

ENHANCING STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN PAKISTAN & RUSSIA IN LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Despite the seemingly slow pace and limited matter in Pakistan-Russia bilateral ties, the relationship is steadily improving and witnessing uniform growth. Regardless of the COVID-19 pandemic, regular communication has been taking place between both the countries and more content is being added progressively to their bilateral relations.

Last month, two important developments have taken place in Pakistan-Russia relations in the strategic and economic domains which are being seen as major steps towards enhancement of Pakistan-Russia strategic relations:

1. 9th Meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security
2. 7th Meeting of Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation

Both the meetings were held in Russia this year.

9th Meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security

The 9th Meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security took place on November 22, 2021 in Moscow, Russia.¹ Both countries were represented by their respective competent authorities.

The meeting was conducted under the co-chairmanship of Mr. Oleg V. Syromolotov, *Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation* (MFA) and Mr. Nabeel Munir, *Additional Secretary (UN and ED), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan* (MOFA).

According to the official press statements released by Pakistan's MOFA and Russian MFA, a broad range of issues related to global fight against terrorism and extremism were discussed which included the existing challenges as well as new and emerging threats to international and regional peace and security.²

Mutual appreciation and acknowledgement was extended on each other's efforts in countering international terrorism. Both sides agreed on the need for greater collaboration in addressing challenges to security. Renewed commitment was reiterated to continue working together to counter terrorist propaganda, especially in the cyber domain and the increasing phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters.

Representatives of Pakistan and Russia reaffirmed their commitment to continue dialogue and collaboration in countering the menace of terror financing as well as their willingness to work closely on issues of mutual concern and significance, especially at key international and regional forums like the United Nations (UN) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

It is important to note that this mechanism of the Joint Working Group commenced in 2002 between the two countries which have been alternatively hosted at Islamabad and Moscow

1 "Press Release on the 9th Meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security", The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, published on November 22, 2021. https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/4949467

2 "Joint Press Release: On the 9th Meeting of the Russia-Pakistan Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism and Other Challenges to Security, 587/2021, Press Releases, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, published on November 22, 2021. <https://mofa.gov.pk/joint-press-release-on-the-9th-meeting-of-the-russia-pakistan-joint-working-group-on-combatting-international-terrorism-and-other-challenges-to-security/>

respectively.³ The last meeting of the Joint Working Group was hosted in Islamabad in 2014. Next meeting of this Joint Working Group is to be held next year in 2022 (in Islamabad most probably).

7th Meeting of Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation

The 7th Meeting of the Pakistan-Russia Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation was conducted on November 24-26, 2021 in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg.⁴

In the 7th Meeting of Pak-Russia IGC, various proposals for cooperation with Russia in the fields of trade, customs, energy, industry, agriculture, education, science & technology, transport and information & communication technology. Both sides had a constructive and positive dialogue for enhancing the bilateral relations between the two countries.

Prior to the Pakistani delegation's visit to Russia, Mr. Omar Ayub Khan, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs of Pakistan during a high level meeting with different national stakeholders had directed concerned officials to identify the priorities and prepare comprehensive proposals including scope, action plan, output and outcomes along with times lines for the different proposals that were to be presented in this 7th Meeting of Pak-Russia IGC.⁵

Apart from the discussion on a plethora of issues and topics, the most notable development during this meeting was the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Federation of Pakistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) and Russia's Ural Chamber of Commerce and Industry (UCCI) on November 25, 2021.⁶

The Pakistani side (FPCCI) was represented by Mr. Mohsin Sheikh, Director & ex-Chairman of the Pakistan-Russia Business Council while the Russian side (UCCI) was represented by Mr. Mikhail Kozlov, Vice President, UCCI.

