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## Pakistan-Russia Counter-Terrorism Cooperation

Pakistan and Russia are vulnerable to the global menace of terrorism, and the counter-terrorism cooperation between the two nations is very important.



### Introduction

Pakistan and Russia have a turbulent history, yet the present, as well as the future trajectory, are improving significantly. Recently, on February 25, 2025, the Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Ambassador Albert P. Khorev met Mohsin Naqvi, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Interior, here in Islamabad. Both countries have “agreed to activate a counter-terrorism dialogue, strengthening security cooperation between the two nations.”

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Ambassador Albert P. Khorev extended his invitation to Pakistani officials to “participate in anti-narcotics training programmes in Moscow, Siberia.” It is very important to note here that the Russian Envoy connected the dots between narcotics and terrorism.

### **The History of Pakistan-Russia Counter-terrorism Relations**

The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mr. Igor Morgulov stated in 2013 that “Pakistan is one of the states which suffered most from terrorism.” He also said that “In the last ten years, more than 35 thousand civilians were killed in the inhuman acts of terror and six thousand Pakistani soldiers and officers sacrificed their lives.” Russia fully understands the menace of terrorism and completely endorses Pakistan’s efforts to fight the global threat of terrorism.

Russia’s Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu visited Pakistan in November 2014, and to reciprocate this, in June 2015, Pakistan’s Army Chief General Raheel Sharif visited Moscow. Later, Pakistan and Russia signed the historic defence agreement in August 2015.

These developments led to the first-ever joint counter-terrorism exercise between the two countries took place in September 2016. The exercise was named as ‘Druzhba’ which means friendship in Russian language. The seventh edition of such exercises, i.e., Druzhba VII took place at Pabbi Tehsil of Nowshera District of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.

### **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS)**

It is important to note here that both Pakistan and Russia are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The latter has a very important permanent organ known as the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). The SCO RATS has a pivotal task of coordinating counter-terrorism endeavours among its member nations. It is to be remembered here that the SCO aims to fight the ‘Three Evils’ known as terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism.

Pakistan and Russia have suffered gravely from the acts of terrorism and terrorist organizations. Terrorist organizations like the Islamic State – Khorasan Province \*(ISKP) with its deadly ideology is a real and present danger to both nations. The ISKP\* has been actively targeting and recruiting the Russian youth using the social media and other soft means. In this regard, intelligence and information sharing are very important.

### **Analysis**

According to renowned Pakistani Journalist Rizwan Razi, Pakistan has recently handed over a couple of terrorists to the Russian officials. The terrorists belonged to Islamic State – Khorasan Province\*(ISKP) and were involved in terrorist activities in Russia, including the deadly attack on Moscow last year. Reportedly, the operation was conducted in early

February 2025 by Pakistan's security officials in the Balochistan province near the Pakistan-Iran border region. It is also visible that just after this successful anti-terrorist operation, ISKP\* and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan\* (TTP) have unleashed a series of deadly terrorist attacks across Pakistan, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan targeting security personnel as well as important people including the suicide attack on Maulana Hamid ul Haq in Newshehra, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. It is to be remembered here that Maulana Hamid ul Haq was the son of Maulana Sami ul Haq who spearheaded the religious school in Akora Khattak in Newshehra. The religious school produced the finest Taliban leadership that fought in Afghanistan for decades.

The ISKP\* attacked the Russian Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan, in September 2022, and effectively gathered support against Russia within Afghanistan by propagating Russia's connections with the then Assad Regime in Syria and Iran. The ISKP\* used the anti-Shia propaganda to attract the potential recruits.

The ISKP\* attacked the Crocus City Hall concert venue in Moscow on March 23, 2024, resulted in the killing of 133 Russian people. These kinds of attacks were not anticipated; however, ISKP's ideological outreach could attract more attackers and these threats should be taken seriously.

### **Conclusion**

It is to be realised that terrorism is a global menace, and it needs collective efforts to combat this grave threat. The recent meeting between the Russian Ambassador to Pakistan Ambassador Albert P. Khorev and Mohsin Naqvi, Pakistan's Federal Minister for Interior, and the subsequent consensus on activating the counter-terrorism dialogue is a welcome development. There is no doubt that Pakistan, as well as Russia, are vulnerable to terrorist threats and a close cooperation between the two are encouraging.

The Druzhiba joint military exercises between Pakistan and Russia is a landmark development that could significantly improve not only the bilateral relations between the two nations, but also could help them in learning from the experiences of each other.

*\* banned in Russia*

Muhammad Ali Baig, March 25, 2025

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