



Written By
Syeda Dhanak Hashmi

Pakistan-Russia Relations: Seventy Years of Diplomatic Ties- A New Era

"United we stand"

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As the old saying goes; one can choose ones friend or foe but not the neighbors.

Whether Pakistan was petrified by the pervasiveness of communism in Russia at the time of its inception or an apprehensive inkling of belligerent the then Socialist India to forge an imminent alliance with an egalitarian USSR, Pakistan's decision to be a US ally was always regretted as a pyrrhic and myopic victory. Pak Russia relations

had many ebbs and flows and it continued in as dramatic way as it had started, it pushed the security concerns of Pakistan to the limits and affected Pakistan in a multitude of ways which includes social, political, diplomatic and militarily also.

It changed the entire focus of the nascent state of Pakistan from social sector reforms to vanguard its frontiers from a possible invasion from the erstwhile Soviet Union, a contrived collusion of USSR and India and last but not the least defeating the ideologies of communism which might have caused an unseen invasion from within the ranks of the society. The fourth Afghan war, as the people would call it in the ensuing years changed everything, it broke down USSR to Russia, emboldened USA to manipulate the world at her whims, unified Germany and isolated Pakistan on all fronts and left it with no choice then to lean on the left-over jihadist from the ashes of a very long, tiring and inconclusive war. 9/11 further twisted the scenario as the western world was scarred by the enemies of peace who supposedly were unharnessed in the most rugged terrain in the western side of Pakistan and the folds of tattered USSR. Ever since a surge to control the region has restarted with no end in sight whatsoever. In this socio political backdrop, Pakistan and Russia's association is not quite unexpected but needs a strong catalyst and extra caution to be carried out seamlessly.

Historical Outlook

Pak-Russian relations have been stained by historical legacies, over-emphasized western dependence and Pakistan's Indo-centric approach. There have always been a turbulence in the history of their relations but most of the times they have

professed each other in an undesirable approach; Pakistan through the prism of western perception and the Soviets/Russia through the Indian eyes. Yet both the countries have strong potential to improve their relations in the fast shifting regional and global security situation. But it depends on how both the countries utilize the new opportunities knocking their doors. Russian Federation is reaffirming its role in its speedy sphere of influence and beyond, and Pakistan is looking for new undertakings of projections in the face of US/western standoff. Therefore, both have geopolitical and strategic obligations to improve their relations.

Pak-Russian relations have often been under-evaluated, despite having strong potentials, primarily due to misperceived ideas and outlooks. There have been numerous chances to enhance their relations however were lost because of countless ways to deal with territorial and global security interpretations. It is intriguing to take note that there isn't a solitary reciprocal issue between the two countries that partitions them. Russian Federation is the inheritor of Soviet mantle; studded with solid nationalism, documented excellence, geopolitical effort and extraordinary power status. Then again, Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan and Central Asia, atomic power status and emerging against Americanism, have incredible potential for restored Russian enthusiasm for Pakistan. In any case, both the settlement practices and scholastic methodologies in Pakistan were/are instrumental in disregarding this essential zone of the country's foreign policy.

As it is said in international relations that 'none is perpetual companion or adversary' the same applies to Pak-Russian relations. Indeed, even in such a

despairing history, one can recognize innumerable transcripts which could have been seized upon and transformed into opportunities for better relations. The most important was the Soviet invitation that was accidentally fail to draw the US side. Maybe, at first, the establishment of a balanced foreign policy could have been laid down with the typical acknowledgment of the invitation. Rather than closing the entryway on USSR to get the US consideration, it would have been all the more profiting to keep both the alternatives open. As Pakistan stroke a fine harmony between USA and China, same could have been a feasible alternative contrasted with the USSR. It is likewise clear that the two communist states of USSR and China demonstrated an extraordinary level of persistence with respect to Pakistan's moves towards joining the western anti-socialist agreements. In view of this tenacity, Pakistan was finally ready to secure China on its side, same is yet to accomplish on Russia. Amid the bilateral phase of Pakistan's foreign policy, Russia demonstrated its interests in the security and economic enhancement of the previous. It legitimately mediated between Pakistan and India after the 1965 war. Rather than forcing the victor's tranquility, the Tashkent Agreement was not impertinent for Pakistan that had lost the war.

It is equally clear from the fact that the greatest critic of the Tashkent Agreement, i.e. Z.A.Bhutto, when came to governance in 1970s, explored every possibility to enhance relations with the USSR. The Pakistan Steel Mill of Karachi is the indication of that period when USSR reacted emphatically to the cordial calls and extended its arms to the fiscal needs of Pakistan. The giant industrial initiative by the Soviet

Union portrayed that it is a serious and grave effort to improve the economic and contemporary improvement of Pakistan. However, this enhanced connection couldn't last long as the Afghan War began in 1980s, which pitched Pakistani sponsored Afghan state army against the Soviet supported Afghan administrations. But, after the Geneva Accords of 1988 facilitated by the United Nations, as the US pulled back hurriedly from Afghanistan, Pakistan got another chance to enhance its relations with the USSR. An agreed and consensual agreement on the post-war Afghanistan amongst Pakistan and USSR couldn't just have enhanced their relations but it could equally have made the whole region stable. In any case, shockingly, Pakistan proceeded with the approach of moving behind Islamic aggressors, which terminated in the Taliban control of Afghanistan. This strategy turned out to be further aggravation as Russia presumed that these aggressors were likewise associated with the Chechnya strife. In this way, a new beginning after the Geneva Accord turned into an option lost.

