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PAKISTAN–AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS: STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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The Pakistan-Azerbaijan relations are rooted deep in history, reinforced by strong religious and cultural affinity, and powered by the notion of brotherhood beyond borders. The bilateral relationship has been further fortified in recent times, as evident from Azerbaijan's unequivocal support to Pakistan during the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. Pakistan also expressed similar support after the announcement of the historic Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace Agreement facilitated by President Trump. While congratulating Azerbaijan, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif stated, "we stand with them at this proud moment of their history."[1] The Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace deal is significant as it further optimizes Pakistan-Azerbaijan evolving relationship.

The evolving and all-encompassing nature of Pakistan-Azerbaijan relations represents a "true demonstration of brotherhood".[2] Having established formal diplomatic relations in 1991, Pakistan and Azerbaijan have steadily strengthened cooperation in political, diplomatic, military, economic and cultural arenas. The two countries extend full support to each others' issues of core interests, including respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pakistan has consistently supported Azerbaijan on Nagorno-Karabakh, while Azerbaijan supports Pakistan on the Jammu and Kashmir

1 "Armenia-Azerbaijan Truce: Pakistan Again Hails Trump's Efforts for Peace," *Dawn*, August 9, 2025, https://www.dawn.com/news/1929735.

2 Imran Khan, "Pakistan Relations with Azerbaijan in 21st Century," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 5, no. I (March 15, 2021): 675, https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2021(5-i)50.

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dispute. A high-level visit by President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, to Pakistan, from 11-12 July 2024, further strengthened bilateral strategic partnership by expanding cooperation in key sectors. The visit culminated in the signing of 15 Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) particularly relating trade and investment.[3] More recently, Azerbaijan's diplomatic support to Pakistan in times of heightened tensions with India has been an exemplary show of brotherhood.[4]

Through their active participation in important regional and multilateral platforms such as the UN, OIC, ECO, CICA, SCO and the Pakistan–Turkey–Azerbaijan Trilateral Partnership, both countries seek to further broaden and deepen their mutual collaboration. For instance, both countries aim to strengthen regional economic integration through the platform of ECO. In an effort to consolidate bilateral trade relations, both countries finalized an investment agreement worth $2 billion on the sidelines of the17th Summit of the ECO, held on July 3–4, 2025, in Khankendi, Azerbaijan.[5] Through CICA and SCO, the two countries seek to make positive contributions to broader regional security and stability in Asia. Furthermore, the Pakistan-Turkey-Azerbaijan Trilateral Partnership is evolving as an important platform for strengthening political cooperation among the three fraternal countries. The Lachin Summit of the Pakistan-Turkey-Azerbaijan Trilateral Partnership, held in May 28, 2025, in Azerbaijan, has been significant in reaffirming their mutual support on the persisting regional disputes of Kashmir, Karabakh, and northern Cyprus.[6]

Pakistan and Azerbaijan have consistently expanded defence cooperation. Being a consistent supporter of Azerbaijan's policy of arms diversification, Pakistan has significantly increased collaboration with Azerbaijan. High-level military exchanges including the meeting between Pakistan's Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir and Azerbaijan's Minister of Defence, Colonel General Hasanov Zakir Asgar Oglu in Lachin, illustrates growing bilateral military exchanges. Another high-level exchange between Azerbaijan's Deputy Minister and Director General of Defence and Chief of the Air Staff, Pakistan Air Force (PAF) in Islamabad was significant in further consolidating

3 "Visit of the President of Azerbaijan to Pakistan," *Press Release*, July 12, 2024, https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/visit-of-the-president-of-azerbaijan-to-pakistan.

4 "Azerbaijan Backs Pakistan Amid Tensions with India," *The Express Tribune*, May 8, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2544718/azerbaijan-expresses-full-support-for-pakistan.

5 "Pakistan Azerbaijan Sign 2b Deal at ECO Summit," *The Express Tribune*, July 5, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2554209/pakistan-azerbaijan-sign-2b-deal-at-eco-summit.

6 "Pakistan Turkiye and Azerbaijan Reaffirm Unity at Trilateral Summit," *The Express Tribune*, May 28, 2025, https://tribune.com.pk/story/2548253/pakistan-turkiye-and-azerbaijan-reaffirm-unity-at-trilateral-summit.

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Azerbaijani Air Forces-PAF collaboration in Multi-Domain Operations (MDO), operational training, military modernisation, and technical expertise.[7]

Earlier, in September 2024, the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) had concluded the largest export deal worth $1.6bn with Azerbaijan Air Force. The deal included delivery of JF-17C Block-III fighter jets to Azerbaijan along with training and ammunitions.[8] Moreover, Pakistan and Azerbaijan are deepening collaboration through participation in joint military exercises. Azerbaijan took part in the 9th Multinational Maritime Exercise Aman-25 hosted by Pakistan, under the banner "Together for Peace", which brought together 60 countries. Such joint military exercises are crucial for enhancing joint military preparedness and counter-terrorism capabilities for maintaining regional peace and security.

