

STRATEGIC INCLINATION OF RUSSIA TOWARDS SINO-PAK ALLIANCE: A GEOSTRATEGIC CONCERN FOR INDIA

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Background:

As the geopolitical balance in Asia has started tilting towards China, Russia has improved its relations with both Pakistan and China which has raised the possibilities of a strategic alliance between the three countries. Both Pakistan and China have had a strategic alliance amongst themselves since 1972. However, Russia has started leaning towards this alliance since 2005 as India and the United States (US) signed a ten year defense agreement and announced their joint collaboration for a civil nuclear pact.

Some of the factors that have brought the three countries closer to each other worth mentioning are US announcement to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan by 2014; Russia & China's active role in the Shanghai Cooperation (SCO); Russia's influence in the Central Asian states & China's outreach in the region through its investments in the infrastructure & natural resources projects; India's diversification of its defense procurements and also Obama's announcement of its Asia Pivot policy with an emphasized role for India. All these factors have worked to bring the three countries closer to each other. New developments on the chessboard of politics have been acting as a catalyst in bringing the three countries together and that is concern of India from geostrategic point of view. This paper is an attempt to examine these developments within the larger framework of its implications for India.

Blossoming Russo-Pak Strategic Alliance:

As the relations between US and Pakistan are falling apart for various geopolitical reasons, there have been a series of high level visits between the Russia and Pakistan during the last three years. Pakistan's role in the Quadrilateral meeting of Russia, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and itself is already well established. Thus, a new strategic relationship is blossoming in the heart of Central and South Asia. Russia has understood the importance of Pakistan in dealing with the problem of terrorism that emanates out of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. In this line, the 8th meeting of Russia-Pakistan Consultative Group on Strategic Stability was held in Islamabad in April that was soon followed by trilateral meeting of the three countries in Beijing. The agenda of both the meetings was common- increasing their trilateral cooperation to control the menace of drug trafficking and terrorism. The most important development has been the initiation of a strategic dialogue between the two countries in August this year. Both Pakistan and India have got the observer status in the SCO, but, Russia has been supportive of Pakistan becoming a full member of the organization [1] If the strategic relationship between the two countries become a full fledged strategic partnership penned in the form of a treaty, Russia will immensely gain against the US on strategic terms. It can have an easy access in the Indian Ocean region through Arabian Sea by seeking permission from both China and Pakistan for the Gwadar port. Additionally, Pakistan has also sought for technical and financial help as it is struggling to commit \$1.3 billion for the Islamic or Friendship pipeline that it has recently joined [2]. In return Pakistan can offer the Russian to extract Coal for themselves from the Baluchistan area.

Though India has recently submitted its application for its formal inclusion in this pipeline, yet, India would bear a considerable loss. It had already in the past abandoned the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline under the pressure from the US and on top of that voted against Iran in the United Nations Security Council. Also, if the Islamic pipeline delivers natural gas to Pakistan, the prospects of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline would be phased out immediately as Pakistan would fulfill its energy needs. In both the cases, Pakistan geographically blocks India's path to the natural resources from Central Asia and the Middle East.

Sino-Russo Strategic Embrace:

The second aspect where India needs to worry is the possibility of transferring Russian arms to Pakistan via China. As India has diversified its defense procurement sources to France, Israel and even the possibility of importing Japanese US-2 amphibian aircraft arises, the foundations of a 'comfortable and privileged' defense relationship between Russia and India seems to be withering away. If we take into consideration the statistics of the last 10-12 years, Russia's international rivals such as Israel has bagged business worth more than \$10 billion (Rs.54,000 crore), and, India has ordered equipment worth \$8 billion (Rs.43,200 crore) from the US in the past five years through Washington's foreign

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