



## PAK-TURK RELATIONS: THROUGH THE SPECTRUM OF REGIONAL INTEGRATION

*Dr. Kiran Nayyar*  
*PhD from Department of Political Science*  
*University of Karachi*  
*Karachi - Pakistan*  
[kirannayyar2020@gmail.com](mailto:kirannayyar2020@gmail.com)

*Dr. Muhammad Salim*  
*Assistant Professor*  
*Department of Political Science*  
*University of Turbat*  
*Turbat - Pakistan*  
[dr.muhammadsalim@uot.edu.pk](mailto:dr.muhammadsalim@uot.edu.pk)

*Syeda Afshan Aziz*  
*Assistant Professor*  
*Department of Pakistan Studies*  
*Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology*  
*Karachi - Pakistan*  
[syedaafshan120@gmail.com](mailto:syedaafshan120@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*This study will evaluate the current state of ties between Turkey and Pakistan, their recent development, and their progressive institutionalisation process. The high degree of bilateral cooperation that has been established in terms of political, military, and economic issues will be discussed within this context. Global and regional developments, especially those with economic and political repercussions for Central Asia and the Middle East, will be discussed, as will the joint strategy that Pakistan and Turkey have been seeking to create over the last few decades. In that regard, activities that are complementary and coordinated across multilateral forums and international organisations with the goal of enhancing bilateral cooperation will be looked at. In recent years, the tasks of keeping Afghanistan stable, building up the ability to respond to interconnected events in the Middle East and South Asia, and using several potential projects in a multilateral way, as envisioned in China's "One Belt, One Road" (OBOR) Initiative, have become very important for the two countries to work on together. These reasons are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Turkey, relations, integration, multilateral, cooperation



## **Introduction**

Religious, cultural, and historical ties have been carried down from generation to generation, and they have played a significant role in the establishment and rapid growth of bilateral relations since Pakistan's independence in 1947. However, during the 1950s, security measures served as a major catalyst in the expansion of bilateral ties. Since both Pakistan and Turkey felt threatened by the Soviet Union's Communist bloc, they allied with the United States Western bloc (US). To counteract the spread of communism throughout the Middle East and South Asia, Turkey and Pakistan worked together. Even if it didn't last, the Baghdad Pact laid the groundwork for a lasting shared policy.

At the outset of the 1960s, Pakistan and Turkey largely followed security policies developed by the Western Bloc. However, by the middle of the decade, they had begun to manage bilateral connections within the framework of the Regional Cooperation for Development with a larger degree of autonomy (RCD). The Johnson Letter of 1964 strained relations between Turkey and the United States, and in the same year, Pakistan believed the United States had abandoned them during its battle with India in 1965. Therefore, Turkey strengthened ties with the Warsaw Pact and developing countries, whereas Pakistan deepened ties with China. (Bishku, 1992).

From the perspectives of Turkey and Pakistan, two major international crises unfolded in the 1970s. First, following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, East Pakistan declared independence under the name Bangladesh. Throughout the conflict, Turkey stood behind Pakistan politically and even militarily. It wasn't until February 1974 that Pakistan officially recognised Bangladesh as an independent nation (Choudhury, 2016). In 1974, Turkey sent its soldiers to the island of Cyprus to participate in a conflict there. Pakistan has been the only country to fully back Turkey's stance, in addition to being a major supplier of military and logistical support. Thus, in the 1970s, Turkey and Pakistan aggressively supported each other out of concern for each other's national security. Similar to the circumstances in the 1950s, Turkey-Pakistani relations blossomed in the 1980s. During that decade, security measures within the framework of the Western alliance rose to the forefront. This policy direction emerged as a result of two major events. With the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the potential of Warsaw Pact expansion to the Indian Ocean shores arose. Furthermore, the regional interests of the West were jeopardised when Iran lost ties with its old ally, the United States, in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. In this setting, the importance of Turkey-Pakistan cooperation in slowing Soviet advance to the south and restraining the Khomeini regime's actions in Iran has increased dramatically. In the first part of the 1980s, following the coups conducted by Pakistani Chief of Staff Zia-ul-Haq in 1977 and Turkish Chief of Staff Kenan Evren in 1980, connections between Turkey and Pakistan became the new focus of global security. Both the military governments extended their full support to the United States, and the alliance between Turkey and Pakistan, supported by the United States, continued until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan ended (Subtain, Hussain, Farooq, Kahn, 2016).

