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Pakistan-Russia Relations During 1992-2001: A Critical Analysis

Abstract

Pakistan and Russia had formally established diplomatic relationship in 1992 by marking the beginning of a new era in their relationship. This move was significant as it ended decades of hostility between the two states by opening new venues for cooperation in various fields. This growing relationship had seen remarkable progress in later years followed by high-level visits to strengthen economic ties, and military cooperation. However, despite progress in multiple areas of cooperation, there were still several challenges that had to be addressed by both states for enhancing trade relationships. The research therefore dwells on the evolution of Russia-Pakistan relations since 1992 and to identify those factors which were responsible for this development. However, both Pakistan and Russia seriously need to improve their bilateral relations, and have to fully realize their potential cooperation in different fields such as trade, defense, energy and infrastructure etc.

Keywords: Bilateral, CARs, Diplomacy, Russia, Security, Trade, Terrorism

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Abstract

Pakistan and Russia had formally established diplomatic relationship in 1992 by marking the beginning of a new era in their relationship. This move was significant as it ended decades of hostility between the two states by opening new venues for cooperation in various fields. This growing relationship had seen remarkable progress in later years followed by high-level visits to strengthen economic ties, and military cooperation. However, despite progress in multiple areas of cooperation, there were still several challenges that had to be addressed by both states for enhancing trade relationships. The research therefore dwells on the evolution of Russia-Pakistan relations since 1992 and to identify those factors which were responsible for this development. However, both Pakistan and Russia seriously need to improve their bilateral relations, and have to fully realize their potential cooperation in different fields such as trade, defense, energy and infrastructure etc.

Keywords:

[Bilateral](#), [CARs](#), [Diplomacy](#), [Russia](#), [Security](#), [Trade](#), [Terrorism](#)

Introduction

Pakistan had complexities in establishing a cordial relationship with Russia after the collapse former Soviet Union. The then leadership of Russia viewed the role of Pakistan as a frontline state in the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), as the US came out as the sole leader of the unipolar world. These developments drastically changed the dynamics of world politics, especially in Central and South Asia in particular.

Fifteen states emerged as independent countries on the world map after the dissolution of (USSR, including the Central Asia Republics(The Central Asian Republics, which gained independence in 1991, are Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan), which were full of natural resources and were considered strategically very important for Pakistan. This drastic change from a bipolar to a unipolar world changed the power equation in the region. Afghanistan, as a landlocked country, was already dependent on



Pakistani ports for its trade through sea, while the newly emerged CARs were also expecting an opening to the oil-rich Middle East through Pakistan.

Amidst this backdrop, Pakistan had to reset its diplomatic and economic relations with Afghanistan, CARs, and Russia. Right after 1992, Pakistan and Russia navigated a balancing act of cooperation and competition on various international issues as the situation demanded. The early 1990s marked a critical period in their relationship, which had previously been strained due to the supportive policy of Pakistan toward the Afghan *Mujahedin* in the 1980s (Nawaz, 2015). Several factors shaped the trajectory of Pakistan and Russia relations, including strategic interests, economic cooperation, and the regional security concerns of the US in South Asia.

The global concerns of the international community in the 1990s were shifting priorities from ideological rivalries to issues like terrorism, economic globalization, climate change, and nuclear proliferation (Memon, 1994). This research paper seeks to explore fundamental factors that played a role in the resetting of the relationship between Pakistan and Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the following pages, an attempt is made to shed light on the factors and challenges responsible for the establishment of relations between the two states. Moreover, diplomatic, economic, and key political moments in Pakistan and Russia relations from 1992 to 2000 shall be critically discussed.

Pakistan-Russian Strategic Interests

The end of the Cold War politics and the emergence of the new world order necessitated realignment of foreign policies for both Pakistan and Russia to meet the requirements of the situation. Looking into the declining interests of the United States in Pakistan and Afghanistan after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was viewed that Pakistan was no longer relevant to the US turned back and left Afghanistan and Pakistan after the disintegration of the former USSR. Afghanistan and Pakistan were facing severe internal crises due to the well-entrenched militant organizations, which posed a serious threat to the regional peace and stability. Much alarming was the fostering relationship of the US with India, which created unrest in the policy circle in Pakistan. Not only was the growing partnership alarming, but

Washington conditioned economic and military aid on nuclear non-proliferation. In such a situation, it was obvious for Pakistan to consider a strategic relationship with Russia, CARs, and regional powers for economic stability (Khan, 2019). On the other hand, Russia viewed Pakistan as a platform to expand its influence in South Asia and beyond. These strategic considerations significantly determined the course of their relations during 1992-1993 (Grare, 2016).

The strategic interests of Pakistan and Russia necessitated cooperation in multiple sectors, as the newly emerged Central Asian Republics (CARs) and Afghanistan relied on Pakistan for their sea trade. The geo-economic and political position of Pakistan urged the new leadership of Russia to carve out economic cooperation. On the other hand, the leadership of Pakistan was looking to open new economic avenues in oil-rich countries of Central Asia bordering Russia.

