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## Pakistan-Turkey Relations: Sustaining the Momentum

*Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan paid a state visit to Pakistan from 16 to 17 November 2016. This paper analyses the outcome of the visit and focuses on the growing relations between Pakistan and Turkey.*

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The people of Turkey and Pakistan share deep-rooted cultural and political connections, predating the creation of Pakistan when the Indian subcontinent was partitioned by the British in 1947. During World War I, most Muslims of British India pledged their loyalty to the British Crown; however, many provided financial, military and moral support to the Ottoman Empire that was fighting on the side of the Germans<sup>2</sup>. The 1915 Singapore Mutiny involving British Indian Muslim *sepoys* was also in support of the Ottoman caliph Mehmad V Resad.<sup>3</sup> The people of Turkey fondly recall the support they had received from Indian Muslims in the Turkish war of independence that led to the formation of the modern Turkish Republic<sup>4</sup>. The pan-Islamic sentiments of Indian Muslims became an example of brotherhood in the Muslim world. This provided the inspiration for the creation of Pakistan somewhat on the model of

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<sup>2</sup> "Indian Muslims, Ottoman Empire and Caliphate during Colonial Period." *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, vol. 6, No 2, February 2015. [http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol\\_6\\_No\\_2\\_February\\_2015/32.pdf](http://ijbssnet.com/journals/Vol_6_No_2_February_2015/32.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

secular Turkish nation-state.<sup>5</sup> Pakistan's founder Quaid-E-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was a great admirer of the Turkish 'Father of the Nation' Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. The nomenclature of Pakistan's national language Urdu (which originally evolved in the cultural ethos of the undivided Indian subcontinent) comes from a Turkish word "*Ordu*" which means camp. Both Urdu and the Turkish language draw vocabulary from Persian and Arabic. Turkey has supported the position of Pakistan on the sensitive issue of Kashmir. Turkey and Pakistan were also part of the Baghdad Pact which morphed into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Both countries were also part of the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which was later transformed into the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO). In more recent times, Turkey joined Pakistan to condemn Bangladesh's execution of the 73-year-old Jammāt-e-Islami leader and former Bangladesh Minister of Agriculture & Minister of Industry, Motiur Rahman Nizami, for war crimes committed during the 1971 war of independence.<sup>6</sup> In demonstration of its solidarity with Islamabad, Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Dhaka.<sup>7</sup> This shows Pakistan's close ties with Turkey.

On 15 July 2016 Turkey successfully foiled a coup d'état attempt by rebel factions of the Turkish armed forces. This development on the night of the coup attempt was closely watched in Pakistan. Images of Turkish people coming out on the streets in support of their democratically-elected government and police officers arresting Army soldiers appeared all over the Pakistani media.<sup>8</sup> This evoked praise and admiration in Pakistan for President Erdogan's government. Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said that "we deeply admire the resolve of the brave and resilient Turkish people, who stood up against the forces of darkness, and anarchy to express their support and commitment to democracy. We express our complete support and solidarity with President Erdogan's democratically elected government of Turkey and the democratic institutions of Turkey".<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> "No: 109, 11 May 2016, Press Release Regarding the Execution of the Death Sentence of Motiur Rahman Nizami, One of the Leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami Party and Former Minister of Agriculture and Minister of Industry of Bangladesh." *Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, [www.mfa.gov.tr/no\\_-109\\_-11-may-2016\\_-press-release-regarding-the-execution-of-the-death-sentence-of-motiur-rahman-nizami\\_-one-of-the-leaders-of-jamaat\\_e\\_islami-party-and-former-minister-of-agriculture-and-minister-of-industry-of-bangladesh.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-109_-11-may-2016_-press-release-regarding-the-execution-of-the-death-sentence-of-motiur-rahman-nizami_-one-of-the-leaders-of-jamaat_e_islami-party-and-former-minister-of-agriculture-and-minister-of-industry-of-bangladesh.en.mfa).

<sup>7</sup> "Turkey Withdraws Bangladesh Ambassador after Execution of Islamist: Erdogan." *Reuters*, [www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-bangladesh-idUSKCN0Y311M](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-bangladesh-idUSKCN0Y311M)

<sup>8</sup> "What Pakistani Politicians Said about the Coup Attempt in Turkey." *DAWN*, [www.dawn.com/news/1271409](http://www.dawn.com/news/1271409).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

