

Is Pakistan Shifting to Russia?

News:

Pakistan and Russia signed a bilateral trade agreement aimed at facilitating and reducing costs of trade between the two countries. The deal was signed during a three-day economic conference for Muslim countries that concluded on May 19, 2023, in Kazan, Russia. The conference brought together participants from 85 countries, fostering a platform for the exchange of business ideas.

Comment:

For some time, there has been a narrative spun in Pakistan that Russia is best suited for meeting its interests given its geographic proximity and it does not condition relations like the US nor does it have an objection with the transfer of technology. This military-backed narrative is pushed to portray Pakistan's independence in foreign policy and to hide the military leadership's submission to US dictates.

The recent economic agreement signed between Russia and Pakistan is portrayed as evidence of Islamabad flexing its muscles and breaking free from US control and of its courage as Russia is under harsh Western sanction regimes because of its aggression in Ukraine. However, for the diligent observer of geopolitics, one will realise this narrative is false and far from the truth, and Russian-Pakistan relations fit into US plans for Pakistan and Russia.

The US has never had an issue with its agents playing ball with its rivals or with those that it has characterised as threats to its strategic interests. But this has been done to secure its strategic interests. The US is not superman, and as it is strained with domestic crises and the need to deploy its resources to fight other battles, it has no issue with Russia establishing economic relations with its Pakistani agent, as this helps in stabilizing its agent as a nightmare scenario for the US is the collapse of Pakistan, and sincere Muslims taking over and establishing a caliphate.

Hence, the US supports its agents' establishing relations with its rivals, in this case Russia, for the sake of its own strategic goals, in this case helping the deteriorating Pakistani economy and hiding Islamabad's submission amid strong anti-US public opinion on Pakistani streets. A similar story can be seen playing out between other US agents like Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, with both seeking entry into BRICS, a China-dominated organization.

The US plan for Russia has never been to destroy it or to ensure its total collapse, but it has worked to limit and discipline it when needed. The US based on readings of its strategic goals for Caucasus and Central Asia, has no problem with Russia existing as a regional power to prevent the emergence of a security vacuum and thwarting Chinese domination of key strategic and geo-economic territories. However, it is ready to discipline Russia when it steps out of line as it did in Georgia and Crimea, and in other files such as in Syria, hence one of the goals of baiting Russia into Ukraine was to punish it for overstepping redlines in Syria. The mentioned explains why the US has had no problem with Pakistan or India establishing economic ties with Russia despite Western sanctions on the latter because of its aggression in Ukraine. These ties allow the Russian state to stay afloat and continue to act as an anchor in key strategic regions.

To conclude, Russian-Pakistan economic ties are not reflective of a shift in Islamabad's foreign policy nor indicative of independence in decision-making, but they fit into US plans for Pakistan and Russia. True, strategic independence will come when the Pakistani military establishment breaks away from the US straight jacket and gives Nusrat to sincere Muslims who intend to re-establish the caliphate (Khilafah) for the sake of not just liberating Pakistan but the whole of Muslim territories.

**Written for the Central Media Office of Hizb ut Tahrir by
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