

WALID IQBAL¹

Prof. Dr. Alikber Alikberov, Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Dr. Vasily Kuznetsov, Deputy Director, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

Prof. Dr. Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky, Head of the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Countries, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences.

The Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, H. E. Danila V. Ganich.

The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to the Russian Federation, H. E. Mr. Shafqat Ali Khan.

My fellow Parliamentarians from Pakistan: Senator Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar (In Person) and Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed (Online).

Distinguished academicians, colleagues, fellow speakers.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to be present here at the International Scholarly Conference dedicated to the 75th Anniversary of the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations between USSR/Russia and Pakistan.

I would like to congratulate the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences for successfully hosting this wonderful event. Strong institutions such as this Institute lie at the heart of progressive development. I also want to convey my deepest gratitude to the hosts of the conference for warm welcome and excellent hospitality that continues to win our hearts.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

After extending my felicitations, I would also like to express my admiration for the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, founded in 1818. The excellence we are witnessing today has been earned over more than 200 years of academic research with great intellectual potential of the scholars working here. The Institute has truly developed Russian knowledge of the East and represents it proudly across the world, being internationally recognized as one of the most prominent academic think tanks in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Today, we are honoured to be a part of 75th Anniversary celebrations of diplomatic relations establishment between USSR/Russia and Pakistan here in Moscow in the presence of our distinguished colleagues.

On 14th August 1947, Pakistan was born in a complex and challenging situation: it had very little infrastructure, very little resources and was virtually devoid any military assets. The lion's share went to

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India. Pakistan was also born in a dangerous neighbourhood as it faced territorial disputes with India over Kashmir and with Afghanistan over the Durand Line.

Its desperate need to build itself economically and militarily, and keeping in mind the magnitude of its requirements, Pakistan could only turn to the more distant yet highly developed and prosperous United States, instead of the neighbouring yet relatively backwards and war-ravaged Soviet Union, in choosing its benefactor between the principal Cold War adversaries.

There were some ideological leanings involved as well. In September 1947, when the Pakistani Cabinet was preparing to despatch Pakistan's first delegation to the United Nations, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammed Ali Jinnah observed, 'Pakistan was a democracy and communism did not flourish in the soil of Islam. It was clear, therefore, that our interests lay more with the two great democratic countries, namely, the UK and the USA rather than with Russia'².

That said, there ended up being a mismatch of expectations between Pakistan and the United States in this matrix. There was no bond of a common adversary — the primary US goal was containing the spread of communism, while Pakistan's primary goal was to secure itself against India. That is what I believe from the 1960s onwards became the cause of a Soviet–Pakistan détente.

And we have come a long way from then until now. I am pleased to note that Pakistan and Russia have come to enjoy close, multidimensional relations based on mutual goodwill and trust. Bilateral ties are marked by cooperation in diverse areas, including the economic, energy and security realms. The two countries also consult at various multilateral fora on regional and global issues of mutual interest.

Despite limited interactions, bilateral cooperation between the two countries dates back to the Soviet times. The Soviet Union agreed to provide techno-financial assistance for the construction of a coastal based integrated steel mill at Karachi, the Karachi Steel Mills. Additionally, major thermal power facilities at Muzaffargarh, Multan-II and Guddu were built by Soviet Union. Besides Soviet Union also helped Pakistan in the establishment of the Oil and Gas Development Corporation Ltd. (OGDCL) and in the development of agriculture sector of Pakistan.

My Dear colleagues!

I strongly believe that Pakistan and Russia will be successful in building an effective, strong and mutually beneficial relationship based on common interests and respect for each other's sovereignty. It will require sustained efforts from both sides to overcome past mistrust and build a foundation for a more cooperative and prosperous future.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The upward trajectory of bilateral relations is being maintained through sustained high-level interactions and strong institutional mechanisms. Pakistan's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as a full member, has infused a new energy to our ties with the Russian Federation. Pakistan highly values the support extended by the Russian Federation during its membership process.

2017 was particularly important year from political point of view for both countries as significant meetings took place including bilateral meetings between the Prime Minister of Pakistan and the President of the Russian Federation in Astana on 9th June 2017 and Prime Ministers of both countries in Sochi on 30th November 2017. Besides, there have been eight (08) visits from Pakistan at the ministerial levels including Ministers from Foreign Affairs, Defence, Water & Power, Science and Technology, Industries and Production, Defence Production, Commerce and Textile and National Health Services in 2017.

² Minutes of Pakistan Cabinet Meeting, 9 September 1947, CF/47, National Documentation Centre, Islamabad, as cited by Dennis Kux, "A Ride on the Roller Coaster: US-Pakistan Relations 1947–1997", in *Pakistan: Founder's Aspirations and Today's Realities*. Op. cit. P. 287.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

The Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov visited Pakistan on 6th and 7th April 2021. During the visit, wide-ranging talks covering bilateral relations and regional and global issues were held.

Both sides have maintained regular contacts at the highest level. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Russia on 23rd and 24th February 2022 and held summit talks with President Putin.

Most recently, Pakistan's current Prime Minister and the Russian President met in Samarkand on 15th September 2022 in a significant move that highlights that despite the change of government in Islamabad both the sides are keen to deepen their bilateral cooperation. The two leaders discussed bilateral ties and exchanged views on regional and international issues. Besides political relations, bilateral exchanges at Parliamentary level have also expanded in recent times.

In this regard, at the invitation of the government of the Russian Federation, a delegation of Pakistan Senate and National Assembly (I was also a member of that delegation) visited Moscow to be a part of International Observers Mission for the Russian State Duma elections held from 17–19 September 2021. Under the requirements of Pakistan's Constitution, 2023 is the year of general elections to the National Assembly as well as all four Provincial Assemblies of Pakistan. Accordingly, I very much hope that in reciprocation of what we experienced in Russia in 2021, a Parliamentary delegation from Russia is invited to Pakistan as election observers in 2023.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

I also want to highlight that pursuant to an Agreement on Cooperation in the fields of Culture, Science and Education signed on 8th July 1997, Russia and Pakistan signed a Programme to Implement Cultural, Educational and Scientific Exchanges for the period 2003–2006 which was renewed for the period of 2007–2009. Currently, a draft of the Programme for renewal/extension is under consideration of the two sides, I would press upon all concerned that it be finalized and executed as early as possible. When our two foreign ministers met in Goa earlier this month, they discussed bilateral, regional and international matters of mutual interest and assured each other of working closely to further deepen cooperation between their countries in the areas of food security, energy and people-to-people contact.

And it is on this last item, people to people contact, that I want to emphasize the most in view of my own personal experience.

It is widely believed that in order to build strong bridges and to come closer to Russia, you have to understand its people and their way of life — Russia is best approached through its culture rather than the more common avenues of politics and economics.

“Russia loves to be mysterious,” the British Ambassador at the time I lived here told me. He said, “Russia is unique. Russia, as the Russians love to say, has its own ‘spetsifika’, its own rules”. Richard Nixon is known to have written to an eminent journalist about how while in college he had developed an early interest in Russia while reading Lev Tolstoy's “Anna Karenina”. His readings, Nixon said in later conversations, played a central role in the way he approached Nikita Khrushchev in their high-level talks, and in his subsequent policies towards Moscow.

I Thank You!