sectors participated. As a result, the prospects of widening the scope of bilateral trade became much more distinct. The IGC's 5th plenary session was held in Moscow on November 30, 2017 which has added pace to dynamic development of economic relations.³⁴

Moreover, the Central Bank of the Russian Federation and the State Bank of Pakistan have signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Bilateral Banking Cooperation on January 15, 2018, aimed at promoting cooperation in disciplines of financial systems, financial infrastructure and financial institutions supervision. The development of banking sector will definitely boost bilateral trade.³⁵

A visit of the delegation of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan to Moscow and Saint Petersburg in September 2015 discovered new exciting opportunities for business links with Russian counterparts. A follow-up trip of a group of Pakistani businessmen also visited to Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, two industrially developed regions of Russia, in 2016 promises to open new vistas for bilateral trade cooperation between the two regions.³⁶

The Agreement between the Government of Saint-Petersburg and the Government of Sind on Cooperation in the Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Fields signed on October 23, 2017, is also a sign of enhancement in friendly relations. The Saint-Petersburg – Sind Business Forum was also established.³⁷

³³ Almas Haider Naqvi & Yasir Masood.

³⁴ Speech by Alexey Dedov, Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, December 10, 2018 available at <http://www.dnanews.com.pk/economic-cooperation-russia-pakistan-achievements-challenges/>

³⁵ *Dawn*, January 16, 2018.

³⁶ Speech by Alexey Dedov, Russian Ambassador to Pakistan, December 10, 2018 /

³⁷ *Ibid*.