



Pakistan's Quest for Alliances and Evolving Relationship with Türkiye



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Pakistan is probably experiencing the worst phase of multidimensional crises. The country is fighting the instability within itself with political unrest posed by Imran Khan's persistent calls for re-election. The state of the economy is alarming with the high debt figures and Pakistan's unceasing reliance on external assistance. The security situation is challenging, with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) launching relentless terror attacks targeting security personnel. The number and nature of TTP attacks in 2025 do not indicate any change in TTP's posture even after the Pakistan military conducted the counter-terror military operations and claims to have carried out thousands of intelligence operations. For the first time, all four provinces are facing unrest. TTP's stronghold in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is well acknowledged. In Balochistan, separatists groups have been active, Baloch resentment against the establishment is rising, and there have been reports of the splinter groups collaborating with the TTP. The recent Jaffar Express hijacking raises numerous questions on the evolving dimensions of Baloch insurgency. Sindh has seen a series of protests opposing the government's plans to build canals on the Indus River. In Punjab, the Sharifs and the establishment are working to strengthen their influence.

Externally, Pakistan's foreign relations did suffer a blow under former Prime Minister Imran Khan. Relationship with the United States got strained, with Khan accusing the US of conspiring his exit. Khan's position on creating a parallel alliance with Türkiye and Malaysia did not go well with Saudi Arabia.

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Recent months have witnessed Pakistan's desperate efforts to expand its external presence, build-up new relationships, and revive its economic and strategic partnerships. There have been efforts to build new alliances which we saw in the case of Pakistan's unprecedented outreach to Bangladesh. Islamabad is meticulously trying to revive its relations with the United States. Its red-carpet welcome to the Turkish President which resulted in signing of multiple agreements does indicate the eagerness to strengthen its existing alliances.

Pakistan's relations with Türkiye have evolved over time, given the mutual strategic interests and ideological empathy the two countries share. Türkiye and Pakistan have shared stable economic and defence ties and have collaborated on defence technology and joint ventures. Pakistan is the second largest recipient of the Türkiye arms exports (2020-2024).¹ There has been a steady development in the cooperation areas, and it would be useful to mention some of the critical developments. Türkiye has been active in upgrading F-16s for Pakistan and has supplied Pakistan with advanced drones, including the Bayraktar, TB2 and Akinci. In 2016, a deal was reportedly signed for the mid-life upgrade of Agosta 90-B submarines of the Pakistan Navy by the Turkish firm STM.²

In 2022, Türkiye received the delivery of the first three 52 MF1-17 Super Mushshak trainer aircraft which were ordered in 2017.³ Pakistan has been aspiring for the Fifth-generation aircraft and has been in discussion with Türkiye for the possible export of Turkish KAAN manufactured by Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI or TUSAŞ).⁴ There are reports that the two nations will be setting up a joint factory to produce the Turkish KAAN.⁵

The visit of Turkish President Erdogan in February 2025 to Pakistan marked the seventh round of the Pakistan-Turkey High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council. Twenty Four agreements and Memoranda of Understanding between the two countries were signed, highlighting collaboration across various sectors, including defence, intelligence, trade, tourism, and science and technology. Erdogan announced that the target is to expand the trade volume between the two countries to USD 5 billion.⁶

Türkiye's diplomatic and strategic choices are shaped by the complexities of the geopolitical developments, its involvement in Syria, tensions with Russia and Iran, and also its eagerness to be close to the Organisation of Islamic Council (OIC). Ankara's economic interest in Pakistan cannot be ignored and it potentially sees Pakistan as connector to Asia to expand its exports.

Pakistan is trying to expand its alliances, create new relationships and nurture existing ties. Its growing relationship with Türkiye will contribute towards its defence modernisation and strategic positioning. Although, Pakistan is a recipient of consistent supply of Chinese defence equipment, looks like the Pakistan military is keen to expand channels of defence imports.

The evolving bilateral relations will contribute not only towards shaping Pakistan's military modernisation but will also support Pakistan's diplomatic posture. This is particularly important given Erdogan's efforts to position himself as the leader of the Islamic world. Erdogan's recent comments on Kashmir have been provocative for India. In February 2025, the Turkish President during his visit to Pakistan said, "The Kashmir issue should be addressed according to the UN resolution through dialogue and keeping in mind the aspirations of the people of Kashmir."⁷ It remains to be seen how far Türkiye can go in terms of alienating New Delhi, given its keenness to join the multilateral forums including BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). While India has well balanced its security situation and strategic interests so far, recent developments are crucial and need careful consideration in India's security policies and diplomatic positioning.

(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])

Notes

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² Mateem Haider, "Turley to Buy Super Mushshak Trainers from Pakistan," *DAWN*, July 15, 2016, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1271025>. Accessed on March 03, 2024.

³ Tayfun Özberk, "Deliveries of Super Mushshak Trainer aircraft to Turkish Air Force Commence," *SHEPARD*, November 11, 2022, <https://www.shephardmedia.com/news/training-simulation/deliveries-of-super-mushshak-trainer-aircraft-to-turkish-air-force-commence/>. Accessed on March 03, 2024.

⁴ Sakshi Tiwari, "After 'Stealth' J-35A From China, Pakistan Discusses Acquiring 5th-Gen KAAAN Fighters From Turkey: Reports," *The Eurasian Times*, January 09, 2025, <https://www.eurasiantimes.com/after-stealth-j-35a-from-china-pakistan/>. Accessed on March 02, 2025.

⁵ "Türkiye, Pakistan to Establish Joint Factory for Production of KAAAN Fighter Jet", *MEMO Middle East Monitor*, January 22, 2025, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250122-turkiye-pakistan-to-establish-joint-factory-for-production-of-kaan-fighter-jet/>. Accessed on March 10, 2025.

⁶ Arshad Mahmood, "Pakistan and Turkey Forge Stronger Ties With 24 Agreements", *themedialine*, February 25, 2025, <https://themedialine.org/by-region/pakistan-and-turkey-forge-stronger-ties-with-24-agreements/>. Accessed on March 12, 2025.

⁷ PTI, "Turkiye's Erdogan Urges India, Pakistan to Resolve Kashmir through Dialogue", *The Hindu*, February 13, 2025, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/turkiyes-erdogan-urges-india-pakistan-to-resolve-kashmir-issue-through-dialogue/article69215124.ece>. Accessed on March 1, 2025.

