

# Russia and the Indo

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Many in Pakistan have hailed President Musharraf's recent Moscow visit. Foreign Secretary even went to the extent of stressing that the visit has initiated a new beginning of cooperation between the two countries. It was indeed a first visit of a Pakistani head of state since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Moscow in early seventies. If one looks at the visit in the background of less than cordial relations in the past, one can at least dub it as an important visit that can initiate a new chapter in Pakistan-Russian relations. A new era often reflects full comprehensions of the incumbent ground realities and a common desire on the part of both leaders to modify the existing sets of relationships and strive for a more fruitful and cordial relationships.

During the Cold War, Pakistan was aligned with the West whereas the Soviets were leading the Communists bloc. The late seventies and the entire decade of the eighties saw Pakistan's deep involvement in the America-led Afghan war against the Soviets. The death of the Cold War not only led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of many Central Asian States but also the emergence of new imperatives governing the relationships among nations. While the relationships during the Cold War were dominated more by the political considerations, the post-Cold War era saw the ascendancy of the economic imperatives over the political considerations.

While Pakistan cultivated the West during the Cold War, India opted for non-alignment and joined the NAM (Non-aligned movement). Cognisant of Pakistan's alignment with the West, the Indians also brought the Soviets to South Asia and in consequence the Soviets also moved closer to the Indians. Compared to the Soviets who remained steadfast in their cordiality with the In-

dians, the ups and downs of vicissitude of Pakistan-American relationship were quite frequent and pronounced.

The initial American attempts revolved around enticing India to its own camp but when the India leaders decided to opt for a middle path and shunned the American overtures; they began to cultivate the Pakistanis. Perhaps that's why the American first invited the Indian leader Nehru to visit US and it was only after being disappointed by Nehru's excessive sermonisation of non-alignment that the Americans began to think of alternative option in South Asia. Despite having found an alternative ally in South Asia, the Americans did not discord India altogether. On the contrary they never missed an opportunity to entice India to its side. Although Nehru's preference to retain options ostensibly did not go down well with American hawks that saw the world in terms of either you are with us or against us, but such an attitude did not last long.

The Pakistanis, on the other hand, were feeling extremely insecure primarily because of India's threatening posture. Lacking in defence capabilities coupled with limited available resources, the Pakistani leaders opted to side with western countries and joined the Cold War alliances mainly because of two reasons. First, how to deter India? Pakistan inherited a force ratio, which was deemed extremely insufficient to defend Pakistan in the eventuality of an Indian attack. Additional linked problems were the outdated equipment and non-availability of desired level of resources. Second, the Pakistanis mistakenly assumed that all the members of alliances would influence India to hold a plebiscite in Kashmir. While the Pakistanis were able to develop a reasonable level of defence capability, they were not able to secure sufficient support from the other al-



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liance partners to influence India to hold the much-desired plebiscite in Kashmir.

The post-Cold War era introduced new rules of the game with economic considerations pushed to highest levels of priorities. Cognisant of its vast market potentials India seemed to have effectively exploited this factor and have been able to attract the interests of many nations. The tragic events of 9/11 not only further changed the rules governing relations among nations but also gave birth to an international coalition against terrorism. Admittedly the war against terrorism started with American initiative and without having secured an agreed definition of what is terrorism and how can it be distinguished from a genuine freedom movement. The post Cold War era made the US a sole superpower and the twin towers tragedy of 9/11 influenced US to become an assertive sole superpower injecting even more new rules. Notions like preventive defensive attacks along with unilateral approaches and bypassing the collective security system of the United Nations seem to be gaining currency rather rapidly.

Given the advent of new sets of rules the nations are modifying their policies in order to adjust to the emerging realities. If Musharraf's Moscow trip were seen in this context, it would indeed make perfect sense. The initiative not only reflects the recognition of the emerging realities that required a balanced approach but also appears to be somewhat timely. Given the cold relationship the two countries experienced over the last so many years, to expect much out of the first contact after three decades of



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non-contact would certainly amount to be somewhat unrealistic. However, it is being asked whether or not Russia could play any role in reducing the incumbent level of Indo-Pak tensions and resolving the ongoing Kashmir dispute. A linked question is whether or not the Russians are willing to play such a role.

Many signs indicate that the Russians are not only willing to play such a role but they also yearn somewhat nostalgically the role they played during the Cold War. Despite having kept close contacts with the Indian leaders before and after President Musharraf's Moscow visit, President Putin was able to project a somewhat different stance from that of India especially on the need to resume a dialogue between India and Pakistan. From a Pakistani perspective perhaps the most significant development of this trip was the demonstrated interest of President Putin to secure the initiation of talks between India and Pakistan. Indeed this appeared to be a continuation of Putin initiative at Almaty.

What appears to be intriguing is that the Russian government recognises Pakistan's efforts to earnestly crackdown the infrastructure of the terrorists and also to plug cross border infiltrations. While the Indians and even the Americans seemed to underplay Pakistani government's efforts to check the infiltrations, the Russian appreciation of Pakistani efforts to tear down the terrorist infrastructure within its own country and to effectively check the cross border infiltrations reflects far more realistic attitude. Indeed this is a source of great satisfaction and encouragement, which may even prove to be a motivational factor for even more stringent measures.

Since both Russia and India are aware of their long history of associa-

tion and friendship, neither is likely to suspect others' intentions. This puts President Putin in a very comfortable position to influence and convince India that dialogue can be started even if the cross border infiltrations has not stopped to the satisfaction of the Indians. The Russians appears to be better placed than the Americans to have a dialogue initiated between India and Pakistan. However, one must not overlook the efforts made by the Americans in reducing the tensions between the two hostile nuclear neighbours. A Russian initiative along with the ongoing efforts of the Americans could produce the desired results.

Indeed the best way out of the incumbent impasse on the subcontinent is to encourage concerted efforts of both the Americans and the Russians individually as well as jointly. Undoubtedly in view of the existing world situation and regional South Asian scene the Russian President is in a better position to have the dialogue resumed as Russian have maintained very good relations with India over the years and still continues to enjoy a very high level of cordiality. In addition, it is now opening up with Pakistan as well. Improved bilateral cooperation between Russia and Pakistan would further provide incentives for more concentration on Indo-Pak normalisation process. However, the picture would become even clearer over the next few months. Not only the next few months will witness the outcome of current Iraq crisis but both India and Russia would also have sufficient time to undertake concerted thinking on the desired dialogue resumption. Before Vajpayee makes his trip to Moscow in May, indications about election trends, which are deemed essential for BJP's future survival, at least by some stalwarts of the BJP's hierarchy, would have also become firmly channelised towards specific directions.