**Pakistan-Russia strategic bonds make pivotal openings**

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The current visit of the Russian FM Sergey Lavrov to Pakistan (April 6-7) ushers in remaking Pakistan-Russia strategic relationship based on mutual understanding on the issues of regional security, counterterrorism and the Afghan peace process. Russia now most likely accepts Pakistan defense and energy needs as legitimate in the interest of the balance of power in the region. This pragmatic change in the Russian policy toward Pakistan is the end result of the mutual realization to weave the strategic bonds of a friendly, sustainable partnership between Moscow and Islamabad, which is a geopolitical driven geoeconomic need of the present time.

Russian policy vis-à-vis emerging imperatives: Russia’s pursuit of spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space has led many analysts to draw historical parallels to previous eras of world order-making, attributing to the Russian desire to resurrect a bygone system of global order, such as the post-World War II “Yalta system.” That the images of Yalta and the Concert of Europe– gaining prominence in accounts of Russian strategy is no accident: Putin himself has spoken on many occasions about both systems, lauding the peace, stability, and harmony in the international system.

A Russian pursuit of striking a grand strategy holds a key consideration. Grand strategy is thus a state’s attempt to optimally allocate scarce resources (means) toward the methods (ways) that are best suited for achieving the state’s highest goals (ends), all while responding and adapting to opportunities and constraints posed by other strategic actors, structures, and events in the international order.

Pakistan’s energy deficit level needs to be tackled on an emergency basis. Considering growing urbanization and industrialization in Pakistan, the urge to strike a civil nuclear energy deal is becoming inevitable

The genesis of new alliances: It is a truism that multipolarity on the global stage has its natural sway on the Asian political order. A region of multi- faith, multiethnic and multi- culture composition, Asia is uniquely situated to cultivate benefits from this international shift from westward to eastward. Both regions – Asia-Pacific and Indo-Pacific – are geopolitically inextricable. China’s colossal strategic investment in the One Belt, One Road economic initiative, Russia’s Eurasian Economic Union and its prospective connectivity with OBOR and Pakistan’s geostrategic location are among the key factors that will define the emerging triangular power relation between the three states—Russia, China and Pakistan.

One could see that independently, each of the three power players has the convergence of interests to make the Russia-Pakistan -China trio– an emerging geopolitical and geoeconomic gamut to change the international and regional dynamics — reshaping a new Asian order. Here one could also evaluate the importance of Russia-China-Turkey-Iran-Pakistan strategic built-up — an evolving multilateral trajectory.

Regional security & the Afghan peace process: As far as regional peace and security is concerned, the future of the Afghan peace dialogue holds profound leverage. The recently-held Moscow summit revives the spirit of the Doha Peace Accord. The major stakeholders of the Afghan peace dialogue agree on the peaceful exit of the NATO troops from Afghanistan by the first of May. Russia, like Pakistan, China and Iran, is of the view that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan as promised in the Doha Peace Deal is important for the future of regional security. The current visit of the Russian FM holds great significance in this regard. Obviously, in the given scenario, it seems an unworkable synergy that in the post-May 01 phase, Islamabad could ever revive logistic supply support to NATO troops in Afghanistan.

Pakistan-Russia defence cooperation: Russian Commander in Chief General Oleg Salyukov recently visited Pakistan where he was called on COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa to discuss defence cooperation between the two countries and the regional security situation. General Bajwa said Pakistan does not believe in zero sum games but instead believes in integration and cooperation. “Cooperation between the militaries of both countries will not only help in improving peace and stability in the region but will also usher economic prosperity, “Army Chief General Bajwa said at the meeting.

The Islamabad-Moscow security partnership has strengthened and expanded since late 2014, when the two former rivals signed their defense cooperation agreement. During the 5th meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism, the two sides shared views on regional and national threats and effective way to counter them. Last year, the Russian and the Pakistan forces had a joint military drill called Friendship-2020. It is also argued that the formation of a regular joint counterterrorism military force between Pakistan-Russia-China is necessary to meet the regional security challenges.

Russian role in Pakistan’s energy needs: It is a universal phenomenon that the socio-economic progress of a state is significantly dependent upon the performance of the energy sector, as the energy sector drives the engine of growth and development in agricultural, industrial, and defense sectors, in addition to impacting domestic users. In Pakistan, the increasing gap between the demand for, and the supply of, energy has brought economic progress to a standstill. A number of industries have been closed due to this increasing gap, which is expected to grow even further.

Russia & Pakistan must strike a civil nuclear deal: In the evolving international scenario, cooperation between states with regards to security and energy needs is becoming a prominent feature. To meet climate change goals, almost all electricity will need to be low carbon, and that will only be possible if the use of nuclear power is increased, said IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi at the opening of the 2020 Scientific Forum. Russia realizes the emerging energy needs of Pakistan (evidenced by the renewal of the Gas-pipeline project in 2020), an agreement regarding the civil nuclear cooperation could be an important feature of the growing bilateralism between the two states. In this regard, a strategy– seeking conformity regarding Pakistan’s desirability and Russian feasibility– could be formed.

Though Pakistan has been fully cooperating with the IAEA vis-à-vis the green energy safety protocols, Islamabad feels left out and wants to pursue a similar deal on the plea that they have increasing energy needs. Until now, the collective generation capacity of all Pakistan’s five nuclear plants is roughly 1,350 megawatts, five percent of the national electricity generation. To facilitate the rapid expansion of nuclear power, the IAEA has amalgamated four of its pre-existing national technical cooperation projects—which supported the regulators, operators, waste managers and non-destructive testers involved Pakistan’s NPP programme —into a single project.

Pakistan’s energy deficit level needs to be tackled on an emergency basis. Considering growing urbanization and industrialization in Pakistan, the urge to strike a civil nuclear energy deal is becoming inevitable. Since 2006, the successive governments in Pakistan have been repeatedly pleading the case for acquiring a civil nuclear deal. Against this backdrop, it is highly suggestible that the nuclear experts in Russia and Pakistan must try to evolve a mechanism to orchestrate a civil nuclear deal between the two sides.

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