

Pakistan-Russia Relationship Prospects for Cooperation

NUST Institute of Policy Studies



Report of the Roundtable on
Pakistan-Russia Relationship: Prospects for Cooperation

NUST Institute of Policy Studies
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- Dr Vladimir Kozin, Leading Expert Military-Political Studies Center, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Russia.
- Ambassador (Retd) Shahid M. Amin, Former Ambassador of Pakistan to Saudi Arabia, France, Nigeria, Libya, & Soviet Union.
- Lieutenant General (Retd) Naeem Khalid Lodhi, Former Caretaker Defence Minister of Pakistan & Former Defence Secretary of Pakistan.
- Major General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque, Graduate of Australian Army Command & Staff College.
- Major General Ehsan Mehmood Khan, Director General Institute for Strategic Studies, Research & Analysis (ISSRA), National Defence University, Islamabad.
- Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan, Principal & Dean NUST School of Social Sciences & Humanities (S3H); Director General NIPS.
- Dr Zafar Iqbal Cheema, President Strategic Vision Institute.
- Brigadier (Retd) Amir Yaqub, Director Operations & Collaboration NIPS.
- Mr Ali Shah, Head of Research, NIPS.
- Dr Atia Ali Kazmi, Senior Research & Policy Analyst, NIPS.
- Mr Muhammad Shabbir, Senior Research Fellow ISSRA, NDU.
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Executive Summary

NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS) organized a roundtable discussion on “Pakistan-Russia Relationship: Prospects for Cooperation,” on Tuesday, 28 September 2021. The event brought together eminent experts and senior analysts. The participants examined renewed salience of Pakistan’s relations with Russia in the context of emerging geopolitical scenario vis-à-vis Afghanistan, impact of U.S.-India strategic partnership on regional security and stability, and geo-economic and energy diplomacy trends.

The participants made seven concrete recommendations to improve Pakistan-Russia bilateral relations:

1. Pakistan and Russia need to take sustainable steps to meet common challenges and capitalize on available opportunities. Both countries must invest in robust government-driven and people-to-people programs as cornerstone of a long-term relationship.
2. Given the significance of Pak-Russia security-based partnership for regional stability, they should further improve their military relations through the Joint Military Commission forum and by effectively participating in bilateral and multilateral military exercises such as those of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
3. The scope of Pak-Russia economic cooperation should be expanded by optimizing the avenues offered in their bilateral Inter-Governmental Commission (IGC); increasing arms trade; and jointly working on beneficial projects such as the ongoing Lahore-Karachi gas pipeline.
4. Both countries should build in the gradual rapprochement in the fields of counterterrorism and other areas of mutual cooperation, as in consensus on Afghanistan’s stabilization and their favorable outlook on Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

5. Pak-Russia relations should not be hyphenated to either country's relationship with India and the West. Both countries should find an intricate balance in this regard.
6. Keeping a people-centered approach, they should utilize and promote bilateral tourism potential, especially religious tourism. Latter can be useful in countering ideologically motivated radical groups.
7. There is a need of promoting scientific, technological, and softer exchanges like theatre, drama, film productions, and sports, in accordance with the contemporary ideals of state-to-state relations. These steps will positively ensure a broad-based partnership between Pakistan and Russia.

Pakistan-Russia Relationship: Prospects for Cooperation

1. Introduction

Pakistan's relations with Russia are gradually warming up and both are overcoming the chequered history of relationship. President Vladimir Putin has chaperoned Russia's resurgence and the global order is becoming multipolar. China's entente cordiale with Russia has accentuated the multipolarity, triggered an American response and placed the international system into a flux. The U.S. is rebalancing and creating a fence of military and economic alliances to contain Russia's resurgence and stem China's rise.

While India is partnering with the U.S. to contain China's rise, it is maintaining strategic ambiguity about changing the status of historic relations with Russia. In playing both camps, India remains active in China- and Russia-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) while enlisting its support in the Quad Axis with the U.S., Australia and Japan.

In this geopolitical and geo-economic milieu, Pakistan and Russia are normalizing relations in a unique and unprecedented manner. To build a sustainable relationship, it should not be transactional in nature. Given the Cold War baggage of Pakistan's relations with Russia and latter's deep rooted investment in India, the two countries can take "baby-steps" towards creating a sustainable and strong relationship.

