

PAKISTAN TURKIYE TIES: THE ROAD AHEAD

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Two countries, bound by brotherly ties best define Pakistan Turkiye relations. The year 2022 marks the 75th anniversary of Turkiye - Pakistan relations. Embedded in deep historical, social, cultural and religious bonds, the two countries describe an ideal relationship. Turkiye and Pakistan are two important countries within the Muslim world, who strive for common causes like upholding the rights of Muslims in Palestine and Kashmir, and countering Islamophobia, as well as being the largest refugee hosting countries. Historically, Turkiye and Pakistan have also been a part of the Baghdad Pact of 1955, which called for cooperation between member states regarding security and defence. Pakistan and Turkiye have been important founding members of the OIC, the ECO and D-8, which naturally makes them the natural leaders of the Muslim world.

Extending diplomatic support to each other has also been a defining feature of this relationship, as is evident from the support both have extended to each other on issues such as Kashmir and Northern Cyprus. Interests converge in several areas as the geo strategic location of both the countries is similar. They stand at the crossroads of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, thus having great potential for regional connectivity and other similar integration initiatives in a world largely moving towards geo-economics.

Pakistan and Turkiye share several common perceptions on some of the most pertinent ongoing regional and international issues, as well as cooperate closely in the multilateral fora including the UN, OIC, ECO and D-8. The shift from geo-politics to geo-economics has led to the evolution and reorientation of the foreign policies of both countries, and in this aspect, Turkiye and Pakistan have also been exploring avenues towards enhancing their economic potential in order to optimize their economic clout. Common challenges such as terrorism as well as the influx of refugees from neighbouring countries are faced by both states. Moreover both countries share similar perceptions on international issues such as Afghanistan and have been involved in the trilateral framework meetings in this regard.

Economic ties between both the countries have existed for decades, however, they have not reached their full potential and there is room for further improvement. Several initiatives by both governments in this regard have shown fruition. Investments by Turkish companies in Pakistan have increased by over USD \$1 billion in the year 2021. The setting up of a joint task force has also been decided, in order to cover issues related to bilateral trade, under the Turkish Ministry of Trade and Pakistan's Ministry of Trade respectively. During President Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan in February 2021, the two countries signed a Strategic Economic Framework agreement that covers a broad spectrum of cooperation in science and technology, defense, tourism, education, and health and other related fields. Likewise, the successful completion of ongoing projects such as the Trans-Afghan Railway project, CASA-1000, and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline could notably augment Pakistan's connectivity with Western Asia and Europe; and thus benefit Turkiye and act as a harbinger of connectivity across the continents. Similarly, the ITI (Islamabad Tehran Istanbul) freight train, envisaged in Vision 2025 of the ECO, which suggests an increased degree of trade amongst intra-regional countries, is also a project with great potential. The ITI Train is an initiative towards regional economic integration, which provides countries with alternative routes and helps create economic interdependence. The ITI Train is an example of a concrete project and an opening to a much wider opportunity as it opens many new doors for enhancement of trade ties.

Defence ties between both countries remain robust and are on a path to further enhancement. Recent examples include the July 2018 collaboration between Pakistan Navy and Türkiye's state-run defence firm ASFAT's contract for the acquisition of four MILGEM-class ships by Pakistan from ASFAT. This was the largest contract ever granted to the Turkish defense industry, exceeding \$3 billion, including the purchase of four MILGEM Ada-class corvettes, two of which will be built in Pakistan, and 30 T-129 Atak helicopters. Defence ties continue to grow at a steady pace and are a testament to the strong relations. Similarly, the Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) signed a contract

with Pakistan's National Engineering and Science Commission (NESCOM) to jointly produce Anka military drones.

Turkiye and Pakistan enjoy strong cultural ties, which is evident by the introduction of Turkish TV shows in Pakistan and their ever increasing popularity. An example of Türkiye's soft power extending to Pakistan is also apparent by the popularity of Turkish television drama *Dirilis Ertugrul*.

The recent visit by the Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to Turkiye from May 31 -June 2, 2022, signifies deepening bonds between the two countries, as was highlighted by President Erdogan who stated during a joint presser that "We are ready to further strengthen Türkiye-Pakistan relations "with a strategic perspective in line with the history, friendship, and potential of the two countries."

It was also decided that the bilateral trade worth 1 billion US dollars would be enhanced to 5 billion dollars. During this visit, both countries signed seven agreements in various fields including trade, housing, defence, energy, tourism, debt management and transportation. Regarding peace and stability in the region, both countries stressed on the need for permanent stability in Afghanistan. Prime Minister Sharif also proposed to include Turkiye in the multibillion dollar CPEC project, thus increasing the scope of regional connectivity. A global free trade regime as well as an open trade economy could be achieved, thus leading to greater regional connectivity if Turkiye becomes a part of CPEC. Prime Minister Sharif called Turkiye and Pakistan 'natural allies' and stated that the enemies of Turkiye are the enemies of Pakistan.

Turkiye-Pakistan relations remain on an upward trajectory and are likely to grow further as the convergence on numerous issues remains the strongest factor in this relationship. Despite the fact that the international order is undergoing major changes, the relationship continues to flourish even though rapidly changing international and regional alliances, growing conflicts and other similar factors are at play. Pakistan and Turkiye relations will continue to remain steadfast and prosper as has been seen in the past; if they continue with this collaboration they can carve out a niche for themselves to become important players not only in the Muslim world but in their respective regions.