Presently, after the 9/11 incidence, both the states are parties to a similar organization together with the US in their fight against terrorism. This is the opportunity that needs to be grasped and consensus on postwar Afghanistan is very important. Blunders of the post-1980s should not be repeated here. Pakistan has now a wide field open to engage with neighboring states to resolve the regional issues.

Recent Developments

Frequent steps have been taken over the last decade by the leaders and governments of both the countries for confidence building and to strengthen their relationship such as:

High level talks on militancy and nuclear proliferation between Pakistan and Russia in 2011.

Russian Air Chief's visit to Pakistan in April 2013.

Russian Naval Chief's historic visit to Pakistan in 2014.

A milestone "Defence Cooperation Agreement" was signed between the two countries during Russian Defence Minister's visit to Pakistan in November 2014.

Russia lifting up the arms embargo on Pakistan in 2014.

Visit of Pakistan's Army Chief to Moscow for crucial talks in 2015.

Russian Spy Chief's visit to Pakistan in November 2016 to discuss intelligence sharing and antiterrorism joint ventures.

Visit of Pakistan Navy's frigate Alamgir to the Russian port of Novorossiysk as a goodwill gesture.

The arrival of Russian Special Forces troops in Pakistan for joint military exercises in September 2016.

Apart from the above mentioned steps taken by both the countries to improve bilateral relations, there were several other notable steps that helped strengthen confidence, determination and aspiration of both the states for enhancing relations with each other. Russia supported and welcomed Pakistan's entry into the Shanghai

Corporation Organisation (SCO). Pakistan showed keen interest in intensifying its technical and military cooperation with Russia in a bid to expand its military arsenal and enhance its defence capabilities (an interest displayed by Pakistan via participating in the Kubinka military expo in September 2016). Russia's assurance to stand by Pakistan in its fight against terrorism is also a very creditable step taken by Moscow. An agreement to construct Lahore-Karachi LNG pipeline was also penned down in 2015 by the governments of Pakistan and Russia to further boost cooperation in development sector.

Renaissance of Ties between Pakistan and Russia

The ties between Pakistan and Russia are far stronger and are undergoing a renaissance. The year, 2018 imprints seventy years of political and diplomatic ties between Pakistan and the Russian Federation. On this auspicious event, it is touching to see the improvement that is being accomplished in the two-sided participation and empathy between the two nations. Financial, political, defense and strategic are developing; ambassadors, specialists and the business groups within the two countries are effectively occupied with distinguishing openings and territories of common interests, for advancing respective participation through bilateralism.

The reinforcing relationship is a positive development for the two countries that have shared physical region, a solid social attachment, and an entangled however in any case exceedingly interconnected past. Today, we are working through the complexities of our common history to fortify a bond that depends on focalizing

economic and key interests, notwithstanding the shared social and cultural commonalities and geographical proximity.

This modification was long overdue, particularly as Pakistan and the Russian Federation have much to offer each other. This is reflected in the numerous turning points that have just been accomplished. For instance, the Russia-Pakistan Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, which was established to help the advancement of common collaboration in the fields of exchange and economy, science, methods and training, has been assuming a productive part. To date, five meetings have been held between the authorities of the two countries- the last being held in November 2017, in Moscow, where the two sides consented to develop collaboration on issues of shared intrigue. Because of these ponder endeavors, the volume of respective exchange has seen an upward pattern over the most recent couple of years. In 2016, it was accounted for to be \$403 million, an expansion from \$331 million of every 2015. Simply a year ago the imports from Russia developed from \$170 million to \$258 million. The Pakistani fares to Russia likewise expanded by 10 percent in three months, as announced in June 2017. While these insights show the positive upward pattern in exchange ties, the figures scarcely rub the surface of the inactive potential.

With regards to defense ties, these developments have been trailed by the elevation of the Russian arms embargo to Pakistan, through the defense collaboration agreement which was signed in 2014. The two consecutive joint military activities

over the most recent two years, "Druzhba-2016" (Pakistan) and "Druzhba-2017" (Russia) additionally delineates the developing certainty and confidence between Moscow and Islamabad.