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In the 1990s, there was a thawing of tensions between the two countries. Despite increased political engagement, a cooling of ties occurred since solid footing could not be built for economic collaboration. Also, during the 1990s, relationships with the people of neighbouring and allied states that had only just earned independence from the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the Eurasia and Balkans, respectively, were Ankara's top priority in developing its foreign policy. However, once the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan, stabilising efforts there became Pakistan's top priority. Afghanistan became a source of contention between Pakistan and Turkey in the second part of the 1990s when the former supported the Taliban administration in Kabul and the latter supported the Northern Alliance (Hussain, 2008).

During the first decade of the 21st century, the dominant storyline in bilateral ties between Turkey and Pakistan was the difficulty of sustaining peace in Afghanistan following the invasion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Pakistan's fragile ethnic and religious fabric was jolted to its core by the 2001 NATO invasion of Afghanistan. During this time, Turkey not only took over formal efforts to mediate between Afghanistan and Pakistan but also made efforts to help the domestic stability of Pakistan.

Historical analysis of bilateral ties shows that religious and cultural similarities are the primary motivating factor in Turkey's close ties to Pakistan. When it comes to issues of international and domestic security, Ankara and Islamabad have come to terms with the fact that their level of cooperation would vary depending on the specific circumstances they find themselves in at any given time. Despite everyone's best efforts, it's clear that economic interests aren't being prioritised sufficiently in bilateral ties. This condition also makes it harder to establish a long-lasting, stable political alliance.

The article's focus is on Turkey and Pakistan, two countries sometimes referred to as "middle powers," and it seeks to demonstrate their influence in both regional and international affairs. Since the conclusion of the Cold War, research into the concept of a "middle power" has picked up steam. Increased openness in the global system is a key factor in this improvement. In the 1990s, the international order shifted to a more multilateral structure, and the well-equipped middle powers rose to prominence (Cooper, Higgott, Nossal, 1993). Unlike previous eras, intermediate powers in this one were not restricted to members of the Western Alliance. It looked like Sweden, Pakistan, Indonesia, India, and Turkey were all being called up as potential middle powers. In the past few years, people have talked more about how important middle powers are and what roles they can play on the international stage. Goldman Sachs was among the leading investment banks and consulting companies that started highlighting prospective coalitions of middle powers. Turkey and Pakistan are among the important intermediate powers of the Next 11 (Egypt, Bangladesh, Iran, Indonesia, Nigeria, Mexico, the Philippines, Pakistan, Turkey, Vietnam and South Korea) (Kuepper, 2016). It would be premature to conclude that middle powers have gained



a decisive role in international politics just because they have been more involved in international politics after the end of the Cold War.

### **Cooperation Among Institutions**

Relations between Pakistan and Turkey have always been friendly and cooperative in politics, but in recent years, efforts have been stepped up to take the relationship to the next level. Since the turn of the century, Ankara and Islamabad have been working together to strengthen their respective institutions within this framework. There are two main reasons for this strategic push: first, the two nations want to strengthen their bilateral connections, and second, they want to align their policies on a regional and international scale.

In 2009, the High-Level Cooperation Council (HLCC) mechanism was established to give the bilateral relationship between the two nations a solid institutional foundation for the future. Since the diplomatic mechanism's establishment, there have been four meetings held under this framework, the present prime ministers of both countries presided over all of these meetings, which were also attended by other high-ranking public officials from the two countries. Turkey held summits in Ankara in 2010 and 2013, whereas Islamabad played host in 2015 and 2017. (The Express Tribune, 2015). Despite including security-related and political matters on its extensive agenda, the HLCC's major goal has been the strengthening of bilateral economic relations. Unless concrete steps are taken in the name of a further economic union, both nations know that bilateral ties would stagnate. Business ties between Islamabad and Ankara aren't as strong as you might think based on how close the two capitals have been politically in the past. This is clear from the bad data on the amount and type of trade between the two cities. (Suvankulov and Ali, 2012).

