

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT AS MEANS OF CONFLICT PREVENTION: PAKISTAN'S DEFENCE DIPLOMACY TOWARDS RUSSIA

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Abstract

In post-Cold War era, defence diplomacy as strategic engagement focuses on a state's military and defence institutions for a peaceful, non-coercive role to build amicable and cooperative relations with former or potential rivals to prevent and resolve conflicts. This research article argues that Pakistan's defence diplomacy towards Russia, a former Cold War adversary, has been geared towards reducing hostility and sources of friction to promote and achieve broader foreign policy objectives of Islamabad. It analyzes strategic engagement between Islamabad and Moscow in four categories of defence diplomatic activities: defence agreements, high level exchanges, joint military exercises and port calls. The article concludes that Pakistan's defence diplomatic efforts (2014-2020) have produced political and strategic-level benefits to prevent conflict and reduce hostility with Russia.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, Defence cooperation, Joint Military Exercises, Military diplomacy, Port calls.

Introduction

Since the turn to the 21st Century, Pakistan's growing security and defence relationship with Russia is a key example of Islamabad's defence diplomacy towards a former Cold War adversary. The bipolar structure of Cold War, in which Soviet Union was a close ally of India, left Pakistan to

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become the “most allied ally” of United States of America in Asia. This strategic configuration straitjacketed Pakistan-Soviet Union bilateral ties for decades. The Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan in December 1979 compelled Pakistan to resist the potentially expansionist design of the Soviets towards the ‘Hot Waters’ of Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean by joining hands with the US and Saudi Arabia in sponsoring and arming Mujahideen fighting the Red Army in Afghanistan.¹ Moscow and Islamabad occasionally engaged in covert proxy war on each other’s territory. While the Soviets tried to exploit ethnic schisms and chasms in Pakistan, Islamabad also conducted clandestine operations inside Soviet Union.² After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan in the year 1989 and the subsequent fall of their client communist regime of President Najibullah, Moscow did its utmost to prevent emergence of a Pakistan-backed Mujahideen regime in Kabul. As Pakistan wanted Hiz-e-Islami Afghanistan Head, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar to be the ruler of Afghanistan, Moscow started supporting the anti-Hekmatyar Mujahideen factions, like Jamiat-e-Islami Afghanistan leaders including Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ahmad Shah Massoud. When in 1994 Taliban emerged in Afghanistan, Pakistan started supporting the militants considering them as potential stabilizing element in Afghanistan, which could also give Pakistan support from its Western neighbour in its longstanding rivalry with its Eastern neighbor, India. In this scenario, Moscow calculating that Taliban ruled Afghanistan would become a potential exporter of ‘radical Islamist’ ideology to neighbouring Muslim Central Asian States, once part of Soviet Union (1917-1991), strongly backed the anti-Taliban United Front (Northern Alliance) in Afghanistan in collaboration with India and Iran. Russia saw Pakistan’s backing of Taliban—and by extension their Chechen and Uzbek affiliates—as evidence of its ability to threaten the security of Russia’s southern flank. As a result, Pakistan’s interests continued to diverge with those of Russia’s interests in the 1990s.³ Despite the turbulent history, the evolving geo-political configuration of the region in post 9/11 era, the visibly interminable Afghan conflict, Russo-American intensified rivalry in post-Crimea period, and the US increasing pressure on Islamabad to toe its line even at the altar of its key national interest in South Asian region have pushed Pakistan and Russia to revisit their strategic ties. Consequently, both states have developed an

¹Tahir Amin, “Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding “New Great Game” in South Asia,” in *The Regional Security Puzzle around Afghanistan: Bordering Practices in Central Asia and Beyond*, ed. Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (Opladon: Barbara Budrich, 2016), 194-196.

²Nikolas K. Gvosdev & Christopher Marsh, *Russian Foreign Policy: Interests, Vectors, and Sectors* (London: CQ Press, 2013), 338.

³ Kurita Masahiro, “Pakistan-Russia Relations: Developments and Limitations,” The National Institute of Defence Studies, NIDS Commentary No.85(April 2019): 1-2.

understanding to start a new era of closer cooperation and support on all issues concerning their respective interests in the South Asian and Central Asian regions particularly war-torn Afghanistan.⁴ In this backdrop, Pakistan has had used defence diplomacy as a tool of foreign and security policy to develop and build cooperative ties with Russia. Defence and intelligence cooperation between Pakistan and Russia began in post 9/11 era, has had steadily increased, widened since 2011 and significantly gained momentum after the conclusion of bilateral Defence Cooperation Accord of 2014.⁵ This article analyzes strategic engagement between Pakistan and Russia (2014-2020) to respond effectively to security challenges in South and Central Asia.

