

The Attempt to Establish Global Friendly Relations: The Soviet Union — Changing Relations and Ayub Khan's Visit to Moscow

Early Relations (1947–1958)

In the early years after independence, Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union remained distant. Pakistan aligned itself with the Western bloc, especially the United States, mainly to meet its economic and security needs. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, viewed Pakistan's pro-Western policies with suspicion during the Cold War. Pakistan's membership in defence alliances such as SEATO and CENTO further increased Moscow's distrust. Moreover, Pakistan's Islamic ideology clashed with Soviet communism, creating an ideological divide. During this period, diplomatic and trade relations were very limited, while the Soviet Union maintained close ties with India. Thus, the relationship between Pakistan and the USSR in this phase was marked by mistrust and political distance.

Shift Under Ayub Khan (1958–1965)

When Field Marshal Ayub Khan came to power in 1958, he realised that Pakistan's overreliance on the United States limited its foreign policy options. Therefore, he sought to build a more balanced and independent foreign policy. Ayub Khan began to improve relations with the Soviet Union to reduce tensions and open new avenues of cooperation. The USSR welcomed this change and responded positively to Pakistan's new diplomatic tone. Cultural and technical exchanges were encouraged, and both sides started to remove earlier misunderstandings. This period marked the beginning of a new era in Pakistan–Soviet relations based on mutual respect and pragmatic diplomacy.

Ayub Khan's Visit to Moscow (1965)

A major breakthrough came when President Ayub Khan visited Moscow in 1965. This visit was a turning point in Pakistan–Soviet relations as it showed Pakistan's willingness to expand its ties beyond the Western bloc. Ayub Khan was warmly welcomed by Soviet leaders, and discussions covered trade, industry, and regional peace. The Soviet Union agreed to provide Pakistan with technical assistance and machinery for industrial projects. Soviet experts helped in the development of heavy industries and engineering works. This visit helped reduce Cold War hostility and improved Pakistan's image as a nation willing to maintain friendly ties with both superpowers. It laid the foundation for a more cooperative relationship between the two countries.

Soviet Role in the Tashkent Agreement (1966)

After the 1965 war between Pakistan and India, the Soviet Union played an important role in restoring peace. Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin invited both Ayub Khan and Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to Tashkent for peace talks. The resulting Tashkent Agreement was signed in January 1966, marking a significant diplomatic success for the Soviet Union. The

USSR's mediation helped end hostilities and encouraged both sides to normalise relations. For Pakistan, this demonstrated that the Soviet Union could act as a neutral mediator in South Asian affairs. It also enhanced Pakistan's international reputation and temporarily improved Moscow–Islamabad relations.

Relations in the 1970s

The 1970s brought new challenges for Pakistan–Soviet relations. Pakistan's growing friendship with China and continued alignment with the United States once again created mistrust with Moscow. The Soviet Union grew closer to India, especially during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, when the USSR supported India diplomatically and militarily. Pakistan viewed this as clear evidence of Soviet bias. Economic and technical cooperation between the two countries slowed down, and political communication weakened. As a result, the relationship entered another cold phase. The trust built during the Ayub Khan period gradually faded as both nations aligned with opposing powers during the Cold War.

Long-Term Impact and Assessment

The evolution of Pakistan's relations with the Soviet Union shows Pakistan's efforts to maintain a balanced foreign policy despite global rivalries. Ayub Khan's visit to Moscow was a milestone that briefly strengthened ties and improved Pakistan's image. However, long-term friendship remained difficult because Pakistan continued to rely on the Western bloc, while the Soviet Union maintained a strong partnership with India. Later, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 further strained relations. Despite these ups and downs, Pakistan's approach toward the Soviet Union reflected its broader desire to build friendly relations with all major powers. It was a clear example of Pakistan's attempt to establish global goodwill while safeguarding its national interests.