

## **Pakistan-Turkey Strategic Partnership**

by

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Alliances and partnerships have always been a core element of states' strategies both during conflict and for cooperation. As the world order, marked by US hegemony, is being challenged with ever-increasing globalization and renewed great power competition, there is revival in the trend of forging new collaborative alliances, be it economic or military ones.

Turkey and Pakistan - the two Muslim middle powers - have historically remained aligned in a fortified kinship out of a shared spirit of brotherhood. The two states enjoy strong political relations based on their shared perceptions about key regional and international issues. Turkey has been one of the few countries that has always extended complete diplomatic support to Pakistan, especially in the Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir cause. Pakistan too extends its full support to Turkey on the diplomatic front, in its disputes with its neighbouring countries. Both have also come forward to support the other during natural calamities.

The two countries realizing their combined geopolitical imperatives and synchronizing interests, embarked upon various [cooperative initiatives](#) in the field of defence like the Turco-Pakistan Treaty of 1954, and establishment of the Pakistan-Turkey Military Consultative Group (MCG) 1988. The two states also came together and initiated [multilateral cooperation](#) by establishing forums like Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) to boost economic collaboration. However, despite these steps, an effective strategic alliance was missing. The arrival of President Recep Erdoğan (then Prime Minister) to power in Turkey led to the dawn of a new era of bilateral cooperation, especially in the defence domain. A High-Level Military Dialogue (HLMDG) was set up in June 2003 when President Erdoğan visited Pakistan after assuming power. It laid to the foundation of cooperative ties in terms of joint defence production and procurement, as well as joint military training and education. The dialogue group since then has met 15 times (most recently in December 2020) and has served as an institutionalized mechanism that [upholds and promotes defence ties](#).

Likewise, a number of defence agreements have shown the inclination of both states to bolster cooperation in this area. In 2015, Pakistan and Turkey signed a deal according to which Turkey was to provide [T-37](#) training aircraft to Pakistan along

with spare parts on gratis basis. In 2016, Turkish Undersecretariat of Defence Industries inked an agreement with the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) to purchase 52 Super Mushshak aircraft. According to PAC, the order would be completed by the end of [2022](#).

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the arms transfer to Pakistan from Turkey totaled [\\$112 million](#) from 2016-2019. During this period, Turkey remained Pakistan's third-largest arms supplier. Likewise, Pakistan ranked as Turkey's third largest arms export market.

Both countries have also exercised mutual exchange of military personnel for training. Around [1500](#) Pakistani military officers have received training in Turkey since 2010. Likewise, there have been several joint military exercises, the most recent one took place in February this year.

Turkey and Pakistan share a cordial diplomatic and an evolving strategic bond which has great potential to further strengthen their relationship by boosting defence and security cooperation in novel fields like emerging technologies which offer considerable room for effective collaboration.

The effectiveness and decisiveness of Turkish drones was demonstrated in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict last year between Azerbaijan and Armenia where the former prevailed over the latter. The victory was attributed mainly to the effective use of drones, a majority of which were of Turkish origin.

Pakistan formulated its [first drone](#) policy in late 2020, and particularly mentioned Turkey as one of the two countries with which it aims to conduct [joint ventures](#) in developing this technology. Both states are currently working on the joint [development and production](#) of tactical unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In addition, PAC has been supplying various drone components to Turkish Aerospace Industries for their Anka drones since [2013](#). Pakistan is also expected to receive the KALKA early warning air defence system from Turkey to counter UAV threats.

The Turkish Aerospace Industries has [signed](#) a MoU with a Pakistani university, National University of Science and Technology (NUST) for combined research and development. In addition, it has also decided to launch a shop at Pakistan's National Science and Technology Park which will focus on defence projects on radar technology, cyberwarfare and drones.

The strategic partnership between the two countries will prove beneficial in the long run. Military cooperation, reinforced by diplomatic support, will enable Islamabad and Ankara to benefit economically and strategically.

Turkey's practice of using Science and Technology (S&T) cooperation as a soft power tool can also prove to be beneficial for Pakistan. Turkey is amongst the countries with the [highest levels of government defence R&D](#) funding as a share of their GDP. Also Turkey's 2023 Industry and Technology Strategy document envisions increasing the share of R&D investments to 1.8% of GDP by 2023. The general trend of investment in S&T is shifting to investments in AI, quantum computing, commercial space, cloud computing, nano-technology, cybersecurity and big data analytics etc. These newly developed capabilities, apart from bringing economic growth would also be the key drivers of military capabilities in the future too. Pakistan, with its timely collaboration, can also benefit from these emerging technologies which would undoubtedly become major components of future warfare.

By strengthening its own defence industry via expanding its potential buyer pool, Turkey can reduce its reliance on Western/ foreign suppliers. In addition, it can find a good strategic partner at a time when Ankara's relations with other regional/Arab states are tense. Besides, Turkey can also benefit from the prospect of [jointly manufacturing fighter jets](#) with Pakistan, an idea already being explored by the two states.

Bilateral defence cooperation will enable Islamabad to diversify its sources of military equipment from its traditional suppliers. Pakistan's drone industry will especially benefit from collaboration with Turkey. Furthermore, it will augment the already amiable relations between the two Muslim states.

Shifting alliances and changing global geopolitical order have brought the two countries closer to each other. Their Islamic background makes this cooperation even more ideal. An upward trajectory of this relationship will play an important role in regional and global power dynamics in the future.

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