Both sides are satisfied at the positive direction of relations. There is groundswell of positive opinion about Russia in Pakistan, and there is similar political will in Russia.¹ However, there is a need to stay alert on the threats of geopolitics and possible spoilers. A relationship anchored in geo-strategic interests can be more beneficial and sustainable than one based solely either on geopolitical or military interests.

¹ Andrew Korybko, "What did the Pakistani ambassador to Moscow say to Russian media?" *The Express Tribune*, September 10, 2021.

Pakistan and Russia closely coordinate within three forums – SCO, the Extended Troika that includes Pakistan, Russia, China, and the U.S.; and the Moscow peace talks. They are members of the SCO which is primarily a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance and does not appear to be aimed against NATO. The two capitals stay connected in several diplomatic realms. Russian Foreign Minister made a successful visit to Islamabad in April 2021, followed by the telecon between Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Putin. The two states are also engaged in strategic energy cooperation. The Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline – also known as Karachi-Lahore Gas Pipeline and North-South Gas Pipeline – will be a flagship project.

The roundtable discussion at NUST Institute of Policy Studies examined Pakistan’s relations with Russia in the above context. The purpose was to identify challenges and opportunities in building strong bilateral relations. This report provides a thematic presentation of the conference which synthesizes assessment and way forward to bilateral relations proffered by the participants.

2. Welcome Remarks

Brigadier (Retd) Amir Yaqub

Pakistan and Russia must focus on optimizing their relationship and there is a lot of room to work in the economic, political, and social domains. Both countries share good relations at the military level which must expand to other fronts. Russia’s support for Pakistan’s inclusion in the SCO has paved the way for more coordinated work on regional stability.

There is a mutual realization that Pakistan is a responsible key player in the region and emerging threats, such as instability in Afghanistan, cannot be resolved without Pakistan’s help. Russia hosted the meeting of SCO Afghanistan Contact Group and re-launched the stalled consultative process to support Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism, drugs, and criminality and to help the country with its sustainable development process within the SCO’s economic cooperation framework. Certainly,

Pakistan and Russia are the two key pillars of any strategy framed to realize regional stability.

3. Panel Discussion

Assessment of Pakistan-Russia Relationship & Suggestions for Improvement

Dr Vladimir Kozin

Pakistan-Russia relations are unique and special. These relations have been peaceful and positive without little vicissitudes. In the presence of a strong political will, the two states can place their ties on sound footing enabling an easy way forward. The emerging environment is conducive for promoting multidimensional cooperation in economic, political, military, and social realms and strengthening bilateral relationship.

Military exchanges have spearheaded Pak-Russia rapprochement. They have pulled Moscow and Islamabad closer and will facilitate building broader ties. Russian military is keen to expand military ties with its Pakistani counterparts. Some initial steps include *Zapad* and *Druzhiba* exercises and other regular military exchanges. On the economic front, the Lahore-Karachi gas pipeline project is an initiative that will contribute to building solid relations.

Similarly, there exist ample chances of bonhomie with regard to coordination in building strategic stability. Their mutual efforts at multilateral arms control forums to stop the militarization of outer space is significant to the promotion of global peace and stability initiatives. The cooperation of both the states for enhancing maritime security in the Indian Ocean region and stabilizing Afghanistan will be the harbinger of regional stability.

Another key area of bilateral cooperation is religious tourism. It has immense potential and will open multiple new socioeconomic avenues for both states besides developing their people and bringing them closer. Russia offers tremendous opportunities for Muslims who rank second in

numbers to Christians in its territories. Numerous grand historical mosques situated in different parts of Russia symbolize the strength of these relations.

To strengthen these relations, Russia will cover the same distance that Pakistan traverses towards the Russian Federation and no power in the world can prevent the expansion of this cordiality. However, it will be useful to properly benchmark the undertakings towards reaching this vision – the avenues with maximum mutual benefits must be initiated first to develop a sustainable and dividend-driven relationship.

The Prism of Foreign Policy

Ambassador (Retd) Shahid M. Amin

The foreign policy of a state pursues national interests, primarily regarding security and economic welfare. India poses main security threat to Pakistan. Islamabad would be interested to know if Moscow can help in ameliorating the threat from India. It is understandable that it will be difficult for Russia to help in mending fences between the two rivals. India is Russia's old ally and one of the major receivers of Russian arms exports. Russia-India relations are strategic and Moscow supports India's interest in becoming permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Their bilateral engagements are marked by top political leadership level exchanges.

