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Issue Brief

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Pakistan-Russia Military Drills - A New Equation to Counter Terrorism

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On September 25, 2017, the Pakistani and Russian Special Forces joined hands for a Joint Military exercise in Minralney Vody, Russia.¹



Code-named DRUBZA-2017, the joint military exercise is a continuation of the 'Friendship-2016' military drills that were conducted between the special forces of Pakistan and Russia in 2016 hosted by Pakistan.²

The exercise is scheduled to last for 2 weeks, and expected to end on October 4, 2017. The focus of the exercise is on counter-terrorism operations, hostage and rescue, cordon and search operations.³

The exercise is taking place on a mountain training range near Nizhny Arkhyz settlement in Greater Caucasus, Russia which is about 70 km inland from the Black Sea shore. Over 200 servicemen in total are taking part in the DRUBZA-2017 Pakistani-Russian military exercise, including over 70 mountaineers from Pakistan.⁴ The opening ceremony of DRUBZA-2017 was attended by senior military officials from both the countries.

The military exercises between Pakistan and Russia stemmed out from a defence cooperation deal between the two countries in 2014 which marked the lifting up of a long arms embargo sanctioned by

¹ News Desk, "Pak-Russian Special Forces' joint exercise started in Russia: ISPR", *The Nation*, September 25, 2017, <http://nation.com.pk/national/25-Sep-2017/pak-russian-special-forces-joint-exercise-drubza-17-started-in-russia>

² Tikhonova Polina, "Pakistan-Russia Drills: Anti-Terrorist Superpower Alliance", *ValueWalk*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.valuwalk.com/2017/09/russia-pakistan-drills-superpower-alliance/>

³ ISPR Press Release, "No. PR-480/2017-ISPR", *Inter-Services Public Relations*, September 25, 2017, https://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/main.asp?o=t-press_release&id=4269&cat=army#pr_link4269

⁴ News Desk, "Over 70 Pakistani mountaineers reaches Russia for 'Friendship - 2017' for military exercise", *Pakistan Today*, September 24, 2017, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/09/24/over-70-pakistani-mountaineers-in-russia-for-friendship-2017-military-exercise/>

Russia against Pakistan. The deal also provided impetus for the sale of Mi-35 combat helicopters to Pakistan despite strong objections by India, an archrival of Pakistan.

DRUBZA-2017 drills are being viewed as the dawning of a new era of cooperation and strategic partnership between the two countries. Pakistan and Russia, for the past several years, have been cementing their military, economic and diplomatic ties. Before the commencement of DRUBZA-2017 drills, India filed a diplomatic plea with Moscow to cancel the military drills with Pakistan. Russia, to the detriment of its relations with India, refused to cancel the drills - a clear sign of Moscow's seriousness to strengthen its bilateral ties with Islamabad.

The timing of the joint military exercise is of great significance. The rising tensions between Washington and Islamabad after US President Trump's speech on his new Afghan-South Asia policy in August 2017, prompted strong rejection from Islamabad of the allegations levelled against it regarding terrorism and induced Pakistan to explore other options to secure its national interests and foreign policy goals. On the other hand, Russia, along with Pakistan's "all-weather friend" China, was the first country to come to Pakistan's defence and warned the West against antagonising Islamabad which could lead to further destabilizing of the region.⁵

Military drills that are taking place in the North Caucasus region have a great significance. Apart from the military exercise's great symbolic value, both Pakistan and Russia will benefit a great deal from one another, given their extensive experience regarding counter-terrorism. Pakistan has pioneering experience in waging mountainous anti-terrorist operations, while Russia has crucial experience in urban warfare. These anti-terrorist drills will be mutually beneficial for Pakistan and Russia due to the different nature of experiences that both the countries have in combating the menace of terrorism.

According to the Moscow-based political analyst, Mr. Andrew Korybko, "Taken together and in the context of contemporary threats and challenges, the joint military collaboration between Russia and Pakistan can lead to the two countries becoming anti-terrorism superpowers and greatly enhance Eurasian security."⁶

⁵ Web Desk, "China, Russia defend Pakistan against Trump criticism", *The News International*, accessed on October 2, 2017, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/225691-China-Russia-defend-Pakistan-against-Trump-criticism>

⁶ Tikhonova Polina, "Pakistan-Russia Drills: Anti-Terrorist Superpower Alliance", *ValueWalk*, September 25, 2017, <https://www.valuewalk.com/2017/09/russia-pakistan-drills-superpower-alliance/>

The analysis by Mr. Andrew holds weight. Both, Pakistan and Russia share similarities as far as the phenomenon of terrorism is concerned. They both share threat posed to their respective national security due to terrorism. Sharing of their experiences and expertise with each other will not only strengthen their counter-terrorism efforts, but will also lead to a much secure and stable region. This will also help contribute to counter-terrorism efforts being carried out internationally.

For Pakistan, these drills provide a win-win situation. A valuable contribution to this effort would be if Pakistan and Russia extend the scope of such exercises and drills to their respective navies, air forces, police and other law enforcement agencies. Such a collaboration will further enhance the capabilities of their armed forces and law enforcement agencies in their surge against terrorism, and will also aid in combating crime locally as well. This exercise will not only help in confidence building with Russia and improve bilateral ties, but will also help deliver a strong message to the world that Pakistan is not a safe haven for the terrorists, but rather a frontline state in the war against terrorism that is committed to eradicate this menace from the face of the earth in cooperation with all regional and international countries.