As our ties accelerate into this new era of success, the potential for exponential development winds up unfathomable. Among the numerous positives that Pakistan carries with it, the principal is local network. Because of Pakistan's critical geostrategic area, new entryways of land and ocean based linkages over the whole locale can be opened up and investigated, which won't just reinforce monetary network, however can entwine the district with new vitality halls. In such manner, Pakistan has just welcomed Russian Federation to join CASA-1000 Project. Besides, in 2017, the government bureau gave an approval to the start of concurrence with Russia for the development of 600MW Natural Gas Combined Cycle (NGCC) control plant in Jamshoro, Sindh. Pakistan and the Russian Federation are also in consultation to determine every single open issue identified with execution of sole melted gaseous petrol (LNG) pipeline project, worth \$2 billion and 1,100 km 'North-South Pipeline Project' with a capacity of around 12 billion cubic meters of gas that will transport gas from Karachi (Sindh) to Lahore (Punjab), and help decrease shortage of gas in the country.

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is another road for the upgrade of this network in such manner. Russia has officially voiced its help for the undertaking, naming it to be significant for Pakistan's economy and local network. As Russia is additionally taking a shot at a comparable Eurasian Economic Union, alongside the

lines of China's Silk Road, as the Russian Envoy to Islamabad, Alexey Dedov expressed in December 2016, it would enormously reinforce the territorial network if the two ventures are consolidated, or if Russia formally joins the CPEC.

Furthermore, for Pakistan, more grounded ties with Russia convert into monetary development and more prominent collaboration on issues of essential national significance to the nation, for example, local security and soundness, the developing danger of fear based oppression in the area, access to Russian military hardware market, and participation in divisions differing from vitality to farming. The two nations have communicated their eagerness to sign a 'Free Trade Agreement' to additionally reinforce the two-pronged/bilateral relationship. Pakistan has repeated its desire to purchase military helicopters and defence and strategic equipment from Russia, as to which the two sides are right now occupied with transactions.

Pakistan and Russia also share a goal of establishing peace in the region, especially Afghanistan. Russia has time and again highlighted Pakistan's part and emphasized that Pakistan is "a key regional player to negotiate with". Recently, Russian Presidential Envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov identified that "putting pressure on Pakistan may seriously destabilize the region-wide security situation and result in negative consequences for Afghanistan," following US President Trump's Afghanistan policy. So far, Russia has hosted three regional talks on Afghanistan with the first held in December 2016, including only China and Pakistan. It is important to understand that Pakistan and Russia are important stakeholders where

peace in Afghanistan is concerned, and both have time and again reiterated their support for peace talks.

In an era of stirring geopolitical interests and realignments, the significance of expanding upon the current establishment of relations to take them forward is comprehended well by Pakistan and Russia. Our bilateral relations have frequently been the casualty of unsystematic outside strategy choices and sketchy fixes, as a result of which there has been next to zero stability and almost little progress.

While there has always been a great potential to benefit from, unfortunately it has never materialized as effectively as it could have. However, it is being realized that the policy of holding our bilateral relations hostage to the interests of other partners is no longer sustainable. The time is ripe for Pakistan to resolve the inconsistency in its foreign policy decisions related to the Russian Federation, and to identify and pursue a particular, coherent idea of what the future of our relations should be like.

In spite of a turbulent past, it is consoling to witness that following the 9/11 assaults and the US drove war in Afghanistan, the two nations have seen critical positive development in respective relations. The cooperation which was earlier constrained is currently step by step expanding and seeing development in relatively every segment. As the interests of Pakistan and Russia progressively converge on concerns of huge territorial significance, we now should work towards improving participation in various fields and increment diplomatic ties and people friendly relations which will prompt a new dawn of conciliation, and give a chance to shed past paraphernalia.

Foreign Policy is dependably a sign of geopolitical substances, local conclusions, merging of interests, historical and social ties. Pakistan and Russia's relationship is a declaration of this phenomenon, and loaded with incredible potential outcomes for development and advance. Advancing, just a proactive approach will yield substantive outcomes. The regulation of relations in such manner is an appreciated sight. With the signing of new MoUs and production of inter-administrative commissions to direct the pace and development in various segments, it is hoped that the events will be materialized and the coming years will see an expanded cooperation. The future thriving of our region lies in more noteworthy regional networking – indigenous resolutions to indigenous issues.

Conclusion

As we celebrate the 70th commemoration of bilateral relations that are revitalizing with each passing year, let us also restate our responsibility regarding guaranteeing the sustainability of these enhancing ties, and to adopting a proactive strategy towards securing the connections that will genuinely transform this into the Asian century – bringing peace, success and steadiness to the region. In this context, the avalanche accomplishment of President Vladimir Putin in his current endorsement as President of the Russian Federation spoke volumes, not only in terms of how far the general masses of Russia remain behind the arrangements of President Putin that have prompted the resurgence of Russia at international level, yet additionally the beginning of the new period of companionships with the Russian Federation. The coherence and stability guaranteed by President Putin's extremely welcome

unrestricted achievement, especially with regards to his 'Look East Policy', will help introduce the expected time of territorial advancement, availability and development in Asia. Let us also recollect then that we are stronger when we stand together. Because united we stand, divided we fall.

