

Russia and the SCO: Pakistan Must Adapt to Emerging Global Realities

By [Stop NATO](#)

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

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Islamabad has long been saying it cherishes the desire of and talking a lot of making a “paradigm shift” in its foreign policy and also took a few steps to come closer to the China/Russia-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as an associate member. But they were not sufficient enough for Russian President Vladimir Putin to pay his first official visit to Pakistan.

And thus, a languid and incompetent administration has lost a rare opportunity of not only downsizing the country’s heavy reliance on the West but also getting closer to the dynamically emerging bloc which the future of the world belongs to.

Pakistan’s overwhelming population, if asked, would vote for a change in foreign policy which has time and again sent shock waves to the country’s vital interests. The Russian president was due here for the first time to open the door to a new era of Pakistan and the East coming closer to each other besides entering the SCO as a full member. Mr Putin’s focal person for relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, told an Indian newspaper that Islamabad talked a lot of rhetoric with little progress towards “meaningful cooperation”.

Russia-Pakistan relations have been on the rise in recent years but economic ties between them have still lagged behind the desired level. The two countries finalized three memorandums of understanding at a meeting of the Pakistan-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission earlier this month and they were to be signed during President Putin’s planned trip. The MoUs relate to the expansion of the Pakistan Steel Mills and cooperation in the energy and education sectors.

Russia thinks that the MoUs are largely a reiteration of agreements signed last year during President Asif Ali Zardari’s visit to Moscow. Russia’s main concern is Pakistan’s slow progress towards major projects in the energy sector, including Central Asia-South Asia electricity transmission from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan (CASA-1000), and construction of rail tracks and motor roads from Tajikistan to Pakistan to create new trade routes in the region.

Russia also showed interest in the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and Mr. Putin also pledged an investment of \$500 million in CASA-1000 and offered to finance and build other projects. But no headway is seen in these schemes.

Another factor that might have contributed to Mr. Putin “delaying” his visit to Pakistan is that Russia smells rat in its objectives in Afghanistan as Pakistan seems closer to Washington’s whims in the region and Moscow thinks that a sustainable resolution of the

Afghanistan issue is possible only with its active involvement and this may not be forthcoming because of Pakistan's foreign policy, which is unnecessarily aligned with the West, particularly the United States.

No wonder if Washington may be influencing Islamabad not to come closer to Moscow because Pakistan has the unfortunate proclivity of yielding to such pressure. For how long Pakistan would want to be left high and dry in the hour of need, is a decision the political leadership has to take and transform it to the new emerging global realities?

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