

## PRESIDENT ERDOGAN'S STATE VISIT TO PAKISTAN: STRENGTHENING TIES FURTHER

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February 20, 2025

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a state visit to Pakistan on the invitation of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on February 12-13, 2025. The Turkish President was accompanied by a high-powered delegation comprising ministers and senior officials as well as corporate leaders. Bound by historical brotherly ties, Pakistan and Turkiye have a robust relationship grounded in mutual respect, shared cultural heritage, and a deep commitment to supporting each other on regional and international platforms. Both nations have consistently stood by each other in times of need, fostering strong diplomatic, economic, and defence cooperation. The partnership is further strengthened by a common vision for peace, stability, and prosperity in their respective regions and beyond. Moreover, Pakistan and Turkiye have been at the forefront regarding tackling the challenge of Islamophobia on the global stage.

This latest visit came at an important juncture as the two countries are seeking to deepen their strategic relationship, address shared challenges, and explore opportunities for enhanced collaboration in trade, defence, technology, and cultural exchanges. It also took place at a period of global turmoil, making it crucial for Pakistan and Turkiye to reaffirm their mutual solidarity and work together to promote regional stability, economic growth, and prosperity. The visit underscores the enduring bonds between the two countries and their commitment to strengthening ties for the benefit of their peoples and the broader international community.

During the visit, President Erdogan jointly chaired the 7th round of the Pakistan-Turkiye High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC) along with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, which has given a blue print for comprehensively upscaling bilateral cooperation across a wide range.<sup>1</sup> The HLSCC serves as the highest decision-making forum between the two countries. The previous HLSCC sessions had contributed to the deepening of bilateral relationship in myriad dimensions. During their meeting, as the two leaders pledged to enhance cooperation further. Twenty-four documents and Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) were signed.<sup>2</sup> The discussions revolved around increasing cooperation in various fields, including defence production and air force electronic warfare. The several MoUs signed included one between Pakistan's Ministry of Defense Production and Turkiye's Secretariat of Defense Industries. Another was between Turkiye's state-owned Aerospace Industries (TAI) and Pakistan's Naval Research and Development Institute. Moreover, a new Joint Standing Committee on Security, Defence, and Intelligence was established under the high-level Strategic Council, further institutionalizing the partnership.

Over the past decade, cooperation in the field of defence cooperation has significantly expanded. This includes the joint production of four MILGEM corvette warships for Pakistan, assistance in modernizing Pakistan's fighter jet fleet, and the exchange and transfer of defence technologies. These initiatives reflect the steadily deepening strategic cooperation between the two nations.

In the economic sphere, both countries agreed to revise the existing trade agreement and reaffirmed the commitment to increasing annual bilateral trade volume to the agreed target of 5 billion, up from approximately 1.4 billion.<sup>3</sup> A Preferential Trade Agreement signed in May 2023 reduced Pakistani tariffs on 130 product categories and Turkish tariffs on 261 product lines, facilitating greater trade integration. It was also decided to upgrade the Trade in Goods Agreement (TGA) between the two countries, which came into force on 1 May 2023, including information sharing of Tariff Rate Quotas; and also by adding new products to concession lists and draft an agreement on trade in services, digital trade and investment facilitation, preferably within a year. Furthermore, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced plans for Turkish firms to establish a special economic zone in Pakistan for industrial production. Energy cooperation is another area which saw progress, with both sides agreeing on a protocol to amend the existing hydrocarbons agreement and signing an MoU to support Pakistan's energy transition. This aligns well with Pakistan's goal of

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1 Pakistan rolls out red carpet for Turkiye's Erdogan, Al Jazeera, February 13, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/13/pakistan-rolls-out-red-carpet-for-turkiyes-erdogan>

2 Sarah Zaman, Pakistan, Turkey to boost strategic ties, Voice of America, February 13, 2025, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-turkey-to-boost-strategic-ties/7973580.html>

3 Turkiye's bilateral trade with Pakistan reached historical high in 2024, says President Erdogan, Anadolu News Agency, February 13, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/turkiyes-bilateral-trade-with-pakistan-reached-historical-high-in-2024-says-president-erdogan/3481175>

reducing dependence on costly imported fuels and shifting toward affordable and sustainable green energy. Additionally, an MoU on mining cooperation was signed, reflecting Islamabad's efforts to attract foreign investment to this sector. Under the HLSCC, six joint standing committees have been established to address a wide range of sectors, including banking, finance, trade, investment, culture, tourism, energy, agriculture, transportation, defense, communication, information technology, education, health and science.<sup>4</sup>

While addressing a business forum, President Erdogan also criticized Israel over its genocidal campaign and strongly condemned the proposal of displacing the Palestinian population from their homeland.<sup>5</sup> Speaking at a joint press conference, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif lauded the Turkish President for being "very important and highly respected leader of the Islamic world."<sup>6</sup> He appreciated President Erdogan for raising his voice for the people of Kashmir and Palestine. Both countries also reiterated the need for strengthening bilateral frameworks in various fields. These included fight against terrorism, the need for combatting Islamophobia, and among several others, cooperation at multilateral forums as well. Pakistan and Türkiye reaffirmed their strong commitment to combating Islamophobia, welcoming the UN designation of March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia and calling for the early appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Islamophobia. Pakistan also reiterated its support for Türkiye regarding Northern Cyprus.

The Turkish President's visit came at a crucial time, when the Middle East region is in a deep flux. The situation in Gaza as well as the transition in Syria after the fall of the Al-Assad regime are huge changes affecting the regional landscape. Further fortifying ties between Pakistan and Türkiye is beneficial for both, economically as well as in the geo-political arena. The visit is a reflection of the strong commitment of leadership on both sides to preserve and further nourish the enduring relationship between the two fraternal nations.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> MUNIR AHMED and SUZAN FRASER, Turkey's Erdogan lashes out at Israel on a visit to Pakistan and laments the tragedy of Gaza, AP, February 14, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/pakistan-turkey-president-talks-shehbaz-sharif-756a2a5f6039b3b462da4bebdba90875c>

<sup>6</sup> Islamuddin Sajid, Pakistan extends 'unwavering' support to Türkiye on Cyprus issue, Anadolu Agency, February 13, 2025, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-extends-unwavering-support-to-turkiye-on-cyprus-issue/3480904>