Turkish President Erdogan paid a two-day visit to Pakistan from 16 to 17 November 2016. In a joint declaration on the future direction of Pakistan-Turkey strategic relationship issued by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and President Erdogan, both sides “agreed to further enhance collaboration in energy, infrastructure, agriculture, food processing and housing as priority sectors”.<sup>10</sup> Pakistan and Turkey are currently engaged in a process of concluding negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement expected to be completed by end-2016<sup>11</sup>. The two leaders also “expressed satisfaction over the progress achieved towards implementation of on-going projects under the framework of the Pakistan-Turkey High Level Strategic Cooperation Council (HLSCC), and reaffirmed the resolve to explore new avenues for collaboration in the forthcoming 5th Session of the HLSCC, to be held shortly in Turkey”.<sup>12</sup>

On 17 November, Erdogan addressed a joint session of the Pakistan Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament). The Turkish President took this opportunity to recognise Pakistan’s support of the Turkish government by saying “Pakistan, with its stance against the 15 July coup attempt, perpetrated by Fetullah Gulen Terrorist Organisation (FETO), showed that it also stood by the Turkish Nation in its second War of Liberation”.<sup>13</sup>

Fetullah Gulen, an Islamic preacher and a former ally of President Erdogan, has been branded a terrorist by the Turkish government since his alleged involvement in the coup attempt. He currently lives in the United States (US) despite a formal request by the Turkish government for his extradition. This has led to the souring of diplomatic relation between the US and Turkey. Prior to Erdogan’s visit, Pakistan issued notices to 450 staff of the Pak-Turk Schools to leave Pakistan by 20 November.<sup>14</sup> It is believed that the Pak-Turk schools are a part of FETO.<sup>15</sup> Erdogan also said during his address that “On this occasion, I would like to state once again that FETO is a bloody terrorist organization posing a threat not only to Turkey but to all countries in which it operates. I wholeheartedly believe that this terrorist organization will be eliminated as soon as possible without harming brotherly Pakistan. I appreciate the recent decisions taken by the Pakistani Government in this direction, and I thank you for your strong support in our fight against FETO”.<sup>16</sup> The President also spoke on terrorism and radicalism that

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<sup>10</sup> “Joint Declaration on the Future Directions of Pakistan-Turkey Strategic Relationship.” *Prime Minister's Office, Islamic Republic of Pakistan*, [www.pmo.gov.pk/press\\_release\\_details.php?pr\\_id=1599](http://www.pmo.gov.pk/press_release_details.php?pr_id=1599).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> “President Erdogan address to joint meeting of national assembly and senate of Pakistan (17 November 2016).” *National Assembly, Pakistan*, [www.na.gov.pk/uploads/1479383330\\_448.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/1479383330_448.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> “Pak-Turk Schools Saga” *Dawn*, [www.dawn.com/news/1296730](http://www.dawn.com/news/1296730).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Same source as in Note 9

has plagued the Muslim world. He said that “the terrorist organizations such as Al-Qaida and its affiliate DAESH are the agents of the war carried out against Islam which are only and solely harming Muslims. We should eliminate these bunches of killers, who have no other skill than to shed Muslims’ blood, from the Islamic world and from all over the world as soon as possible. Otherwise, neither Turkey, nor Pakistan, nor the world of Islam, nor humankind will attain peace”.<sup>17</sup> This statement by Erdogan was well-received in Pakistan as it clearly highlights that the war against terrorism must be fought by Muslims too. It also sends the message that the terrorists are not representatives of Islam but enemies of the religion. Pakistan has been a victim of sectarian violence aimed at minority Muslim sects. Erdogan said that “terrorist organizations try to find a basis for themselves by provoking the divisions and differences among the Muslims. In order to save the Muslims from this servile situation faced, we have to eradicate all means of exploitation from sectarianism to ethnic discrimination spreading among the Islamic nations”.<sup>18</sup> This provides a reminder to Pakistan that sectarianism and terrorism are inextricably linked and thus there is a need to forge unity in the Muslim world in order to combat radical Islamist terrorism.

Erdogan also reiterated Turkish support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue which was featured in his parliamentary address. He said that “The Kashmir issue, which we follow carefully and could not have been solved for almost 70 years, continues to hurt our conscience. The latest developments in Kashmir once again demonstrated the importance and the urgency of the solution of this problem. We are aware of the distress and suffering of our Kashmiri brothers and sisters. We are deeply concerned about the increase of the tension. The international community should exert further efforts in order to solve this issue which has political and humanitarian dimensions, according to justice and law.”<sup>19</sup> This can continue to provide the impetus for fostering close cooperation. . Erdogan noted further that “we are two brotherly countries, not only in words but in real meaning”.<sup>20</sup> Turkey’s stance on the Kashmir issue is not any new revelation. In August 2016, during Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu’s visit to Pakistan, he said at a press conference that “Turkey has always supported Pakistan’s position on Jammu and Kashmir, and will continue to do so until the long-festering issue is resolved.....with regards to the Jammu and Kashmir question, Turkey has been supporting,