Because of this, the HLCC must work on expanding bilateral investment and commerce. Currently, commerce between Turkey and Pakistan is below expectations. Between 1990 and 2000, bilateral commerce rose by only \$3 million, from \$132 million to \$135 million. The peak year for bilateral commerce was 2011 when \$1.087.1 million was exchanged, and the figure had fallen to \$599.1 million by 2015. In the fiscal year 2021-22, the value of commerce between Pakistan and Turkey was \$883 million, with exports to Turkey being \$366 million and imports from Turkey totalling \$517 million. In 2021-22, the trade deficit with Turkey will be \$151 million. (OEC, 2022) A free trade agreement (FTA) between Turkey and Pakistan will likely improve commerce between the two countries because of the strong complementarities between their economies. Exports from Pakistan to Turkey are highly concentrated, while exports from Turkey to Pakistan are more widely varied. Textiles account for almost 73% of Pakistan's exports to Turkey. In comparison, Turkish exports to Pakistan are more sophisticated technologically and have a larger value added (Suvankulov and Ali, 2012).

### **Preferential Trade Agreement**

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Commonly known as the Trade in Goods Pact, the PTA has significant rules on bilateral safeguards, dispute settlement, periodic review and balance of payment exclusions. Pakistan and Turkey have always shared close ties, and Prime Minister Shehbaz has called this agreement "a magnificent moment and a milestone" in their long and fruitful relationship. He reflected on the unrelenting efforts of the ministries on both sides that led to the agreement's signature after his official visit to Turkey in May. The prime minister continued by saying that the agreement will pave the way for further trade and cooperation between the two nations and their numerous industries. The prime minister added that Pakistan and Turkey will keep working to deepen their ties. Dr Mehmet, Minister of Trade, said the event was a watershed moment that will go a long way toward cementing and expanding commercial connections. He said that it wasn't simple to satisfy everyone involved, but that persistence and baby steps ultimately led to the agreement's success. The Turkish minister also expressed gratitude to PM Shehbaz for his role in finalising the deal and strengthening connections between the two nations' commercial sectors. Qamar believed that the PTA will increase bilateral commerce between Pakistan and Turkey in a wide range of industries.

He also expressed hope that an FTA between Pakistan and Turkey would be realised. The minister of commerce emphasised the need of fostering greater business-to-business contact to boost trade and investment ties between the two friendly nations. Turkey lowered tariffs on 261 lines of Pakistani exports to the country, including many important industrial and agricultural products. Relations between the two countries date back centuries and continue to strengthen in critical areas including politics, defence, culture, and education. After both nations realised that increasing economic connections would need coordinated efforts to develop bilateral ties, the Framework Agreement between Pakistan and Turkey was signed in 2016 by Pakistani Minister of Commerce Engineer Khurram Dastagir and Turkish Minister of Economy Mustafa Elitas.

By creating a Free Trade Area, the agreement paved the way for the gradual liberalisation of trade in commodities, services, and investment. To determine where each party might make the most progress in lowering trade barriers, a Joint Scoping Study was performed under the terms of the agreement. The textile industry was singled out by Turkey, whereas Pakistan's concerns were spread throughout a wider range of industries and products.

Prior to Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's travel to Turkey from May 31 to June 2, 2022, progress on finalising a preferential trade agreement (PTA) between Pakistan and Turkey had been sluggish. When Qamar visited Turkey to finalise the Trade in Goods Agreement between the two countries, he met with the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr Mus and signed a joint Ministerial Statement. To facilitate the medium-term strategic aim of \$5 billion in bilateral commerce, the Trade in Goods Agreement has been drafted. After 19 rounds of talks between the two sides, the deal was done on August 12. Both parties are open to a more comprehensive agreement after the current one has shown its worth via the creation of goodwill and economic rewards. Market access



on 261 tariff lines has been granted to Pakistan under the PTA. The total global value of Pakistan's exports of these goods is \$5.1 billion. To put it another way, Turkey spends about \$7.6 billion worldwide on these imports.