Although, recently, India has tilted towards the West, Russia has not given up on it yet. Russia still sees India as a strategic partner in the region. A regional alliance between Pakistan, Russia, and China is in making but it may take time. Pakistan-Russia relations have improved the post-U.S. withdrawal scenario in Afghanistan. Pakistan's relations with big powers should be diverse and not at the cost of one state's relations with another.

The Converging & Diverging Variables of Pakistan-Russia Relations

Major General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque

Due to the orientalist character, Russia neither makes new friends nor abandons old ones easily. The common strategic interests and history of Pakistan's relations with Russia teach us the lesson that there is a need to get over the legacy of past and start building new and strong relations.

Understanding the foreign policy landscape in Russia is vital for constructing good bilateral relations. There are three camps in the Russian foreign policy circle that strive for power in the country. The *Atlantis* covers Europe and the United States, the *Imperialists* cover the historical past of Russia, while the *Islamophiles* cover the eastern flank of Europe. A good balance must be struck to fuel a strong Pakistan-Russia relations.

There are both converging and diverging variables, but the focus must be on the points of convergence. In terms of the converging variables in Pakistan-Russia-China relations, economic development, regional security, arms trade and their joint interest in stabilizing Afghanistan top the list. At the same time, Russia's relations with India are a source of discomfort for China and Pakistan. A strong Moscow-Delhi relations is a diverging variable, but it must not be given too much weight. A conscious effort is required for filling strategic gaps and chalking out a new era of cooperation based on win-win approaches.

4. Concluding Thoughts

Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan

Historically, Pak-Russia relations have not worked the way other relations have been burgeoning. There is more to be done and the best way to move forward is to have people-to-people relations and close linkages between the think tanks of both countries. This will open a new knowledge-based front to the relationship.

Both countries have developed a decent confidence in military relations and this needs to be extended to the economic, political, and social spheres. The relationship will get strength and will be durable if it is multifaceted. We are at the nascent stages where long-term bilateral relations between the two countries and the need of confidence building measures are equally important. The trajectory for future relationship looks promising and with sincere mutual efforts a durable relationship can be established.

5. Way Forward

The following five major steps will be useful in building and managing a sustainable Pakistan-Russia relationship:²

Step-I: The cultural foundations of both Pakistan and Russia reflect the shades of oriental heritage and understanding of each other's culture will be mutually beneficial. More Pakistanis should know Russian geography, history, culture, literature, and people, and vice versa, with a well-chalked out role of their Diasporas.

Step-II: Building trust and synergy among institutions and fully implemented formal frameworks of their cooperation will add value to ties – some of the institutions being government and corporate bodies, institutions of higher learning and public policy such as think tanks, and the academic and expert communities.

Step-III: The expansion of mutual cooperation must lay emphasis on building Pakistan's capacity through trainings, technology transfer, incubation and commercialization, joint production, and strengthening of Pakistan's defence industry and industrial base. A large number of Pakistan's skilled labor force can be engaged in Russian industry and technical work places.

Step-IV: Robust economic relations thrive on balance of trade and smooth flows of foreign direct investment (FDI). Russia is the 16th largest export and 21st import economy, while Pakistan positions at 67th export and 44th import economy out of 120 economies

² Dr Atia Ali Kazmi, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Evolving Geopolitics and Strategic Options," *Hilal Magazine*.

worldwide. The total trade potential between the two countries is projected to be \$71.6 billion. However, Pakistan exports to Russia in 2020 stood at \$144.54 million and imports stood at \$613.08 million. The full trade potential is yet to be realized and both countries require concerted efforts to achieve that. Also, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers investment and co-work in projects such as smart and safe cities, special economic and free trade zones, rail, road and other mega infrastructure, and education cities.

Step-V: Pak-Russia greater relations will give impetus to their energy sectors. Russia hosts few of the world's most proficient energy firms that find myriad opportunities of reforms and investment in the Pakistani energy market. Lahore-Karachi Gas pipeline investment is an example of what more can be done.

