Pakistan and Russia: The Defense of National Interests

Russia has agreed to supply Pakistan with military hardware. On June 2, 2014 the head of Rossiiskiye Tekhnologii, (Russian Technology) Sergei Chemezov, officially confirmed the decision on the supply of arms and military equipment to Islamabad. Analysts interpreted this as a move in new geopolitics for Russia in West Asia.

Over the course of the preceding decades, military ties between the two countries have progressed rather slowly. Moscow didn’t officially introduce an embargo on the supply of military products to Pakistan, but neither did it include Pakistan in its list of final recipients. In the period from 1996 to 2010, Russia delivered to Pakistan about 70 military Mi-17 transport helicopters, which successfully serve Pakistani military needs to conduct rescue operations during flooding.

Currently, negotiations are underway to supply to Pakistan Mi-35 helicopters. The management and maintenance of advanced Russian military technology requires the special training of aircrew personnel. The draft plan of the Pakistan-Russian negotiations includes the question of the internships officers in military educational institutions of the two countries.

The Pakistanis are also interested in buying high-precision weapons, artillery, air defense systems, long-range missiles, guided missiles, etc. The Russian developer of small arms, Promtechnologiya, has agreed to carry out testing of their sniper rifle, ORSIS T-5000, in Pakistan, which has proven itself in various natural and climatic conditions.

The Russian military breakthrough in Pakistan is seen by many within the framework of Moscow’s new policy of reorientation towards the East, highlighted by the recently signed agreement with the Chinese on the supply of natural gas. The main thing for Russia, as well as for the Pakistanis, is the potential of the military transaction in the defense of their national borders. This was illustrated in the first reaction to the news in Islamabad. On the Pakistani Ministry of Defense website: “...the ice was broken; whether the proposed Mi 28; when India makes a request for Apaches, Pakistan asks for Mi 25...” etc.

What were the motivating factors that prompted Moscow to take this important political decision in June 2014 to officially confirm its intentions to sell weapons and military equipment to Pakistan? There are several subjective and objective reasons, but one of them was the forging of closer ties between Russia and Pakistan.

Shifts in foreign policy have occurred in Islamabad. “Since June 2013, we have strengthened our strategic partnership with China, reoriented our relations with the U.S., updated our contacts with the E.U., reached out again to Russia, strengthened ties with ASEAN, Africa and Latin America,” said Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, underlying the priorities of the national security policy.

The military anti-terror campaign led by the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, launched in late September 2001 with the landing of American and British commandos in Kandahar, at the costs of billions of dollars and hundreds of lives, disappeared in the Afghan meat grinder and by the middle of 2014 had turned to be a complete failure.
One of the outcomes of this long drawn out campaign was the further radicalization of Islamic groups in the region. In Afghanistan are several ethnic military groups which include, The Afghani Taliban, The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, The East Islamic Movement of Turkestan, etc. The Pashtun lands (in the south of Afghanistan and north-east regions of Pakistan) these groups include not only the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, but over the years this area comprises a large number of foreign fighters. Federal Army Staff Headquarters has repeatedly said the presence of foreign insurgents and include among them a significant number of Uzbeks, Uighurs, Arabs, etc.

At the end of May 2014, American President, Barack Obama, announced a review of the scheduled withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan, the end date stated in December 2016. According to the GRU Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Igor Sergun, “the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan will continue until 2024…” At the same time, according to his words, “it will not have a significant impact on the reduction of the military capabilities of the armed opposition… Radical Islamist groups operating in the country will continue to be the main terrorist threat in Central Asia.”

U.S. President Barack Obama confirmed on May 27, 2014, that the American military contingent of 32,000 troops in Afghanistan will be reduced to approximately 9800 soldiers towards the beginning of 2015. That number will be reduced by half by the end of 2015, before eventually complying with the number to ensure security at the U.S. embassy in Kabul towards the end of 2016. In other words, security at the U.S. diplomatic mission will be provided by the U.S. military.

The decision on the reduction of the military presence of international coalition forces in Afghanistan was seen by the Afghan Taliban as a long-awaited victory over the occupiers. One of the developing scenarios in the country means the capturing of power by the Taliban.

The continued presence of U.S. and NATO coalition forces in Afghanistan, not only prolongs the current armed conflict in the country, but has pushed the Taliban in Afghanistan to a new jihad. It pulls behind a further strengthening of Islamist groups in northern Afghanistan in close proximity to the borders of other Central Asian republics. In south Afghanistan and in Pakistan's Pashtun tribal zone, it is expected to intensify the activity of anti-federal armed elements.

As a result of the half-hearted solutions of the White House, including the revised schedule for withdrawal as requested the General Staff of Pakistan, was the diversification of the entire military scenario in the region; and which requires an adequate response on behalf of the key players.

The Defense Committee of the Senate (upper house of parliament) of Pakistan is reviewing the parameters of security policy. In the field of foreign security, i.e. at the border, in particular at the Pakistani-Afghan border, there is a major security challenge; with regards to internal domestic security, the challenge is terrorism and religious extremism in several provinces of the country. The new “army doctrine,” announced in 2011, declared that the war was carried out by the Pakistani Taliban and other insurgent groups and is the biggest threat to national security.

One of the answers to the challenges of Pakistani national security is a comprehensive modernization of military forces. In recent years, the federal army headquarters in Rawalpindi developed and consistently implemented a rearmament program.

“The army should be equipped with the latest military weaponry and technology to protect national borders,” Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has repeatedly said. Despite the fact that the main suppliers of arms and military equipment are China, USA and Turkey, Pakistan in recent years avoids depending on one or two majority foreign suppliers. The impact of cooperation with the United States (term of the contract for the supply of fighters, signed in December 2007 by General Pervez Musharraf with the President of the United States has unilaterally and repeatedly revised by the Americans, depending on the relationship with the civilian and military leaders in Islamabad).

In 2013/14 there was an intensification of military and political contacts with countries of the Persian Gulf. Islamabad and Riyadh agreed on the joint production of certain military equipment, such as the release of training aircraft JF-17, thunder and Mushshaq trainingcraft. In the spring of 2014 Pakistan signed a contract with Jordan and in May and has already delivered at the airbase Mushaf Mir in Sargodha. The Mushaf Mir Airbase in Sargodha has already placed on active duty five out of thirteen F-16 fighters; parallel to that, the artillery corps is being modernized.

Pakistan is more than interested in the supply of Russian helicopters. The lack of a developed railway network (the mountain areas of the north-east is deficient and the highway system is not in good condition) making it difficult not
only for the transfer of federal forces (military operation in the spring of 2009 in South Waziristan), but to conduct military operations against militants against training camps and shelters. Everyone understands that the Pakistani army is professionally trained, disciplined and no one else in the region are able to withstand a variety of militant groups.

Many Western observers tie the declaration of the presence of Russian weapons in Pakistan with the events in Crimea and Kiev’s punitive operation in eastern Ukraine, as Moscow’s response to the West over a “spat with Ukraine.” Islamabad’s position on the Ukrainian crisis is diplomatically restrained. “We support efforts to promote dialogue and peaceful resolution of all issues,” said Pakistani Foreign Ministry.

The process of the diversification of the military in West Asia began in 2011, when U.S. President Barack Obama announced the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Each player in the new geopolitical scheme calculated their time for tactics and moves. Russia is in a new environment, not only does it crowd the American arms market in Pakistan, but it also negates the dream of American supremacy.

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