Development of Pakistan- Russia Defence Ties (2001-2013)

The attacks of September 11, 2001, on the US mainland transformed the geo-political landscape of South Asia with new strategic shifts shaping the contours of Pakistan's security dynamics. In the changing political configuration of the region, Pakistan too began to re-engineer its relations with Russia. In 2002, a Joint Working Group (JWG) on 'Counterterrorism and other New Challenges to International Security' was established which paved the way for normalizing the mutual ties. In 2003, General Pervez Musharraf during his visit to Moscow promised to share collected information about Chechen separatists and other militants operating in Russia and Central Asia.⁶ In 2007, Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov visited Pakistan and discussed the prospects of economic and security cooperation. In late 2008, Russia gave Ukraine a green light to sell Pakistan four IL-78 refueling aircraft.⁷ In 2009, Moscow remained unhesitant in Islamabad's purchase of Chinese JF-17 fighter jets, powered by Russian RD-93 engines.⁸ In the same year, Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, paid his first official visit to Russia. This visit helped to further build confidence and paved the way for a meeting between President Asif Ali Zardari and the then Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev in 2010. The next year in May 2011, Colonel General Alexander Postnikov, Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Russian Ground Forces visited Pakistan. In October 2012, General Kayani visited Moscow

⁴ Shabir Ahmad Khan & Muhammad Khan, "Pakistan-Russia collaboration: Implications for Afghanistan and Central Asia," *Central Asia Journal*, No. 84 (Summer 2019): 2-3.

⁵ Muhammad Nawaz Khan, "Pakistan-Russia Relations Redux: From Estrangement to Pragmatism," *IPRI Journal* 19(1) (2019):56-85.

⁶ Gvosdev and Marsh, 341.

⁷ Naveed Ahmad, "Russia's Pakistan Volte-Face," Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, (January 7, 2015), accessed August 7, 2018. <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13117-russias-pakistan-volte-face.html>.

⁸ Gvosdev and Marsh, 342.

and held a meeting with C-in-C of Russian Ground Forces, Colonel General Vladimir Chirkin. General Kayani discussed the possibility of military-to-military exchanges and purchase of Russian military hardware including Mi-17 helicopters.⁹ In August 2013, General Chirkin paid a follow up visit and discussed on improving defence cooperation and the security situation in South Asia, especially Pakistan-Russia cooperation to restore peace in post-2014 Afghanistan.¹⁰ Indeed, General Kayani was successful to transform his personal rapport into purposeful and persistent linkages between Islamabad and Moscow. These initial exchanges fostered greater understanding among Islamabad and Moscow for furtherance of regional and international security.

Conceptual Framework: Defence Diplomacy

The concept of defence diplomacy is used to analyze the burgeoning relations between Pakistan and Russia. Defence diplomacy's origin is rooted in the classic military diplomacy since the very geneses of nations when armed forces were employed to support states' foreign policy objectives. During Cold War, military diplomacy was traditionally used for deterrence and balance of power purposes to strengthen Western allies against Soviet Bloc states. But the post-Cold War environment witnessed an enlarged role of the Western defence establishments in promoting the foreign and security policy of their governments to help Central and Eastern European (CEE) States towards democratization and post conflict peace building. The military personnel of NATO became increasingly involved in many programmes including military training and education, joint military exercises, policy and planning to assist defence reforms in CEE states.¹¹ Since the late 1990s, several NATO member States, the US, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, and Southeast Asian Nations have included wider foreign policy and security goals such as preventing conflict and addressing traditional and non-traditional security issues in the ambit of military diplomacy. This new construction of military diplomacy gained prominence as defence diplomacy.¹²

Cottey and Forster in their seminal work on defence diplomacy note that defence diplomacy involves "the peacetime cooperative use of armed forces and related infrastructure (primarily defence ministries) as a tool of foreign and security policy." They argue that defence diplomacy in the post-Cold War era is being used not only to strengthen defence capabilities of

⁹*Business Recorder*, (October 4, 2012).

¹⁰*Pakistan Today*, (August 5, 2013).

¹¹Tarak Barkawi, "Defence Diplomacy in North-South Relations," *International Journal*, (Summer 2011): 597-612.