For Turkey's part, Pakistan has proposed lowering tariffs on 130 separate lines. In all, Turkey earns \$23 billion by exporting these goods throughout the world (12 per cent of total exports). Pakistan spends almost \$6 billion on worldwide imports of these goods. Both conventional and non-traditional industries, including processed agricultural products, seafood, plastics, technical items, rubber tubes and tyres are now open to Pakistani exports. (Express Tribune, 2022)

### **Defence and Security Cooperation**

The defence and security industries are other areas where Turkey and Pakistan might work together in the future. The two countries have collaborated for many years to address a range of security issues, from the rise of communism in the 1950s to the emergence of terrorism and religious extremism in the 2000s. Not only have cooperative training programmes and the defence industry thrived, but ties between the Turkish and Pakistani forces have grown in many other ways as well. Under the Treaty of 1954, Turkey and Pakistan began working together for the first time in the area of defence. Since the Treaty was signed, armed forces from both countries have been actively cooperating in areas such as armament and training. Soon after, in 1988, the Pakistan-Turkey Military Consultative Group (MCG) was established to broaden the scope of the two countries already existing collaboration in military education and the defence sector. In June of 2003, Turkey and Pakistan established the High-Level Military Dialogue (HLMDG). (Hussain, 2008)

Defence industrial and military collaboration between both nations has grown since the turn of the millennium. During this time, Ankara and Islamabad routinely participated in joint military exercises (such as the "Anatolian Eagle" and the "Indus Viper"), shared military expertise, and traded weapons and supplies. In addition, in 2015, an agreement was reached on a programme for the cross-training and exchange of air force personnel and pilots (Khan, 2016). To improve economic ties, a breakthrough in the defence industry might be facilitated by harmonising policies. Despite the fact that Ankara and Islamabad's collaboration in this area was scant for a long time, the two capitals have recently launched real steps.

Pakistan and Turkey reached the following agreements in their final communiqué from the 6th Session of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council:

- increase the level of their collaboration in the defence and security sectors; this includes emphasising collaborative R&D and production endeavours and making as much of their defence procurement from each other as feasible.



- promote strategic stability and international and regional security, particularly in each other's territories, and strive toward global disarmament and non-proliferation goals.
- intensify the relationship between the law enforcement agencies of the two nations by facilitating joint training and the exchange of useful information, experiences, and skills.
- work together through existing anti-terrorism organisations to create new means of collaboration in response to the ever-changing nature of the danger, which includes cyber-crime and cyber-terrorism. (MoFA, 2022)

### **The Trilateral Meetings of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey**

During the 2000s, Ankara and Islamabad's political collaboration expanded to address regional concerns. The long and difficult process of establishing peace in Afghanistan ranks top on this list. In order to achieve this goal, Turkey has pioneered not one but two separate yet complementing mechanisms: one trilateral and one multilateral. The Istanbul process, led by Turkey, brings Afghanistan's immediate neighbours and regional powers together in an effort to combine and channel their individual contributions to the common cause of securing long-term stability in the country. The Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey Trilateral Summit gives Ankara a platform from which to mediate the resolution of a number of issues between Islamabad and Kabul.

After the Taliban resurgence in 2005, Turkey hosted a meeting between the heads of Pakistan and Afghanistan on April 29, 2007, to discuss how to confront terrorism together. It was in Turkey that President Ahmet Necdet Sezer convened the first-ever meeting of the Trilateral Summit. Former leaders of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Hamid Karzai and Pervez Musharraf, were there. In an effort to foster trilateral cooperation, the Ankara Declaration was released. The Declaration emphasised friendly relations between countries, respect for each other's borders, and staying out of each other's business (BBC Turkish, 2007).