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> Ibid

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

fully supporting, Jammu Kashmir and Pakistan's position."<sup>21</sup> Back in February 2013, the then Foreign Minister of Turkey, Ahmet Davutoglu in his speech to the Twelve Islamic Summit in Cairo said that "The Jammu and Kashmir issue has been awaiting a just solution for 65 years. This solution should come through peaceful dialogue, in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions and be acceptable to all parties. We reiterate our strong support in reaching an enduring peace for the brotherly people of Kashmir".<sup>22</sup>

There was no immediate official reaction from the Indian Government to Erdogan's latest statements in Pakistan. Prior to Erdogan's visit to Pakistan, on 4 November 2016, a Turkish delegation led by Minister of Development Lutfi Elvan met India's Home Minister Rajnath Singh. An official press statement by the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs reported: "Seeking Turkey's support on the Kashmir issue, Shri Rajnath Singh said India seeks Istanbul's support in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC)".<sup>23</sup> Following President Erdogan's speech in Islamabad it seems apparent that Turkey has turned down the Indian Home Minister's appeal for support. President Erdogan visit to Pakistan has further consolidated the long-standing bilateral relationship between Turkey and Pakistan. The two Muslim republics share in common many social, religious, cultural and political characteristics, which form the basis of their close relationship. Erdogan's visit seems to have propelled the Pakistan-Turkey relations to greater heights.

This visit is also an indication of the fact that Turkey under President Erdogan is emphasizing its linkages with countries of common values of the East. Rather than aligning itself with the European Union which was the thrust of the foreign policy of his predecessors. This is reflected in the fact that shortly, after the visit to Pakistan; President Erdogan said that "Turkey did not need to join the European Union (EU) at all costs and has floated the idea of becoming part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation."<sup>24</sup> On 21 November 2016, the European parliament

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<sup>21</sup> "Turkey 'Fully Supports' Pakistan's Position on Kashmir: Turkish FM - The Express Tribune." *The Express Tribune*, [www.tribune.com.pk/story/1155127/turkey-fully-supports-pakistans-position-kashmir-turkish-fm/](http://www.tribune.com.pk/story/1155127/turkey-fully-supports-pakistans-position-kashmir-turkish-fm/).

<sup>22</sup> "Statement by H.E. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey at the Ministerial Meeting Preparatory to the Twelfth Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, 4 February 2013, Cairo." *Republic of Turkey, Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, [www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h\\_e\\_-ahmet-davutoğlu\\_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-preparatory-to-the-twelfth-session-of-the-islamic-summit-conference\\_-4-february-2013\\_-cairo.en.mfa](http://www.mfa.gov.tr/statement-by-h_e_-ahmet-davutoğlu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey-at-the-ministerial-meeting-preparatory-to-the-twelfth-session-of-the-islamic-summit-conference_-4-february-2013_-cairo.en.mfa).

<sup>23</sup> "Turkish Delegation Led by Minister of Development Meets the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh." *Press Information Bureau Government of India Ministry of Home Affairs*.<http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=153274>

<sup>24</sup> "Erdogan Says Turkey Not Yet 'Closed the Book' on EU, but Has Alternatives." *Reuters*, Thomson Reuters, [www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-europe-erdogan-idUSKBN13O1D8](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-europe-erdogan-idUSKBN13O1D8).

voted by an overwhelming majority to suspend Turkey's EU membership talks.<sup>25</sup> This provides a strong motivating factor for Turkey to be part of President Xi Jinping's One Belt-One Road initiative. During the Pakistan-Turkey investment roundtable conference that took place on the agenda of the visit, "President Erdogan urged Turkish businessmen to invest in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects of Pakistan saying that the CPEC was a game changer for the region."<sup>26</sup> The current state of affairs between Turkey and the European Union twined with the positive developments in Pakistan-Turkey bilateral relations as well as Pakistan long standing relationship with China; provides an opportunity for Pakistan to be Turkey's conduit for its future linkages with China.

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<sup>25</sup> "Euro MPs Vote to Freeze Turkey EU Membership Talks." *BBC News*, [www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38090121](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38090121).

<sup>26</sup> "Erdogan Urges Turkish Businessmen to Invest in CPEC Projects - Business - Dunya News." [www.dunyanews.tv/en/Business/361474-Erdogan-urges-Turkish-businessmen-to-invest-in-CPE](http://www.dunyanews.tv/en/Business/361474-Erdogan-urges-Turkish-businessmen-to-invest-in-CPE)