¹²Gregory Winger, "The Velvet Gauntlet: A Theory of Defense Diplomacy," in *What do Ideas Do?*, ed. Agata Lisiak and Natalie Smolenski (Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellow's Conference Proceedings, 2014): 2-3.

partners and potential allies but also to build sustainable cooperative relations with former or potential foes through a wide range of activities. This process is described as strategic engagement. Within this framework, defence diplomacy as strategic engagement is recognized by Cottey and Forster as an effective instrument in prevention, management and resolution of conflict by working towards changing perceptions and attitudes of partner state's militaries, introducing transparency in defence relations, offering reassurances about intentions, building perceptions of common interests, supporting confidence-building measures to overcome differences, upholding political commitments, and encouraging partner state for broader cooperation. The defence diplomacy activities to accomplish these outcomes include the appointment of defence attachés, defence cooperation agreements, contacts between senior military and defence officials, joint military exercises, training and education, port calls, peacekeeping operations and provision of military equipment.¹³

Pakistan – Russia defence ties neatly fit the framework of defence diplomacy developed by Cottey and Forster. Russia is identified in this article as a former foe during Cold War and post-Cold War period. However, in recent years, Pakistan has used defence diplomacy as a means of strategic engagement to reduce sources of friction, building trust and confidence, thereby preventing conflict and solving political differences.

Objectives of Pakistan's Defence Diplomacy

Based on Cottey and Forster's framework, Pakistan's defence diplomatic engagement with Russia operates on several levels to promote broad foreign and security objectives of Islamabad:

- Altering the perception of Russian armed forces regarding Pakistan as 'enemy state' to dispel Cold War hostility and develop a constructive and strong partnership. This is important as many of Russia's current mid- and high-ranking officials were involved in the Afghan conflict in the 1980s, and now demonstrate reluctance to deepen cooperation with Pakistan.¹⁴
- Offering reassurances to Moscow about Islamabad's intentions in the 'War on Terror' through defence diplomatic activities to build mutual trust for cooperating on international peace and security.
- Reinforcing perceptions of common interests between Islamabad and Moscow to collaborate on security challenges and to harmonize

¹³ Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, ed. International Institute for Strategic Studies, Adelphi Paper (365) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004): 6-16.

¹⁴ Vladimir Moskalkenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," Carnegie Moscow Center (May 10, 2014): 11.

views on creating a cooperative regional framework based on international norms and regional connectivity.

- Developing defence and military capability with a focus on learning new skills from Russian military.
- Procurement of military equipment and defence industrial cooperation with Moscow.
- Building effective channels to cooperate to overcome political differences particularly with reference to peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.
- Developing cooperation with Moscow in advancing maritime security and economic interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Developing broader cooperation with Russia in other areas such as cooperation in energy, trade and economic fields.

Pakistan-Russia Defence Diplomacy in Practice

Pakistan's defence diplomatic activities with Russia include (but not limited to) conclusion of defence agreement, high level exchanges, joint military exercises and port calls.

Pakistan-Russia Bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement

Cotter and Forster consider bilateral defence cooperation agreements as significant defence diplomacy tools to establish an institutional mechanism for advancing defence relationship between the states. Beginning in 2014, Pakistan accelerated its efforts to deepen defence cooperation with Russia which culminated in conclusion of a Defence Cooperation Agreement (DCA). The agreement was signed during Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu's visit to Islamabad in November 2014. The visit came amid the drawdown of US-led NATO forces from Afghanistan by the end of December 2014 and reflected a growing understanding between Islamabad and Moscow to fill up the strategic vacuum created by US withdrawal. The then Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Muhammad Asif described the agreement as a 'milestone', which "will translate this relationship in tangible terms and further strengthen military-to-military relations."¹⁵ The Agreement sets the following strategic priorities:

- Information sharing on political and military matters
- Cooperation for promoting international security
- Strengthening of counter-terrorism efforts and arms control activities
- Bolstering military cooperation in various areas

¹⁵Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Landmark Defence Cooperation Agreement," *Dawn*, (November 21, 2014).

- Sharing experiences in peacekeeping operations¹⁶

The agreement focuses to enhance traditional as well as nontraditional military and defence capabilities. Both the states could also engage in production of defence equipment through joint ventures.¹⁷ Commenting on the Agreement, Sergei Shoigu said that it would have “a great practical focus and contribute to increasing combat efficiency of armed forces” and its implementation “would bolster other aspects of bilateral cooperation.”¹⁸ Agreeing with him, a Military Official noted that the Agreement has transformed Pakistan’s regional security architecture and Islamabad is better able to play a key role in the region. Both the states were more likely to align their Afghanistan policies to support a political solution of the conflict by engaging Afghan Taliban in peace negotiations, coordinate counterterrorism strategies in the region and engage in arms trade which will not only strengthen defence partnership but also expand cooperation in other areas.¹⁹

1. High Level Exchanges

Pakistan’s defence and military officials regularly interact with their Russian counterparts through high level visits and meetings to advance Pakistan’s foreign policy objectives.