Economic Cooperation

After the withdrawal of the Soviets from Afghanistan, the US showed less interest in economic and military aid to Pakistan rather began to gaze her eyes on Pakistan's nuclear program. Consequently, the US applied sanctions on Pakistan, which was adopted by the US Senate in 1985, but it was initiated in October 1990 to implement (Jaffrelot, 2004, & Akhtar, 2017). Until the objective of the US to defeat the Soviet Union was fulfilled, the US initiated sanctions on Pakistan. (Akhtar, 2017). Pakistan's economic and military support was subject to halting its nuclear development. The United States of America withheld \$700 million in aid for Pakistan that was promised to be provided between 1988 and 1994 (Farooq, 2016). The US did not allow the handing over of F-16 aircraft to Pakistan, for which the amount of one billion dollars had already been paid. These adverse steps by the US posed security and financial challenges for Pakistan, while the precious sacrifices of Pakistan throughout the Afghan war were ignored altogether (Ali, Ahmad & Shah, 2019).

The economic indicators between Russia and Pakistan did not show steady progress throughout the 1990s. As of the end 1980s, the Soviet Union accounted for a very sizable 2.4% of Pakistan's exports, compared to just 0.6% of imports. These economic indicators remained mostly unchanged

until Vladimir V. Putin's presidency in 2000. The fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001 and the subsequent war against terror opened up new opportunities for Russia and Pakistan.

Having a long history of mistrust and suspicion, both nations showed an interest in economic cooperation. Russia, with its vast resources and technological prowess, emerged as a promising partner for Pakistan's economic development. Conversely, Russia looked at Pakistan as a potential market for its goods and services (Khan, 2019). However, concrete economic engagements, trade relations, and regional cooperation would still need many years to materialize (Sattar, 2013).

The foreign minister Gohar Ayub's visit to Russia in July 1997 paved the way for the signing important agreement on military, defense, and technology-related cooperation, including Badr II, and a meteorological satellite of Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO). It was followed by a visit from Nawaz Sharif, where an agreement on trade cooperation and barter trade was signed. Sartaj Aziz and his counterpart Georgy Gabunia have completed a successful round of dialogue (Khan & Amin, 2012).

Regional and Security Concerns

This historically established fact is that Pakistan's foreign policy always revolves around security concerns during and after the Cold War. This is due to Pakistan's hostile relations with its neighboring countries in the formative phase and the strategic interests of superpowers in the region. The regional dynamic of security with strategic involvement of global powers put Pakistan in a precarious situation (Memon, 1994).

The Russian Government continued to back India with the supply of military and defense articles even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, which raised serious concerns in Islamabad. While at the same time, it was unfortunate that the US stopped the supply of equipment to Pakistan by applying sanctions. The situation in Afghanistan was changing rapidly with the emergence of the Taliban. Therefore, Pakistan was struggling to get financial and defense stability by resetting its relations with regional and global powers, especially Russia. Eventually, Pakistan succeeded in purchasing Agosta submarines and Mirage 5 fighters from France. Moreover, Pakistan was trying hard to buy

Russian equipment as well as 300 tanks from Ukraine. It is evident from these efforts that Pakistan was not confident about the US deal to get modern weapons.

The unstable situation in Afghanistan was a shared concern of Pakistan and Russia, as the internal conflict led to the rise of the Taliban. In the late 1990s, Russia was worried about the potential spread of Islamist extremism into its territory (Haqqani, 2015). The main concern of Moscow was that after consolidating power, the Taliban would support Islamist insurgencies in Central Asia and beyond, thereby destabilizing the entire region, and stability would suffer. No serious efforts were made by either side to clear the misunderstandings and improve relations (Owais, 2007). Pakistan, on the other hand, grappled with the refugee crisis and border insecurity (Nawaz, 2015). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was assumed that the two countries would be able to find common ground and cooperate on issues of mutual concern. However, Pakistan's involvement in the affairs of Afghanistan, especially its support for the Taliban government, did not create a conducive environment for bilateral cooperation that would have benefited both countries (Owais, 2007). But the shift in global politics after 9/11 made Islamabad realize that it needed to improve its relations with a vast country of natural resources and the highest level of science and technology in the region, and the largest country in the world (Owais, 2007).

Diplomatic Relations between Russia and Pakistan

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of a unipolar world under the dominant role of the US. The capitalist market economy created a shift from geopolitics to geo-economics. Pakistan, being dependent on the capitalist world, was left with limited choices as nuclear nonproliferation, conventional arms control, and promoting democracy, human rights, and peace became common principles among the relations of the states. Therefore, it was obvious for Pakistan to look for new avenues in Central Asia, Afghanistan, and beyond by creating diplomatic ties with these countries as well as with Russia (Owais, 2007).

