

Pakistan's Russian Wheat Import Deal: Business As Usual or Something Different this Time?

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Global Research, May 31, 2022

Region: [Asia](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

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The new government's latest deal with Russia could muddle the narrative from their opponents that they came to power to punish the former premier for his ties with that country, which is why it can't be described as business as usual even if the terms are the same or very similar to the ones that had been agreed to in the past and not close to the 20% discount that Imran Khan was reportedly negotiating.

The Express Tribune [reported](#) on Sunday that Pakistan's Finance Ministry announced the day prior that “The [Economic Coordination Committee of the Cabinet] allowed import of two million metric tonnes of wheat on a government-to-government basis” from Russia. The outlet added that

“The Ministry of National Food Security had proposed that the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Commerce should jointly explore the possibility of barter trade with Russia due to sanctions imposed by the West. However, there are no sanctions on the import of grains from Russia but the government would have to work out a mechanism to make the payments after Moscow has been thrown out of the global payments clearing system –the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (Swift).”

It remains unclear whether the price that was agreed upon comes close to the 20% discount that former Prime Minister Imran Khan earlier [claimed](#) that Russia had offered his country prior to his scandalous ouster, just like nobody knows the details of the alternative payment mechanism that'll be employed. Observers should also note that it isn't exceptional in and of itself that Pakistan is importing wheat from Russia since it's done so [before](#) in the past. For this reason, one might be inclined to believe that this deal is business as usual and nothing all that important to pay attention to, yet the larger context in which it was announced indicates that there's something different this time, even if it's not the advantageous terms that Pakistan's former premier was reportedly trying to negotiate with Russia.

He blamed his scandalous ouster on a US-orchestrated regime change plot to punish him for his independent foreign policy, particularly its [Russian dimension](#), a charge that the US and the new government that replaced him both deny. The nearly two months since his removal through a no-confidence motion have seen the country slide into [one of its worst political crises](#), which has in turn resulted in Pakistan [sending very mixed signals](#) to Russia that implied credence to the premier's claims that his relations with that Eurasian Great Power had something to do with his removal from office. After all, one would assume that their reported discounted commodity talks would have remained on track and likely already led to the deals that the former premier mentioned had that not been the case.

This lack of progress over nearly the past two months came as Pakistan sunk into one of its worst-ever economic crises that'll necessitate it seeking the reliable import of discounted food and fuel, which together consume [37.39%](#) of the country's total import bill, if it's serious about cutting costs. It's [presumably](#) for this pressing reason why the new US-friendly Pakistani government [didn't rule out](#) such imports from Russia last week despite its traditional partner probably frowning upon Islamabad's continued dealings with Moscow. Simply put, pragmatism might take precedence over politics in pursuit of "regime reinforcement" regardless of the speculative external pressure involved since former Prime Minister Khan's successors' priority is to not be removed from power through poverty-driven riots.

It might very well have been with this goal in mind instead of a desire to reaffirm its [principled neutrality](#) in the [New Cold War](#) that the Finance Ministry just announced that it allowed the import of two million metric tonnes of wheat from Russia. So as not to be misunderstood, this deal will serve the objective interests of the Pakistani people even if it wasn't agreed to on the advantageous terms that the former premier was reportedly negotiating since the country urgently needs to ensure its food security amidst the [global crisis](#) in this sphere, though there's also no ignoring that it's in the new government's political interests as well for the earlier explained reason. Building upon the last-mentioned observation, it can be predicted that some of its supporters might spin the deal to refute the former premier's claims.

For example, they could point to this agreement to cast doubt on his accusation that they came to power as part of a US-orchestrated regime change plot to punish him for his Russian-friendly foreign policy after they themselves just proved that they're capable of reaching a deal with that multipolar Great Power in spite of [actively trying to improve ties](#) with its unipolar American rival. In possible response to that domestic politicization of this international deal, their opponents could retort that the terms might not have been as advantageous as what former Prime Minister Khan was reportedly trying to negotiate, the claim of which could be intended to erode the potential boost to the new government's legitimacy and thus uphold the legitimacy of their critics' allegations against them.

The new government's latest deal with Russia could muddle the narrative from their opponents that they came to power to punish the former premier for his ties with that country, which is why it can't be described as business as usual even if the terms are the same or very similar to the ones that had been agreed to in the past and not close to the 20% discount that Imran Khan was reportedly negotiating. Put another way, Pakistan's relations with Russia have been at the center of the country's latest political crisis but had hitherto been instrumentalized by the former government, though now the incumbents might have realized that they could spin the deal that they likely reached purely out of survival necessity and not for political pragmatic reasons in order to cast doubt on their

critics' accusations against them.

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This article was originally published on [OneWorld](#).

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