High Level Visits and Meetings: High-level exchanges provide Pakistan with opportunities to secure Russian military equipment. In June 2015, a deal for the purchase of Mi-35M Russian assault helicopters, was reported to have been reached during General Raheel Sharif’s visit to Moscow. Subsequently, the agreement to purchase four Mi-35M helicopters was signed at Rawalpindi in August 2015 and Islamabad received the four helicopters in August 2017.²⁰ It was Pakistan’s first weapon purchase from Russia, suggesting that Pakistan seeks to expand its military acquisition beyond America and China. Nevertheless, Moscow’s sales of the S-400 system to New Delhi has irked Islamabad, and India is upset that Russia is

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sudha Ramachandran, “New Era in Russia-Pakistan Relations?” *The Diplomat*, (December 3, 2014), accessed March 17, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/12/new-era-in-russia-pakistan-relations/>.

¹⁸ Syed, “Pakistan, Russia Sign.”

¹⁹ Interview with a Military Official ,(October 26, 2018).

²⁰ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Pakistan Begins Receiving Advanced Attack Helicopters from Russia,” *The Diplomat*, (April 12, 2018), accessed May 3, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/pakistan-begins-receiving-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/>.

building defense relations with its nemesis Pakistan, which India seeks to isolate internationally.²¹

Military contacts are also considered as important tool to inform and influence Russia's military opinion about Pakistan's policy in the 'War on Terror.' A case in point is Russian military delegation's visit to North Waziristan on 30 March 2017. The delegation was briefed about Pakistan's army Operation Zarb-e-Azb to clear the region from terrorists; Pakistan's efforts to strengthen security along Pak-Afghan border and to promote socio-economic development of the region. The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) reportedly said that "the delegation acknowledged and appreciated Pakistan Army's achievements in the fight against terrorism and efforts to bring stability in the region."²² This suggests that military to military contacts promote greater transparency in defence relations and build trust that Islamabad is committed to defeat the forces of extremism and terrorism and contribute to international peace and security.

Pakistan's military leadership takes a broader view of Pakistan and Russia's defence engagement and calls attention to economic dimensions of the relationship as well. In April 2018, General Qamar Javed Bajwa during his visit to Russia stressed that Pakistan "will keep on working towards a cooperative regional framework based on sovereign equality and mutual progress through connectivity." He underscored that Islamabad "welcomes any initiative which can bring peace and stability in Afghanistan and the whole region will benefit from it." Appreciating his views, General Gerasimov said, "Russia supports Pakistan's efforts towards reconciliation and peace in Afghanistan and is willing to play a role towards that end."²³ In July 2019, General Bajwa during a meeting with C-in-C of Russian Ground Forces, Oleg Salyukov, reinforced this point that military cooperation between Pakistan and Russia will enhance peace and stability in the region and "usher economic prosperity." Salyukov also expressed his desire to strengthen relations of cooperation with Pakistan across a broad spectrum of areas.²⁴

Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee (JMCC): The establishment of JMCC in 2018 paved the way for regular military consultation between defence officials of Russia and Pakistan to discuss military cooperation and deliberate upon Afghanistan peace process, counterterrorism and the Middle East situation.²⁵ The JMCC is usually co-

²¹Feroz Hassan Khan, "Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations: An Emerging Entente Cordiale," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*4, No.1 (Special Issue 2021): 42-64.

²²*Daily Times*, (March 31, 2017).

²³F. Z. Khan, "Gen Bajwa's 'Significant' Visit to Russia," *Daily Times*, (May 10, 2018).

²⁴*The Express Tribune*, (July 2, 2019).

²⁵Sana Jamal, "Pakistan, Russia Expand Defence Cooperation," *Gulf News*, (August 8, 2018).

chaired by Russian Deputy Defence Minister and Pakistan's Defence Secretary and provides the "highest forum of defence collaboration" between the two states. The first meeting of JMCC was held in Rawalpindi, Pakistan in August 2018 and resulted in concluding an important Agreement for Russian military training of Pakistan's army officers. The Agreement came amid worsening relations between Pakistan and the US, which resulted in freezing of all US military training for Pakistani officers over differences on Afghanistan conflict. According to a Pakistan's defence analyst, training of Pakistani military service members at Russian military institutions "would bring about a major shift in the world view of top military officers" who were until now trained at US institutes.²⁶ In August 2019, the second session of JMCC was held in Moscow during which the forum hoped that JMCC "would continue to play a vital role in enhancing defence cooperation."²⁷

Meetings at Multilateral Defence Forums: Pakistan's and Russian military and defence officials also interact through various multilateral forums.

Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS): The annual Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS), organized by the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, provides an important venue for the two sides to hold bilateral talks and informal discussions on the sidelines of the event. In April 2016, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu, after meeting Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif on the sidelines of 5th MCIS, stressed that constructive relations between Moscow and Islamabad were important for maintaining international security. In Sergei Shoigu assessment:

*"We appreciate the achievements in military cooperation. Our meetings promoted growth of the number of contacts between the armed forces of Pakistan and Russia in many directions throughout the recent years."*²⁸

The forum is also a platform to exchange Islamabad's views on regional and global security challenges. In April 2018, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan during his address at 7th MCIS highlighted the brutal repression of people by Indian army in Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir and remarked: "Jammu & Kashmir dispute must be resolved in accordance with UN resolutions, taking into account the aspirations of the Kashmiris."

²⁶Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan, Russia Sign Rare Military Cooperation Pact," *Voice of America*, (August 8, 2018), accessed July 11, 2019. <https://www.voanews.com/south-central-asia/pakistan-russia-sign-rare-military-cooperation-pact>.

²⁷*The Express Tribune*, (August 20, 2019).

²⁸Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, "Heads of the Russian and Pakistani Military Departments had a Meeting within the Moscow Conference on International Security," (April 27, 2016), accessed March 2, 2019 <https://eng.mil.ru/en/mcis/news/more.htm?id=12084071@egNews>.

He expressed concerns over growing foothold of the Islamic State in Afghanistan and the use of drug money for financing of terrorism as Afghanistan sees exponential increase in poppy cultivation.²⁹ Experts note that these high-level exchanges and interactions amongst the leaders of the two states not only helped to fix the pre-existing misunderstandings but also proved to be the basis of future amicable Pakistan-Russia relations.³⁰

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Pakistan is keen on expanding its security and defence ties with Russia through SCO since Islamabad secured full membership of the block along with India at the Astana Summit in June 2017. The annual SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting provides a leading mechanism for Pakistan's Defence Minister to interact with his Russian counterpart on the sideline of the group with a focus on improving security and promoting economic cooperation in the SCO region. From Pakistan's perspective, Moscow can help Islamabad to further its strategic outreach in Central Asia given the significant influence Russia retains over CARs. In the long run, supporting China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) —a connecting point of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) would also contribute to Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership.³¹ Moreover, Pakistan's strategic community views that Islamabad-Moscow cooperation within SCO framework can deter New Delhi from taking any action likely to heighten tensions in the region.

Pakistan-Russia Joint Military Exercises

Military training and exercises constitute an important instrument of Pakistan's defence diplomacy and intend to benchmark Pakistan army's capabilities as well as learn new techniques from Russian military. Furthermore, joint exercises provide opportunities for both militaries to foster deeper comprehension of each other culture, change mutual perceptions from rival to supporter described as softening the "competitive mindsets" of the participating military personnel, directing "their energies from confrontation to cooperation."³² Since 2014, Pakistan-Russia collaboration is growing in this domain. The militaries of both the states have participated in eight bilateral and five multilateral exercises during 2014-2020 [Table 1].

²⁹*Times of Islamabad*, (April 4, 2018).

³⁰Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi & Adam Saud, "From "Geo-Strategic Rivals" to "Probable Allies"? A Constructivist Analysis of the Pakistan-Russia Relations." *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 91(2) (2021): 153–162.

³¹Vladimir Morozov & Andrew Korybko, "Pakistan's role in Russia's Greater Eurasian Partnership," *Polis. Political Science*, no. 3 (2020): 9–22.

³²Wilson Chun Hei Chau, "Explaining China's Participation in Bilateral and Multilateral Military Exercises," *Security Challenges* 7 (3), (Spring 2011): 57.