In 2008, new leaders took office in both Turkey and Pakistan. On August 7, 2007, Abdullah Gul succeeded Ahmet Necdet Sezer as president of Turkey. After Musharraf's military government was toppled in Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto's husband, Asif Ali Zardari, took over as president (Raza and Akbar, 2012). At the recent Second Trilateral Summit, the leaders of Turkey, Afghanistan, and Pakistan met to examine ways to improve cooperation between their countries. The Third Trilateral Summit, which took place in Ankara on April 1, 2009, was devoted to enhancing security cooperation between the three countries involved (The Nation, 2010).

Intelligence and military leaders from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey met in Istanbul on January 25, 2010. Globally, Turkey's Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu emphasised Ankara's willingness to persuade the Taliban to halt hostilities and participate in elections. (Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the UN, 2016).



The Fifth Trilateral Summit held on December 24, 2010, in Istanbul, reached the decision to construct a train from Turkey through Pakistan and into Afghanistan. Communication, aviation, trade, and energy transportation are all areas where the parties have committed to making strides (Presidency of the Republic of Turkey 2010).

On October 31, 2011, Gul, Karzai, and Zardari gathered in Istanbul for the Sixth Trilateral Summit (Aksam, 2011). Several initiatives were launched to bring the three countries closer together politically, economically, and culturally. On December 12, 2012, at the Seventh Trilateral Summit, held in Istanbul, a crisis hotline was established to facilitate immediate communication during times of crisis (Dawn, 2012).

On February 13, 2014, the seventh Trilateral Summit was held in Ankara. The first time a group had a prime minister instead of a president. Nawaz Sharif represented Pakistan. The Summit meeting focused on Afghanistan when ISAF leaves at the end of the year. The Summit also examined the forthcoming presidential election and its repercussions (The Express Tribune, 2014). The ninth summit hasn't been met yet, two years after the eighth summit in 2014. The delay has two causes. Afghanistan's 2014 elections were tumultuous. Three months after the anticipated June announcement date, election results were eventually announced (Colakoglu and Yegin, 2014). Ashraf Ghani, the next president of Afghanistan, must prioritise consolidating authority, fighting the Taliban, and redistributing government resources.

### **Reopening of Freight Rail Line**

The first freight train from Pakistan to Turkey via Iran departed the station after a ten-year hiatus, significantly boosting commerce between the three nations that comprise the ECO. Travelling from Islamabad to Istanbul city covers the 6,540 km distance in 10 days, or less than half the time it would take to go that distance by sea (21 days). On Tuesday, December 21st, the first train ever to go from Islamabad, Pakistan's capital city, to Istanbul, Turkey, departed from the Margala station, transporting over a dozen containers of rice, dates, and pink salt. The train can haul up to 80,000 tonnes of cargo. It will travel 1,990 kilometres through Pakistan, from Quetta to Taftan at the Iranian border, and then continue on to Tehran and Tabriz across a length of 2,603 kilometres before finally arriving in Istanbul via Ankara. This route is the quickest and most cost-effective way to transport goods between Asia and Europe. The Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul (ITI) container train service was initiated by the three nations in 2009, but it never went beyond the testing phase. To improve connection with China's Belt and Road Initiative, Pakistan, Iran, and Turkey had intended to launch passenger services on the ITI transnational line once the inaugural freight trains began running.

Talks are in the works to build a rail line from Islamabad to Kashgar in southern Xinjiang Province, replacing the Karakorum Highway. It has been proposed to connect Gilgit, Pakistan, which already

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has a national rail connection to the rest of Pakistan, to the existing Chinese railway that passes via Khunjerab Pass on its route to Kashgar and Yarkand. This would be accomplished by building a link between the two systems. China's involvement in several rail projects in Pakistan is primarily motivated by commercial considerations; however, China also sees distinct advantages for its improved transportation and access to Central Asia and the Persian Gulf. Because Pakistan's national rail network connects to Pakistan's Seaports at Karachi and Gwadar, China's involvement in these projects is primarily motivated by commercial considerations. China has been creating Special Economic Zones in the Punjab region near Afghanistan to accommodate Afghani business, and there have been major new investments at Gwadar to achieve the same thing. Both of these initiatives are aimed at facilitating trade between China and Afghanistan.