The relationship between Pakistan and Russia underwent a new change throughout the 1990s by

focusing on the integral role of Russia in the UN Security Council for support of the Kashmir issue. As the earlier tilt of Russia toward India was disturbing the policy makers in Pakistan. This historical context has often colored the interactions between Pakistan and Russia, creating a sense of distrust and suspicion on both sides (Smith, 2000). However, with the end of the Cold War, both countries sought to reevaluate their relationship and explore opportunities for cooperation in the post-Soviet era.

In 1992, a new turn came in Pakistan-Russia relations when the two states signed a landmark agreement on economic cooperation. This agreement paved the way for increased trade and investment between Pakistan and Russia, signaling a shift towards more positive relations between the two countries (Jones, 2003). The collaboration of both states in the technology, defense, and energy sectors has created a new chapter of progress and development in the region. Despite these positive developments, tensions between Pakistan and Russia persisted on certain key issues, particularly in the realm of regional security.

One of the main points of contention between the two countries was their differing stances on the conflict in Afghanistan. While Russia supported the Afghan government and its efforts to combat insurgent groups, Pakistan maintained close ties with the Afghan Taliban, viewing them as a strategic asset in the region (Brown, 1995). This fundamental disagreement created a barrier to closer cooperation between Pakistan and Russia and underscored the complexities of their bilateral relationship.

Pakistan and Russia also engaged in military cooperation during this period. In 1994, Pakistan signed a defense cooperation agreement with Russia, marking a significant step towards enhanced military ties between the two countries (Black, 1997). This agreement facilitated the exchange of military equipment, joint training exercises, and defense technology transfers between Pakistan and Russia, strengthening their defense partnership and signaling a deepening of their military cooperation. Despite these positive developments, challenges continued to impede closer relations between Pakistan and Russia. One such challenge was the issue of arms sales to India, Pakistan's longstanding adversary. Russia had a long-standing defense partnership with India and continued to supply arms to the Indian military, causing concern in

Pakistan about the implications for regional stability (Green, 1994). This issue complicated efforts to build trust and cooperation between Pakistan and Russia and highlighted the competing interests at play in their bilateral relationship.

The diplomatic exchange of visits and ties began in 1993 when Kozyrev, the Foreign Minister of Russia, came to Islamabad on a state visit. Earlier, Akram Zaki, the Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, had visited Moscow and had given a warm invitation. Sardar Asif, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, in a reciprocal visit to Russia, succeeded in a joint declaration, according to which meetings of foreign ministers of both states shall be held regularly. The visit of Russian Parliamentarians to Islamabad in 1995 agreed to provide military equipment to Pakistan. However, the emergence of the Taliban movement in Afghanistan diverged the strategic interests of both states. Besides disagreement on the Taliban issue, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif tried to mend relations with Russia by paying a state visit in 1999, where he signed an agreement on trade and commerce (Khan, 2021). President Yeltsin and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also agreed on cooperation in the energy sector and environmental pollution. In a reciprocal visit to Islamabad, the Russian foreign minister expressed his willingness to work with Pakistan (Khalid & Munir, 2023).

Conclusion

Pakistan and Russia have had complex and tumultuous relations since the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. Some of the internal and external elements hindered the progress of relations between the two countries. Historically, it was due to the earlier tense relations at the time of the Cold War when Pakistan came into existence, the world was polarized into two ideological blocs, that is, the Russian Communist bloc and the American Capitalist bloc. Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union became more complex when Pakistan joined the SEATO and CENTO organizations. Although Pakistan's participation in these agreements was not aimed at facing off communist expansion, but to ensure its own security against India. However, Russia failed to recognize Pakistan's compulsion to these pacts, leading to stagnation in the development of relations between the two countries.

Lately, the involvement of Pakistan in Afghan *Jehad* also contributed to tense relations between

the two states. However, the demise of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new era in international power dynamics, with the US emerging as the sole superpower. This shift affected Pakistan's relations with Russia as both countries faced new challenges and had to adapt to the changing landscape. After the demise of the Soviet Union, the US turned its attention to Pakistan's nuclear program, imposing sanctions through the Pressler Amendment.

Pakistan and Russia were engaged in redefining their relations in accordance with their strategic and economic interests. However, both Islamabad and Moscow had conflicting interests in Afghanistan as Russia supported the Northern Alliance while Pakistan backed the Taliban. The Taliban were

tuned saucerful to control Afghanistan in 1996, which was recognized by three countries, including Pakistan. Like other neighboring countries, Russia did not like the Taliban government.

The 9/11 incident marked a significant turning point in Pakistan's foreign policy, which provided an opportunity for Pakistan to reassess its priorities and security challenges. The US once more needed the support of Pakistan in fighting militancy and war against terrorism, and therefore, abandoned its support for the Taliban. By joining the global war on terror and abandoning pro-Taliban policy, the Pakistan-Russia relationship witnessed improvement in mutual trust and bilateral relations. After the ousting of the Taliban regime, diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Russia were enhanced.

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