Pakistan and Russian naval personnel have exercised three times using the codename “Arabian Monsoon” in 2014, 2015 and 2018. The exercises have focused on conducting of combined operations to interdict activities of pirates and other organized criminal groups at sea, including cutting off the supply of narcotics in North Arabian Sea.³³ According to the Federal Drug Control Service of Russia, these exercises gave new impetus to the anti-drug cooperation between Islamabad and Moscow.³⁴ Since 2017, Russian Navy also participated in multilateral naval exercises Aman-17 and Aman-19 hosted by Pakistan since 2007 on biennial basis. Aman [Peace] exercises aim to refine the concept of ‘collective and collaborative’ security to keep the IOR stable by countering piracy, drug trafficking, human smuggling and terrorism.³⁵ Russian participation in the naval exercises was a confirmation that Moscow considers Islamabad a viable ally for the security of civilian, commercial and military targets in the IOR. The Special Operations Forces of the two states have conducted five training exercises under the codename Druzhba [Friendship] in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. Friendship exercises are conducted on annual basis alternately on Pakistani and Russian territory and focused on exchanging mutual counter-terror experiences in the field of mountain warfare, reconnaissance operations, fighting in built-up area, tactical preparation, hostage and rescue and air assault techniques. An analyst noted that these exercises have been valuable for Pakistan to learn to use Russian military hardware for its Counterinsurgency (COIN) and Counterterrorism (CT) operations, including combat aircraft and infantry weapons.³⁶

Table 1: Pakistan-Russia Joint Military Exercises (2014-2020)

Type of Exercise	Code Name	Date	Location
Naval	Arabian Monsoon-I	Oct 17-20, 2014	North Arabian Sea
	Arabian Monsoon-II	Dec 4-9, 2015	
	Arabian Monsoon-III	Nov 30- Dec 1, 2018	

³³ Maksim Shepovalenko, “On the Nature and Focus of Joint Combat Training Events Between the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation and the Armed Forces of India and Pakistan,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 32(3), (October 2, 2019): 303–323.

³⁴ Embassy of the Russian Federation in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, “Second Joint Russian-Pakistani Antidrug Exercises “Arabian Monsoon-2015”,” (December 9, 2015).

³⁵ “Aman,” <https://aman.paknavy.gov.pk/Home.aspx> (accessed August 12, 2019).

³⁶ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Russia and Pakistan to Hold First Ever Military Exercise,” *The Diplomat*, September 14, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/russia-and-pakistan-to-hold-first-ever-military-exercise/> (accessed May 17, 2018).

Special Warfare Exercises	Druzhba-I (Friendship 2016)	Sep 24-Oct 10, 2016	Special Operations School, Cherat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province, Pakistan
	Druzhba-II (Friendship 2017)	Sep24- Oct 4, 2017	Minralney Vody in North Caucasus, Karachaevo Cherkess Republic, Russia
	Druzhba-III (Friendship 2018)	Oct 21 -Nov 4, 2018	Special Operations School, Cherat; National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC), Pabbi, Punjab Province; Pakistan
	Druzhba-IV (Friendship 2019)	Oct 2-11, 2019	Krasnodar, Russia
	Druzhba-V (Friendship 2020)	Nov 8-19, 2020	Special Service Headquarters in Tarbela, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province;andN CTC,Pabbi, Punjab Province
Naval (Multinational)	Aman-17	Feb10-14, 2017	Arabian Sea
	Aman-19	Feb 8-12, 2019	
Multinational under SCO	Peace Mission-2018	Aug22-29, 2018	Chelyabinsk Oblast, Russia
	Tsentr-2019 (Center-2019)	Sep 16-21, 2019	Training Grounds of Central Military

			District, Russia
	Kavkaz-2020 (Caucasus-2020)	Sep 21-26, 2020	Training Grounds of Southern Military District, Russia
Source: Data compiled by Author through various sources including ISPR (www.ispr.gov.pk)			

Moreover, the value of Friendship Exercise is enormous in terms of COIN and CT experience gained during the exercises. Commenting on Friendship 2017 exercises, Andrew Korybko argued that Pakistan can share its extensive experience waging mountainous counterterrorism operations in tribal areas with Russian armed personnel, while Russia can share Pakistan Special Forces key anti-ISIS tactics. He noted that Russia-Pakistan exercises and military cooperation “can lead to the two countries becoming anti-terrorist superpowers and greatly enhancing Eurasian security.”³⁷ Russia seeks Pakistan’s cooperation to counter the threat of regional affiliate of Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), the Islamic State Khorasan Province (IS-K)—the term ‘Khorasan’ refers to the region of Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, Iran, and Central Asia. The fight against IS-K has led to an acceleration of counterterrorism coordination between Pakistan and Russia bilaterally as well as multilaterally through SCO framework.³⁸

