

RUSSIA AND PAKISTAN: SHARED CHALLENGES AND COMMON OPPORTUNITIES

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For at least the next decade, threats emanating from South Asia will directly challenge Russia's security. The ongoing Afghan conflict and cross-border issues such as terrorism, organized crime, and nuclear security, all of which reverberate in Moscow, guarantee long-term engagement between Russia and Pakistan. To address these shared challenges, Moscow needs a new approach to South Asia that prioritizes developing Russian-Pakistani relations.

The Evolving Russian-Pakistani Relationship

- Russia has articulated its national objectives in specific South Asian countries, such as fighting drug trafficking in Afghanistan, capitalizing on India's economic growth, and working with Pakistan, but it lacks a cohesive South Asia strategy.
- Regional instability and Pakistan's weak political regime mean the country may face serious security threats in the coming years.
- Pakistani and Russian security interests are increasingly intertwined, so Moscow cannot afford to ignore the emergence of new threats in Islamabad.
- Officials from Pakistan and Russia participate in various bilateral and multilateral forums to address their shared security concerns.
- Developing relations would benefit both countries, but there are obstacles to closer cooperation. Moscow does not want to provoke India, Pakistan's regional rival; a history of conflict has damaged Russian-Pakistani trust; and security concerns make Russian companies reluctant to do business in Pakistan.
- Constructive dialogue is taking place on potential Russian-Pakistani civil nuclear cooperation. Although such collaboration is unlikely, these talks allow the two countries to address shared concerns on issues like nuclear security and nonproliferation.

Steps Russia Can Take to Improve Relations

Develop an integrated Russian policy on South Asia. Instead of pursuing different interests in each country, Moscow should formulate a coherent, overarching regional strategy to better address threats from South Asia.

Promote intensive Russian-Pakistani dialogue. Discussion between members of civil, military, and economic institutions in both countries will help further endeavors to deepen cooperation on a range of issues.

Enhance existing contacts between officials. Increasing ties between representatives of the Russian and Pakistani power structures will build trust, promote transparency, and boost confidence in the developing relationship.

Help Pakistan respond to security threats on its territory. Providing political, economic, and military support will help Islamabad address security issues before they threaten Moscow. This assistance should not alter the regional balance of power or provoke India.

Reach out to the Pakistani public. Informing the Pakistani audience of Russian positions and projects in South Asia will help Moscow build trust with regional countries and make its policy more transparent and predictable.

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