Both countries have significantly scaled up economic cooperation. Pakistan-Azerbaijan bilateral trade volume stood at $5.96 million in 2024, with Pakistan's exports (grains, textiles, pharmaceuticals and others) to Azerbaijan amounted to $5.93 million whereas imports (LNG and petrochemicals) equaled $0.03 million. Important agreements aimed at facilitating bilateral trade include Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) and Transit Trade Agreement (TTA).[9]These trade agreements not only facilitate diversification of competitive exports and but also improve market access for Pakistan and Azerbaijan thereby enhancing overall bilateral trade.

Similarly, the 8th Session of the Pakistan-Azerbaijan Joint Commission successfully expanded the scope of bilateral cooperation particularly in the areas of trade and economy, defense industry production, agriculture and food security. Another notable development is the recent Azerbaijan-Pakistan investment partnership agreement worth $2 billion under which Azerbaijan committed to invest in Pakistan's economic sector.

Pakistan and Azerbaijan have considerably expanded cooperation in the energy sector. Azerbaijan's rich oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) reserves serve as vital alternatives for diversifying Pakistan's energy supplies thus consolidating its energy security. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, Azerbaijan has proven oil reserves of 7 billion barrels and 60 trillion cubic feet (Tcf) of natural gas.[10]

7 "Pakistan, Azerbaijan Strengthen Defence Ties in Air Force Talks," *The Daily CPEC*, August 20, 2025, https://thedailycpec.com/pakistan-azerbaijan-strengthen-defence-ties-in-air-force-talks/.

8 "Pakistan Signs Largest Ever Fighter Jet Sale Deal with Azerbaijan," *Azernews.Az*, February 22, 2024, https://www.azernews.az/nation/222206.html.

9 "Trade Agreements - Ministry of Commerce | Government of Pakistan," Ministry of Commerce | Government of Pakistan, July 22, 2024, https://www.commerce.gov.pk/about-us/trade-agreements/.

10 "Caspian Energy - Azerbaijan's Proven Oil Reserves Estimated at 7 Billion Barrels," February 11, 2025, https://www.caspianenergy.media/index.php/en/caspian-energy-media-en/energy-en/item/7981-azerbaijan-s-proven-oil-reserves-estimated-at-7-billion-barrels.

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LNG deals between state-owned Pakistan LNG, Pakistan State Oil (PSO) and State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR), have facilitated meeting of Pakistan's LNG requirements. Securing competitive long-term LNG and crude oil contracts from SOCAR can help Pakistan evade supply volatility. A significant step undertaken towards this goal has been the establishment of a joint oil trading company in Singapore with an objective of expanding Pakistan's energy supply chain meanwhile also benefiting from emerging market opportunities.[11]

At the same time, Azerbaijan's investments are crucial in modernizing Pakistan's oil and gas infrastructure, particularly Pakistan's LNG terminals, gas distribution networks, and oil storage facilities. Azerbaijan has already expressed interest in participating in the Machike–Thallian–Tarrujabba White Oil Pipeline (MTT-WOP), which forms the backbone of Pakistan's oil pipeline from Karachi to Peshawar. Joint partnerships in infrastructure upgradation and CPEC energy projects can further boost energy cooperation, hence benefiting both countries.

For Pakistan, Azerbaijan's key strategic location as an emerging transit hub offers a gateway to accessing European and Russian markets. By building land connectivity projects such as the Trans-Afghan Railway and the Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (UAP) Railway, Pakistan can effectively integrate itself into the Middle Corridor (Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) and gain access to Eurasian markets. The Azerbaijan-Armenia peace deal is expected to fast-track the completion of the Zangezur Corridor, a vital transport artery expected to revitalize Pakistan's exports to Eastern Europe, further amplifying the country's trade potential. While for Azerbaijan, gaining access to the vibrant South Asian market by integrating into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can boost country's trade basket. Azerbaijan can leverage from Pakistan railway networks to gain access to Gwadar port for its exports to Chinese, African and Asian markets.[12] In this regard, the formation of joint working groups for expanding trade and infrastructure investments is a significant development.

To conclude, Pakistan and Azerbaijan bilateral relationship continues to evolve from pre-dominantly conflict-based diplomatic support to all-encompassing strategic partnership especially in the post-Azerbaijan-Armenia Peace deal. Moreover, Pakistan's recognition of Armenia has also paved way for normalization of relations between Islamabad and Yerevan. Meanwhile, Pakistan and Azerbaijan have expressed interest in further deepening bilateral cooperation especially in strengthening defense-industrial cooperation, energy partnerships, and sustainable development. However,

11 Shahnawaz Akhter, "Pakistan, Azerbaijan Sign MOU for Joint Oil Trading Company," *Pkrevenue.Com*, February 24, 2025, https://pkrevenue.com/pakistan-azerbaijan-sign-mou-for-joint-oil-trading-company/.

12 App, "CPEC Crucial for Azerbaijan's Exports," *The Express Tribune*, July 3, 2018, https://tribune.com.pk/story/1749004/cpec-crucial-azerbaijans-exports.

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expanding cooperation in trade and investment, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and digital economy necessitate further collaboration. Meanwhile, investments in cultural diplomacy and strengthening people-to-people ties remain paramount in forging a closer and mutually beneficial bond between the two nations, taking Pakistan-Azerbaijan relations to further heights.

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