The exercises also foster understanding of Pakistan and its culture, promote confidence and a sense of common interest between Pakistan and Russian military. On the closing ceremony of Friendship 2018, General Bajwa stated that the Friendship Exercise is “a great forum to reinforce existing relationship between the two militaries.”³⁹

Furthermore, the political and strategic benefits of the exercises are immense. In particular, the exercises have consolidated Islamabad’s defence diplomatic efforts to persuade Moscow to shift away from a lopsided Indian foreign policy in the region. This was evident from Russia’s decision to continue with 2016 and 2017 Friendship drills despite India’s concerns.⁴⁰ This

³⁷Polina Tikhonova, “Pakistan-Russia drills: Anti-terrorist Superpower Alliance,” (Value Walk, September 25, 2017), accessed December 4, 2017, <http://www.valuewalk.com/2017/09/russia-pakistan-drills-superpower-alliance/>.

³⁸Samuel Ramani, “Russia and Pakistan: A durable anti-American alliance in South Asia,” *The Diplomat*, (April 21, 2018), accessed May 8, 2018 <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/russia-and-pakistan-a-durable-anti-american-alliance-in-south-asia/>.

³⁹*Dawn*, (November 5, 2018).

⁴⁰Imdad Hussain, “The Flaws in India’s Plan to Diplomatically Isolate Pakistan,” *The Express Tribune*, (March 28, 2017).

decision represented a major impact of Pakistan's defence diplomacy on Russia's policy in the region.

Since 2018, the militaries of both states also interacted and participated in three multinational exercises codenamed as 'Peace Mission 2018', 'Centre 2019' and 'Caucasus 2020' under the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure of SCO. The exercises were hosted by Russia and focused on countering the threat of international terrorism. Taken together, these exercises further deepened Pakistan-Russia security cooperation and build the military capability of SCO member-states to tackle common security threats and promote regional stability.

2. Port Calls

The exchanges of port calls between Pakistan and Russia are an important defence diplomacy mechanism to build trust and maritime partnership. Ship visits are a way to support Pakistan's political, security and diplomatic goals as Pakistan's navy personnel ashore can be excellent ambassadors of its goodwill. The first visit by Pakistan's navy sailors to Russia took place in October 2013, when Pakistan Navy Ship (PNS) Aslat made a call to Black Seaport of Novorossiysk. Pakistan Fleet Commander Admiral Khan Hasharm Bin Saddique described the visit "a new stage in cooperation" between the two states. The ship visit provided opportunities for Pakistan navy personnel to conduct a range of activities—including meeting with Commander of the Novorossiysk naval base, meetings with Russian navy personnel, a visit to the city mayor and sightseeing tour of the city. Pakistan and Russian navy sailors also played a mini football match and a tug of war competition.⁴¹ The visit served to promote friendly relations and build linkages between the two navies. In April 2014, Russian Federation Navy (RFN) made a first ever reciprocal visit to Karachi port indicating a growing relationship with Pakistan Navy. On conclusion of the visit, Russian navy ships participated in a joint anti-piracy exercise.⁴² In October of the same year, Russian ships paid another goodwill visit to Pakistan, conducted training activities and held tabletop discussions on defence cooperation in Indian Ocean followed by a joint training with Pakistan Navy in Arabian Sea.⁴³ This visit demonstrated RFN keen interest in Pakistan Navy capabilities against security threats in the IOR. Subsequently, ship visits have become a key element of bilateral defence relationship [Table 2]. Exchanges of port calls may be particularly important to Pakistan as these facilitate substantive policy discussions and allow deeper engagement with

⁴¹*Tass*, (October 17, 2013), accessed October 5, 2019, <https://tass.com/world/702371>

⁴²*Business Standard*, (April 20, 2014).

⁴³*The News International*, (October 17, 2014).

RFN. In August 2018, PNS Aslat made a visit to Saint Petersburg to take part in Russia's Navy Day ceremonies. The significant of this visit is highlighted by the fact that the Commander-In-Chief of Russian armed forces, President Putin was the Chief Guest of the naval parade and Aslat was the only foreign ship attending this event. Pakistan Navy delegation was led by Vice Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Kaleem Shaukat. During port call, interactions of Pakistan navy officials with RFN were conducted which helped in enhancing mutual understanding and confidence building. Aslat was also opened for Russian citizens with the aim to strengthen people to people contact and build trust among societies of the two states.⁴⁴

