

The Conduct of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Structure, Strengths and Issues

(2018-2020)

Policy Brief

Part-7

Pakistan-Russia Relations

Pakistan-Russia relations have gradually evolved in the last one decade due to Pakistan's strategic alliance with China, Pakistan's gradual moving away from the US, Russia's resurgence, and its political and economic interests in South Asia. Russia is finding new opportunities in South Asia in the wake of the US decision of withdrawing troops from Afghanistan. The membership of Pakistan in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in June 2017 brought Pakistan, Russia, China, Afghanistan, and the Central Asian Republics closer to one another. Starting in 2010, Pakistan-Russia military relations improved markedly as illustrated by high-level visits, arms sales, and increased cooperation. As a result of exchange of military visits from the two countries, Moscow lifted arms embargo on Pakistan in 2015, which gave a clear signal that Moscow was ready to improve its ties with Pakistan and was redefining its strategic interests in the changing geopolitics of South Asia. The signing of a deal which allowed Pakistan to purchase Mi-35M helicopters from Russia, and a series of joint military exercises from 2015 to 2018 had set the upward trajectory of military cooperation.

In February 2018, Pakistan's foreign minister visited Moscow and signed several agreements. All these high-level visits led to developing a closer civil and military cooperation and laid the foundation for robust cooperation between the two countries at the time of the installation of the incumbent government. There are four emerging factors driving Russian interests in Pakistan: CPEC, the future of Afghanistan, and markets for defense and strategic sales.

Chronology

The upward trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations has been encouraging in the last two and a half years. The SCO and the UNGA provided opportunities for talks between Pakistan's prime minister and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and Prime Minister, Dmitry Medvedev, as well as two foreign ministers. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, accompanied by the foreign secretary, paid his maiden visit to Russia (December 25-26, 2018) and held detailed talks with the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and expressed Pakistan's desire to forge a long-term and multidimensional partnership with Russia to promote bilateral relations in diverse fields and regional cooperation under SCO framework. The two foreign ministers agreed to continue efforts through the Moscow format of consultations for supporting the Afghan peace process, counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and peaceful nuclear cooperation including the NSG.

Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua and Sergei Ryabkov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia, led their respective delegations to the 13th meeting of the Pakistan-Russia Consultative Group on Strategic Stability (March 28, 2019). The two sides exchanged views on regional and global security environments and their impact on international arms control, disarmament, non-proliferation, non-militarization of outer space, and upholding bilateral and multilateral treaties. Pakistan and Russia signed a joint statement on "No First Placement of Weapons in Outer Space" on May 22, 2019, which is a reflection of convergence

of views between Pakistan and Russia on the prevention of arms race in outer space.

Analysis

The conduct of foreign policy by Pakistan and Russia in the last two-and-a-half years has been promising and encouraging to forge closer bilateral relations and cooperation on regional and international levels. Earlier, in pursuance of the Pakistan-Russia military agreement of 2017, a joint Military Technical Commission was set up, and the two sides explored prospects of military sales, held five joint military exercises, undertook two joint naval exercises apart from Russian naval ships' participation in the multilateral AMAN exercises hosted by the Pak Navy in 2021, and organized six rounds of military staff

talks. The growing relations have set the tone for future engagements.

Given that a political and institutional structure has been built up and convergences recognized, especially on the future of Afghanistan, Pakistan's objective to try to reap the benefits from China's BRI of which CPEC is a key part, markets for Russia's defense and strategic sales, and also from Russia's Eurasian economic community, augur well for Pakistan and Russia to deepen strategic cooperation in bilateral, regional, and international matters. These major engagements will have a positive knock-on impact on our overall objectives of deepening bilateral, regional, and multilateral cooperation, particularly on stabilizing Afghanistan.

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