Upon the train's departure, Pakistan's railway minister said that it was the fulfilment of a long-held desire for the countries of the area to begin sending container trains from Pakistan to Iran and Turkey. He believes that increasing and deepening ECO rail cooperation will help to maintain peace and stability in the area. These nations form the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) together with Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Turkey, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. It's a great place to network with like-minded people while also learning about new investment and trade possibilities. As an ad hoc organisation recognised by the United Nations Charter, the ECO's stated mission is to establish a universal market for all products and services. Both the ECO's secretariat and its culture branch are based in Iran, while Turkey and Pakistan host the organization's economic and scientific bureaus, respectively.

The Pakistani Foreign Minister has stated that crucial projects like the Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railway are urgently required to promote regional business cohesion, in contrast to Abdul Razak Dawood, a former adviser to the prime minister of Pakistan for commerce and investment, who claimed that the ECO train can practically help expand exports, imports, and trade among the member countries.

By extension, the ITI will link to China's Xinjiang Province, home to the Turkic Uighur Muslim population, enhancing the Belt and Road's capacity to link the economic systems and infrastructure of nations throughout Africa, Europe, and Asia. China has sought direct involvement in the development of Iran's infrastructure because of the importance of transportation to its Belt and Road Initiative. On the other side, Iran will be able to circumvent American sanctions with the aid of the ITI train. Since the ECO nations utilise their own currencies in commerce rather than the US dollar, this is an appealing alternative trading avenue for Tehran. (Silk Road Briefing, 2021)

### **The One Belt One Road Initiative**



Pakistan and Turkey need to seize chances like China's 'One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR), which was unveiled in 2013 if they wish to achieve economic integration on a bilateral level and beyond. This programme struck a chord with people all across the world when it was first announced. The collection of projects intended to constitute the backbone of OBOR has increasingly become the subject of considerable controversy, both in terms of their finance and the huge geographical region they are anticipated to span. Given this, it might be illuminating to focus on the two most salient aspects of the Chinese worldview that distinguish it from its "peers" promoted by other countries. To begin with, the scope of the Chinese ambition is far broader; it encompasses virtually the entirety of Asia and extends to the shores of East Africa and the heart of Europe. Here, Beijing's vision of Eurasian-scale connectivity encompasses a number of interconnected projects spanning two major regions: one that traces the historical Silk Road across the land bridge of Central Asia and on to Europe via Russia, and another (i.e., the southern corridor) that traverses Iran and Turkey and ends in southern Europe.

Instead of only imagining a one-way transportation corridor, nations along OBOR's route will experience genuine economic integration. Motorways, railways, communication lines, pipelines, harbours and airports will be modernised and linked together for this purpose, and new infrastructure will be built from the ground up wherever it is required.

China's Silk Road programme stands apart from similar initiatives sponsored by other countries because of its massive funding. Beijing has promised \$40 billion from the Silk Road Fund it established recently for related projects. The sum is greater than any other Silk Road-related project has ever seen. In addition, the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), led by China, was founded in 2015 with a \$50 billion capital base, with plans to treble that amount in the near future. These funds will be used exclusively for Silk Road projects. Given the scope of the AIIB, which encompasses essentially the whole of Asia, it seems probable that the bank's resources will be put to such use. Beijing is considering transferring a total of \$62 billion from the Agricultural Development Bank of China, the China Development Bank and the China Export and Import Bank to the coffers of its OBOR partners. Overall, these donations amount to almost \$152 billion, drawing more attention to the initiative's size than its substance (Viehe, 2015).