6. Recommendations

1. Pakistan and Russia need to take sustainable steps to meet common challenges and capitalize on available opportunities. Both countries must invest in robust government-driven and people-to-people programs as cornerstone of a long-term relationship.
2. Given the significance of Pak-Russia security-based partnership for regional stability, they should further improve their military relations through the Joint Military Commission forum and by effectively participating in bilateral and multilateral military exercises such as those of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.
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Profiles of Panelists

Dr Vladimir Kozin

Dr Kozin is a Leading Expert at the Military-Political Studies Center of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). He is also the Corresponding Member, Russian Academy of Natural Sciences; Professor, Russian Academy of Military Sciences; Member, Scientific Board, National Institute of Global Security Research; Member, Expert Council, Foreign Relations Committee, Russian Senate; Winner of Colonel-General V. Korobushin's Reward (Russian Strategic Missiles' Forces) and Russian Natural Sciences Academy Reward; and Member, Friends of Gorchakov's Foundation. He is an active member of the dialogue group on Russia-Pakistan relations and Senior Global Fellow of NUST Institute of Policy Studies.



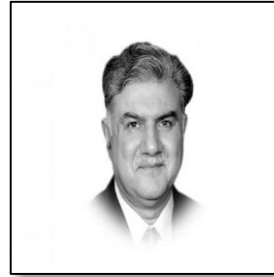
Ambassador (Retd) Shahid M. Amin

Ambassador Amin served in Pakistan Foreign Service in various capacities. He was Pakistan's ambassador to Saudi Arabia, France, the Soviet Union, Nigeria, and Libya, with concurrent accreditation to several other countries. He was also posted in New Delhi, Kabul, Tehran, Brussels, London, and New York. He is a well-known figure in the media where he participates in discussions on international affairs and Pakistan's political and economic scenario. He has published articles on foreign affairs in local and international publications. His publications include *Realism in Politics*; *Reminiscences of a Pakistani Diplomat*; *Europe and the Muslim World: Coexistence or Conflict*; *A Concise History of Pakistan*; *Pakistan Forever*; and *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*.



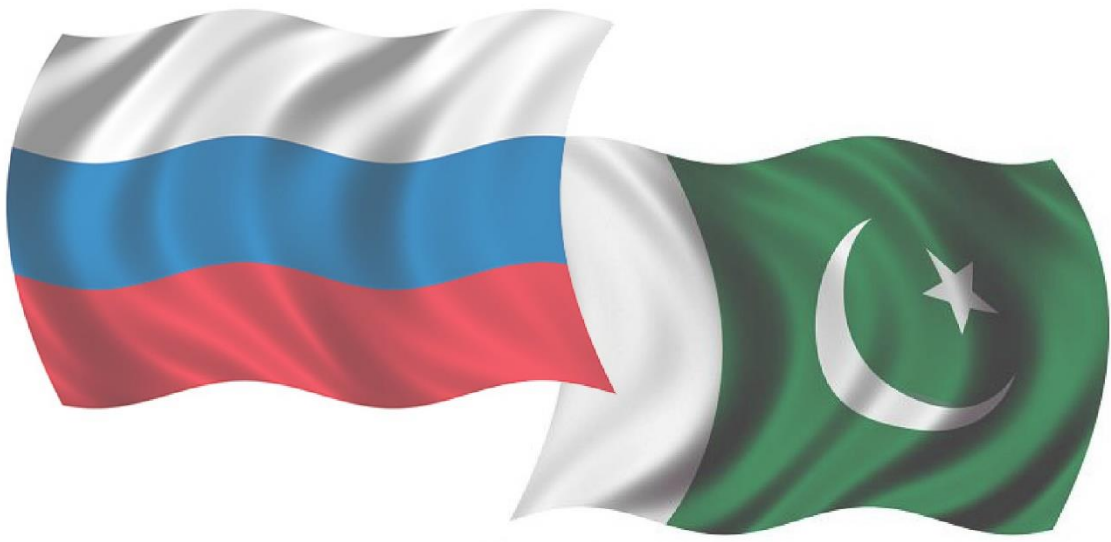
Major General (Retd) Inam Ul Haque

Major General Haque served Pakistan Military for almost four decades in various command, staff, and instructional assignments. He was actively involved in Operation *Al-Mizan*, fighting terrorism along Pakistan's Eastern borders for over three years. He is a graduate of Command and Staff College Quetta, Australian Army Command and Staff College, National Defence University Islamabad, and Chinese National Defence University, Beijing. He holds a master's degree each from Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad, University of Balochistan Quetta, and University of Wisconsin, Madison USA. He writes a weekly column in The Express Tribune and contributes to other journals and magazines on various issues involving international relations, security studies, and political sociology.



Gallery





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