Table 2: Port Calls Conducted by Pakistan and Russia 2014 – 2019	
Date	Details of Port Calls
April 19-23, 2014	Russia's anti-submarine warship Marshal Shaposhnikov and service ship Alatau visited Karachi port.
May 2014	PNS Rahna ward visited Novorossiysk.
October 16–22, 2014	Russian naval frigate Yaroslav Mudry and tanker Kola visited Karachi port.
December 4-6, 2015	Russian navy vessel Vice-Admiral Kulakov visited Karachi port.
December 6-9, 2016	PNS Alamgir paid a visit to port of Novorossiysk.
February 10-14, 2017	Russian ship Severomorsk visited Karachi and took part in Aman 2017 Exercises.
July 28-31, 2018	PNS Aslat paid a first ever visit to Saint Petersburg, Russia.
November 26-30, 2018	Russian ship Severomorsk and Middle Sea Tanker Kama visited Karachi port. Russian sailors participated in international exhibition of weapons and military equipment 'IDEAS-2018.'
February 8-12, 2019	Russian Navy Ship participated in Aman 2019 Exercises.

⁴⁴*The News International*, (August 2, 2018).

Source: Data compiled by Author through various sources including ISPR (www.ispr.gov.pk).

Most importantly, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on “Training of Naval Personnel and the Conduct of Joint Military Exercises” was signed during the meeting of Vice Admiral Shaukat and Russian Navy’s Commander-in-Chief, Admiral Vladimir Ivanovich Korolev. The MOU would allow Pakistan Navy to substantially increase its operational synergy with RFN in maintaining the maritime security and freedom of navigation along Sea Lines of Communication across IOR.⁴⁵ From an Indian perspective, naval cooperation between Pakistan and Russia is a cause for concern as it would have long-term security implications for New Delhi in the IOR.⁴⁶

Conclusion and Recommendations

A number of conclusions may be drawn from Pakistan’s defence diplomacy towards Russia. One, defence diplomacy has significantly reduced Pakistan-Russia ‘historic distrust’ and created valuable military to military linkages which could in turn, be used to exercise influence at multiple levels to manage and prevent conflict or a potential crisis. Two, Pakistan’s defence diplomatic efforts have brought a change in Russia’s perceptions towards its role in the ‘War on Terror.’ Moscow is increasingly convinced to believe in Islamabad’s capability to curb the threat of militant-terrorist organizations specifically IS-K and this has provided an impetus to accelerate counterterrorism cooperation between the two states. Three, Pakistan-Russia strategic engagement has been able to overcome political differences on Afghanistan. As the Taliban were gaining influence and control of Afghanistan, Russia and Pakistan agreed that a negotiated settlement was the only feasible solution for the future stability of Afghanistan and the region. Russia, in fact, hosted parallel peace initiative involving Afghan Taliban. Islamabad views that Moscow is back in the new great game. At the time of this writing, United States completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan on August 30, 2021—following successful peace agreement with Afghan Taliban in Doha, Qatar in February 2020—and Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021.⁴⁷ Four, Russia increasingly considers Pakistan a key player in the regional security

⁴⁵Maqbool Malik, “Pakistan, Russia sign MoU for naval cooperation,” *The Nation*, (August 1, 2018).

⁴⁶ B. M. Jain, *South Asia Conundrum: The Great Power Gambit* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2019): 126.

⁴⁷Khan, “Russia–Pakistan Strategic Relations.”

architecture of South and Central Asia. Conversely, Moscow and New Delhi seem to continue to drift away on strategic issues including stabilizing Afghanistan, counterterrorism and regional security. Five, Moscow and Islamabad have been expanding cooperation in maritime realm too. Indeed, this convergence of interests was not possible without Pakistan's vigorous defence diplomacy. However, given Russia's longstanding strategic relations with India, it remains to be seen whether Pakistan can secure Moscow diplomatic and political support for reducing tensions with India and purchasing advanced weapons from Russia. Arguably, defence relations would further improve from a deepening cooperation in security as well as trade, energy and economy. In this connection, the policy recommendations are as follows:

1. To deal with the complex security challenges, Pakistan and Russia should deepen cooperation on cyber security, military education and training, drug trafficking and military-technological cooperation.
2. There is a role for Pakistan's security and defence think tanks and academic institutions to hold frequent discussions with Russian defence institutions to promote mutual understanding on a wide range of areas including energy and trade fields. The engagement would also enhance social and cultural linkages and people to people contact.
3. Pakistan's defence diplomatic efforts should seek Moscow's cooperation through SCO forum in stabilizing Afghanistan, reducing tensions with India and helping to diffuse a future Pakistan-India crisis
4. Both states can cooperate to broader security in the IOR including capacity building, reducing disaster risks and ensuring freedom of navigation.

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