

Competitive Exams: Current Affairs 2011: Russia-Pakistan Ties

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- For decades Russia-Pakistan relations had been poisoned, first by Pakistan siding with the United States in the Cold War against the Soviet Union, then by its providing the stage for Mujahideen operations against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan and later by providing the training ground for Chechen rebels. Russia-Pakistan relations continued to be defined by Moscow's ties with India.
- Sochi Summit, quadripartite summit of Russia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Tajikistan hosted by President Dmitry Medvedev at the Black Sea resort, was a turning point.
- The focus of the Sochi meeting was on the situation in Afghanistan. But it also provided an opportunity for Moscow to improve its relations with Islamabad.
- Mr. Medvedev's bilateral meeting with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari on the sidelines of the summit was marked by uncharacteristic warmth.
- Two main conclusions can be drawn from the Medvedev-Zardari meeting:
- The Russian-Pakistani dialogue has, for the first time, been promoted to the level of Presidents
- Moscow has overcome its reluctance to develop full-fledged relations with Islamabad.
- What has made the Moscow turnaround is the realisation that seeing Islamabad as part of the region's problems does not help to advance the Russian goal of playing a bigger role in the region. The Kremlin finally decided that Pakistan must be part of the solution. The format of four-way cooperation with Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan should help Moscow prepare for the eventual pullback of the US-led forces from Afghanistan: Engage Pakistan, return to Afghanistan and tighten Russian hold over the former Soviet Central Asia.
- In Sochi, the new forum, which Mr. Medvedev described as a working regional format, was institutionalised as a permanent arrangement, independent of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, a defence bloc of former Soviet states focussed on Central Asia. The quartet announced that its next summit would take place in Dushanbe and that the foreign and economic ministers of the four countries would hold regular meetings as well.
- Russia agreed to join two long-planned regional infrastructure projects that would create energy and transport corridors from Central Asia to Pakistan across Afghanistan.

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- One project, CASA-1000 (Central Asia-South Asia), involves the export of electricity from power-rich Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- The other project is a motor road and a railway from Tajikistan to Pakistan across the Wakhan corridor in extreme northeast Afghanistan a buffer the British created at the end of the 19th century between the Russian and British empires. The proposed transport link resurrecting the ancient Silk Road would be a strategic gain for the countries involved. Pakistan will receive direct access to the markets of Central Asia and Russia, while Tajikistan and Russia will get access to Pakistani ports.
- The Sochi summit has dimmed India's hopes of gaining a strategic foothold in Tajikistan. India and Russia had planned to jointly use the Ayni airfield, which India helped to renovate, but Indian presence there looks doubtful now in the context of the emerging Russia-Afghanistan-Pakistan-Tajikistan axis.
- India will, of course, remain Russia's close friend and strategic partner, but it will have to learn to live with the new Russian-Pakistani bonhomie, just as Russia has taken in its stride India's entanglement with the US

Courtesy: The Hindu and Times of India

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