

Russia-Pakistan Military Relations: On the Path to a Strategic Partnership

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The statements made by the Russian and Pakistani Defense Ministers after their interaction at this year's Moscow Conference on International Security show that the military relations between the two Great Powers are on the right track and moving them closer to clinching a long-awaited strategic partnership.

Russia and Pakistan have been engaged in a [fast-moving and comprehensive rapprochement](#) across the past couple of years that's put their relations on the [trajectory of a strategic partnership](#), with the statements made by their Defense Ministers after their interaction at this year's [Moscow Conference on International Security](#) (MCIS) showing that their military ties in particular are definitely on the right track.

TASS [reported](#) that Sergey Shoigu had this to say when speaking with his Pakistani counterpart Khurram Dastgir Khan:

"Over the past few years, bilateral meetings have contributed to building up contacts between the Armed Forces of Russia and Pakistan in such areas as the joint drills of land troops and the navies, and also the strengthening of ties between the General Staffs. This year, our defense ministries also have an intense program of measures.

We support Pakistan's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a full-fledged member. We expect that SCO interaction will contribute to developing and strengthening friendly ties between our defense ministries.

We are grateful to the Pakistani side for regular participation in the Moscow conference on international security. From year to year, the forum is increasingly turning into a venue for an open and professional dialogue on a wide range of present-day problems.

I had warm and comradely relations with your predecessor. On his invitation, I visited Pakistan for the first time."

That same day, Mr. Khan [spoke at the venue](#) and was [on record](#) as saying the following about Russian-Pakistani relations:

"Both countries have, I believe, been able to transcend their history and to have a fresh beginning.

...

It is a beginning because, of course, that history of mistrust and essentially standing on two opposite sides is there; but, both countries, because of many geo-strategic reasons, now find it a more optimal path to be cooperating with each other.

...

I want to emphasize that this need not be in any way a zero-sum relationship with the United States. It is just that Pakistan has done a regional recalibration of its foreign and security policies.”



Pakistani Defense Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan speaking at the Moscow Conference on International Security in April 2018

Without a doubt, ties between the two Old Cold War-era rivals have remarkably thawed to the point where they're now close partners in the [New Cold War](#), though with Pakistan indirectly declaring its membership in a new Non-Aligned Movement ([Neo-NAM](#)) when describing the win-win recalibration of its policies in light of recent events. Russia's "[military diplomacy](#)" is slated to play a crucial role in helping Moscow and Islamabad "[balance](#)" the tumultuous transition from unipolarity to multipolarity, and it's expected that further cooperation between their armed forces will be forthcoming with time.

There's [no better chance than now](#) for Russia and Pakistan to clinch an official military partnership especially after Vice President Pence's [hostility](#) towards Pakistan at the end of last year and President Trump's [aggressive tweets](#) that marked the beginning of this one. Both point to the inevitable deterioration of the erstwhile strong US-Pakistani military partnership, while the positive interaction between the Russian and Pakistani Defense Ministers earlier this week evidently shows that the two sides are working on their own multipolar military partnership in response.

It should be reminded that this isn't aimed against any third-party such as the US or India but is designed to advance win-win outcomes that promote regional peace and stability, to which end the "Holy Grail" of the Rus-Pak military partnership would be if Moscow [sells its defensive S-400 anti-air missile systems](#) to Islamabad. It's still far too early to talk about the likelihood of that happening, but it would nevertheless be the crowning moment of their partnership if such a development occurred or even if credible reports emerged about prospective talks on this topic.

Curiously, the [long-awaited S-400 deal](#) between Russia and India has once again [been delayed](#) and wasn't agreed to at the MCIS like earlier media reports [wrongly predicted](#), and while a source told TASS that this is just because of a pricing dispute and that the contract will be [signed in October](#), one can't help but wonder whether New Delhi's intransigence on this issue is due to its indignation at Moscow's growing closeness with Islamabad and its [fear of US sanctions](#). After all, India is trying to play Russia off against the US in order to get the best and most affordable military deals possible, so such a [Chanakya-like](#) scenario can't be precluded.

Irrespective of Russia's historical [ties with India](#), Moscow is moving forward in forming

a [Multipolar Trilateral](#) between itself, Beijing, and Islamabad in order to safeguard security in the [vulnerable Eurasian Heartland](#) that's at a greater threat of US-instigated [Hybrid War](#) than ever before due to the dangerous introduction of Daesh to the Afghan battlespace. The grand strategic vision is the formation of a [Golden Ring of Multipolar Great Powers](#), of which Pakistan is the most geostrategically important, and this explains one of the driving motivations behind the Rus-Pak military partnership that was on full display earlier this week in Moscow.

The [US and India](#) will likely try to convince the other that this emerging Eurasian institution is aimed against them, shrewdly predicting that this misleading infowar narrative will get their counterpart to commit even more to their [planned 100-year strategic partnership](#) by providing a "defensive justification" of it to their respective domestic audiences and the global public at large. The fait accompli that's forming per the US' "[scenario superiority](#)" of the situation is the division of Greater Eurasia into the two blocs of the Heartland-centric Golden Circle and the Rimland-based NATO-"[Quint](#)", with everything in between them in West and Southeastern Asia falling under the Neo-NAM and reaping the benefits of "[competitive connectivity](#)".

It may already be too late to reverse this trend, and there's no telling whether the [pivot state](#) of [India](#) even has any sincere desire to do so, but in any case, the developing Russian-Pakistani Strategic Partnership and the two sides' strengthening military relations that have come about because of their fast-moving rapprochement in recent years will form an axis of stability in Eurasia during these turbulent times, with these two Great Powers interestingly interacting with one another for the greater collective good in the New Cold War unlike their previous pattern of behavior during the Old Cold War.

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