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Pakistan Elated: Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf is on a three day state visit to Russia presently i.e. the first week of February 2003. Pakistan is greatly elated on the Pakistani President's visit to Russia for the following reasons:

- * Pakistan's President was invited by the Russian President.
- * It was the first visit by a Pakistan President in the last thirty years.
- * Russian President's invitation to General Musharraf has led to a counter-invitation by Pakistan. Whenever this visit takes place, it will be the first time in Pakistan's history that a Russian head of state would be visiting the country.

Pakistan's elation over the Russian visit by General Musharraf has led to the official Pakistani media terming it as "historic"; "path breaking"; "history in the making" and "forward looking".

The Political Reasons for Pakistan's Elation: Without touching on the analysis of Russia's political motives for extending an invitation to General Musharraf for a state visit to Russia, let us first examine the political reasons for Pakistan's elation. These can be said to be:

- * Pakistan has been in a tight American grip post-9/11. This has led Pakistan: (1) To concede basing of United States military

forces in Pakistan, (2) Crack down on Pakistan's Army's natural allies i.e. the Islamic Jehadi organizations, and (3) Partial reversal of Pakistan's Kashmir policy in Musharraf's January 12, 2003 speech that Pakistan will attempt to curb cross-border terrorism.

* The Russian visit affords General Musharraf some political space both domestically and externally to demonstrate that Pakistan has options

* In the South Asia context Pakistan would be pleased that a Russian visit by a Pakistani President and the connotation that he is also the Chief of Army Staff will rattle its traditional enemy i.e. India.

* In relation to Kashmir, Pakistan would be greatly elated that the Pakistani General's visit took place in the backdrop of Pakistan's celebrating of the "Kashmir Week" expressing solidarity with Kashmiri people.

Russia's Likely Motives in Inviting the Pakistani General: Russia's invitation to General Musharraf to visit Russia and hosting it in February 2003 cannot be dismissed lightly as one more event on the Russian diplomatic calendar. The common reasons being attributed by media analysts is that the Russian President wants Pakistan's assistance in reining-in Islamic Jihadis in Chechnya and that Russia wants a stake in any oil and gas pipelines likely to be constructed from Central Asia to Pakistan's ports.

Strategic analysis would however have to look to finding answers to the following questions regarding Russian motives:

* Is Russia's invitation motivated by United States prodding to assist Pakistan in getting a dialogue opened with India in view of close relations in the past?

* Is there a Chinese factor in play, by Russians bailing out Pakistan from the United States grip and affording it more political space for manoeuvre ?

* Is Russia's South Asia policy under-going change in response to the trend of a more proximate India-United States strategic partnership emerging?

* Is Russia looking for wider markets for the sale of its military equipment?

Russia is no more better placed than United States to prevail on India to open a dialogue with Pakistan. Unlike Pakistan where the General takes all decisions, in India the Government in power of any political dispensation has to be sensitive to prevailing Indian public opinion. The Indian public opinion is today heavily against any dialogue with Pakistan because of Pakistan's unwarranted proxy war. The Russian President should give up any hopes for getting India to open a dialogue with Pakistan.

The China factor in Russia's motivations cannot be entirely ruled out. China at an appropriate stage can take credit for assisting Pakistan, however indirectly, from getting out of a tight spot. Russia and China could both be strategically pleased if Pakistan can be eased out from the American orbit.

Russia would not be averse to a change of direction in its South Asia policies. Russian-Indian relations today are no longer weighed down heavily by the ideological baggage and emotional factors of the Indira Gandhi days. India today is more pragmatic about her national security interests. India's dependency factor on Russia in terms of defence equipment spares is not that critical.

Russia must remember that it was Russia which first began to move away from the Russia- India strategic partnership of the 1970's. India's moving away began very late in the process. Please see this author's paper "India Russia Strategic Cooperation: Time to Move Away" (SAAG Paper No 144 dated 21.09.2001)

Pakistan in terms of a market for Russian military equipment is not all that attractive as China has created a vice-like grip on Pakistan as a military client state. Russia may also not like, or Chinese be amenable to, any dilution of the China- Pak military client relationship.

India's Reactions: India's reaction has been very mature and measured. It has not been alarmed by the many unprecedented "firsts" for Pakistan in terms of Pak- Russia relations.

Even the Indian media has been rather indifferent to the Pakistan's General's visit to Russia and has not sensationalised it. It must be said to the credit of the Russian President that he chose to ring up the Indian Prime Minister while the Pakistani General was arriving in Russia, that Russia had no intentions to dilute its traditional strategic relationship with India.

Even at the joint press conference with General Musharraf, President Putin commented that any future developments in Pak- Russia relations will not be at the cost of its traditional strategic relations with other countries (India not mentioned by name, but implicit, definitely.)

Conclusion: The Pakistani General's Russian visit may be path breaking in Pakistani perceptions, but it is not so for India. India is conscious of the historic baggage that blights radical developments in Pak-Russia relationships.

India also seems to be confident that today it is in a unique position where her power potential in the coming decade cannot be dismissed lightly. It is a reality in the making and Russia cannot lose sight of that both politically and strategically.

India, in fact, should welcome an enlarged Pakistan- Russia relationship for two reasons. If it develops positively and Russians succeed in converting Pakistan into a responsible actor in South Asia instead of being a "spoiler state", it is to India's advantage.

If Pakistan proves otherwise, Russia would then have learnt once again that it cannot positively do business with Pakistan. That too would be to India's advantage.

Russia, and in passing United States, too, need to recognize that India under political pressure will not succumb to a dialogue with Pakistan, repeating the Agra Summit blunder. India and India itself will chose when it needs to resume a dialogue with Pakistan, having laid out what Pakistan must do to prove its bonafides for resumption.

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