The overland portion of OBOR, known as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), centres on two countries. The southern route of the SREB runs via Pakistan, and the western corridor runs through Turkey. Furthermore, the RCD worked during the 1960s and 1970s to include not just these three nations in a common transportation network, however, this will be possible because of the connectivity of Turkey to the China-Pakistan railway through Iran. To that end, China has promised both financial and technical help for OBOR initiatives, which would greatly aid in the process of integrating ECO nations on a number of fronts. Pak-Turkish connections will be strengthened through the emphasis on infrastructure integration between the two countries, especially in the transportation sector, as part of the larger SREB strategy. Thus, Ankara and

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Islamabad will be afforded an opportunity to strengthen their bilateral economic ties and move swiftly and effectively toward realising their goal of regional economic integration among ECO members.

Consolidating reciprocal economic connectedness within the framework of OBOR is another goal of the Turkey-Pakistan FTA's projected completion. Including trade in services and investments in the final draught could make it easier to start joint ventures in fast-growing industries like tourism, resort development, catering, and construction. It could also encourage technical and vocational cooperation and joint R&D. Because a full FTA would require more business connections through trade fairs, sectoral exchanges by business delegations, and other informal meetings, it may be possible to come up with a plan for bilateral investment along the lines of the CPEC. Turkey's investments in Pakistan's IT, renewable energy, comms, and construction sectors, together with those in the country's food processing, agribusiness, and tourist sectors, totalled \$900 billion by the middle of 2016. (Pakistan Observer, 2016b).

## **Conclusion**

Since establishing official diplomatic ties in 1947, Pak-Turkish relations have been dynamic and strong. These two nations and their people are friendly and solid. Until the 2000s, the bilateral relationship had two chronic deficits. First, economic and commercial partnerships flopped. The second failure stemmed from Ankara and Islamabad's inability to use mutual confidence to foster in-depth collaboration in the region and beyond. In 2016, major economic and trade handicaps remain. This part of the bilateral connection must meet two important thresholds. When negotiations between Pakistan and Turkey over a free trade agreement (FTA) are finalised, it will pave the way for a plethora of new opportunities in terms of commerce and investment on both sides. When China announces OBOR-related initiatives that complement its own, that will mark the second milestone. Once OBOR is implemented as a regional integration strategy, Turkey and Pakistan may set up a logistical network that would boost bilateral investment and commerce. Beijing's monetary support for OBOR initiatives would provide further enhancement, given Ankara and Islamabad's cost-related issues and credit shortages.

The 2010-formed HLCC has helped institutionalise political connections. If the HLCC continues to meet annually to support multifaceted initiatives, Pak-Turkish connections will strengthen in many areas. Defence and security industry partnership and public diplomacy will deepen the relationship. Since the turn of the century, Turkey and Pakistan have boosted regional institutional cooperation. During the Cold War, successive trilateral structures like the RCD and ECO formed the backbone of an ever-stronger Iran-Pakistan-Turkey diplomatic history. From this perspective, ECO's extension to include Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan after the Cold War should be viewed as a positive development. Its three founders – i.e. Pakistan, Iran and Turkey must go further to achieve political collaboration and economic integration within ECO.

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The trust gap between Islamabad and Kabul may be bridged if the Istanbul Process and the Afghanistan-Pakistan-Turkey Trilateral Summit can continue to meet regularly. Due to its varied membership and widespread scope, the Istanbul Process can serve as a reliable foundation for more extensive regional cooperation. If utilised properly, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) might help Turkey and Pakistan strengthen their connections throughout the region and beyond. The SCO now includes all of South Asia after accepting Pakistan and India as full members at its 2016 Tashkent Summit. In the near future, Turkey, a dialogue partner, will likely be elevated to observer status. The future structure of the organisation, as well as Turkey's ties with the European Union and NATO, will determine whether or not Turkey can become a full member. Turkey will participate in SCO meetings as a discussion partner or observer even if it does not join as a full member. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) might provide a platform for Turkey and Pakistan to pursue a coordinated regional agenda.

In sum, Turkey and Pakistan will soon have enormous potential to revitalise bilateral and multilateral collaboration. If the two countries take these chances, they may add breadth and depth to what is today a mostly one-dimensional relationship.



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