³ "Pakistan Russia Joint Meeting on Counter Terrorism", Ministry of Interior, Government of Pakistan, accessed on November 30, 2021. <https://www.interior.gov.pk/index.php/about-moi/policies-moi/14-sample-data-articles/149-pakistan-russia-joint-meeting-on-counter-terrorism>

⁴ "Pakistan, Russia agrees to enhance economic, trade cooperation", Radio Pakistan, published on November 26, 2021. <https://www.radio.gov.pk/26-11-2021/pakistan-russia-agrees-to-enhance-economic-trade-cooperation>

⁵ "Federal Minister for Economic Affairs Mr. Omar Ayub Khan chaired a high-level meeting to discuss agenda of the upcoming meeting of Pakistan-Russia Inter-Government Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific & Technical Cooperation", Ministry of Economic Affairs, Economic Affairs Division, Government of Pakistan, published on November 11, 2021. <https://www.ead.gov.pk/NewsDetail/ZjQ2ZDgwNDgtNjExMCO0MTEzLTlkN2QtOTQ5MWEzN2FhMGNI>

⁶ "Pakistan, Russia to further enhance economic, trade ties", The Express Tribune, published on November 26, 2021. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2331074/pakistan-russia-to-further-enhance-economic-trade-ties>

During the signing ceremony, Mr. Omar Ayub Khan along with Ambassador of Pakistan in Russia Shafqat Ali Khan were also present. It is noteworthy that Pakistan-Russia IGC on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation is co-chaired by Mr. Omar Ayub Khan and Mr. Nikolay Shulginov, Minister for Energy of the Russian Federation.

Conclusion

Regular G2G (government-to-government) dialogue, increased communication and enhanced cooperation (via public and private sectors) between Pakistan and Russia is becoming a norm in their bilateral relations.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, bilateral relations between Pakistan and Russia have continued to improve and grow over the recent years.

Outcomes of both meetings (9th JWG and 7th IGC) were highly positive and encouraging. Initially it was speculated that Pakistan-Russia relations are limited to traditional security and military domain only. However, these latest round of meetings, especially the one on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation not only shuns this impression but also indicative of the expanding facets of Pakistan-Russia relations.

In the security domain, both sides agreed that due to the changing nature of security threats and emergence of new ones, it is extremely important for both countries to increase cooperation with each other and develop new methods and frameworks in order to develop better defence mechanisms in this regard.

The reiteration of combating the menaces of terrorism & extremism, foreign terrorist fighters, propaganda, misinformation & disinformation campaigns and terror financing together in unison is a testament to the commitment and strong will of both Pakistan and Russia towards eliminating such problems in the region and building mutual trust & confidence in order to strengthen bilateral relations. Furthermore, Pakistan can greatly benefit from Russia's progress that the latter has made in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and cyber security.

The commitments made in the economic and commercial domain are highly significant.

The MoU signed between FPCCI and UCCI is an important milestone in Pakistan-Russia relations. It is being termed as the *"beginning of new relations between Pakistan and Russia (Ural Region)"*.

The Ural region of Russia is politically and geographically a highly significant region. A mountainous region, stretching along Western Russia (from the coast of the Arctic region to northwestern

Kazakhstan), the Ural region is rich in metal ores, coal and precious & semi-precious stones. The natural treasures under the Ural mountains have contributed significantly to the mineral sector of the Russian economy.

Pakistan, as an important major gem-market in the region can generate huge revenue by trading in such commodities with Russia, especially the Ural region, now that an MoU is also in place to facilitate such commercial activity. Moreover, Pakistan can also benefit from the abundant energy sources of the Ural region in order to fulfil its energy needs.

This MoU also acted as a complimentary initiative to the recent intergovernmental negotiations on building the New Trade Corridor (NTC) via Pakistan, Central Asia and Russia.

Furthermore, during the 7th IGC Meeting between Pakistan and Russia, officials and representatives of both sides discussed new niches for Pakistani companies and businesses that are desirous to engage in the Russian market as well as find new vistas for trade cooperation between the two states.

In fine, the commitments and agreements made between Pakistan and Russia recently were need of the hour and according to regional and international dynamics. Both countries have taken a pragmatic and honest approach towards their bilateral relations. Majority of the threats being faced by both states are similar and mutually shared such as terrorism & extremism, narco-trafficking, cyber attacks and propaganda campaigns to name a few. And it is only logical to confront such threats via mutual efforts in order to further enhance the strategic partnership between Islamabad and Moscow.