

Turkey and Pakistan; Venues of Cooperation and Bones of Contention - Esra Pakin-Albayrakoğlu



Turkey

and Pakistan are brotherly states with time-honoured bilateral relations.

Today, both are particularly afflicted by refugee and energy issues, which can be alleviated through enhanced dialogue and exchange of expertise. Although

some political divides around the Muslim Brotherhood and Israel cloud what might otherwise be a mutually satisfying collaboration, there are more advantages than disadvantages to incentivising the deepening of existing ties.

Refugees and Energy: The Case of Turkey

Currently,

[Turkey](#)

[hosts](#) more than 3,5 million Syrian refugees

and thousands of asylum seekers and beneficiaries of protection of other nationalities, mainly from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. [Host](#)

[community hostility](#) is rising exponentially,

particularly in Turkey's metropolitan areas. Integration challenges cause

further instability in a country already suffering from socio-economic problems multiplied by COVID-19. Grievances are being exploited by opposition parties against

the backdrop of next year's elections, thus fueling political tensions as well.

In

Turkey, much progress has been made in collaboration with the EU and the World Bank to tackle various issues related to the refugee crisis. Turkey can be a

role model if it adeptly manages to build the resilience of impacted communities and reconcile refugees and the local population. However, rather than applaud,

Ankara receives criticism for using refugees as a bargaining tool against the EU. Likewise, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA), which

allocates huge sums of humanitarian aid to Syrian refugees as part of Official Development Assistance, ranks "very poorly" in the [Aid](#)

[Transparency Index 2020](#) just above the

lowest-ranking institution, namely, China's Ministry of Finance.

According

to the [National](#)

[Energy Policy of 2017](#) and the energy agenda of Vision 2023, Turkey aims to be a hub in regional energy trade and has undertaken various natural gas and oil pipeline projects. Its contribution to Europe's energy security has reached new heights in 2020 with the realisation of the Southern Gas Corridor upon completion of the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP). Another priority is to make the most of domestic and renewable energy resources. Turkey ranks 5th in Europe and 12th in the world regarding installed capacity in renewable energy. In this vein, Turkey also engages with nuclear power for more independent and environmentally friendly energy production.

However,

Turkey has the fastest-growing energy demand among the OECD members in the past two decades and ranks second to China in the increase in electricity and natural gas demand around the globe. It still has a 74% import dependency to meet its energy requirements, while the share of renewables in Turkey's installed power amounted to only 52% at the beginning of 2021. Additionally, constructing and maintaining nuclear plants might create a new form of dependency on Russia, Japan, and France, while public concerns about nuclear safety demand urgent attention.

Common

Denominators and Minor Obstacles in Bilateral Relations

Turkey

and Pakistan may share experiences and intelligence to stem the tide of [refugees coming from Afghanistan](#). As of January 2022, approximately 3 million Afghans were living; around 1.4 million were registered refugees. Likewise, Ankara and Islamabad can collaborate on various projects to stabilise Afghanistan. This would halt not only the flow of refugees but also

fuel the productivity of Pakistan's ["Vision Central Asia"](#), which requires traversing Afghan soil.

Pakistan has recently launched for the first time its [National Security Policy](#), which hinges on economic security through regional connectivity and shared prosperity. It also states its intention to enhance space capabilities and information and cyber security. Turkey has also embarked on various initiatives to realise the same goals. Accordingly, there is ample room for joint projects in its "Asia Anew Initiative" framework launched in August 2019 to prioritise economic and trade cooperation with Asian partners.

Similarly, Turkey may be of good help to Pakistan, owing to its strategic partnerships with Central Asian states. Islamabad seeks to tap into the energy resources of its neighbours while offering them the shortest route to global sea trade. To incorporate Central Asia in the Chinese-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Pakistan may thus boost regional prosperity and stability like Turkey's [Middle Corridor](#) interlinked to the BRI. Turkey can be of help to Pakistan in terms of green energy as well since the majority of BRI projects involving Pakistan feature [coal-based activities](#). Against the backdrop of widening Western sanctions on Russia, Islamabad's hopes of energy cooperation with Moscow in the framework of a multi-billion-dollar [southern gas pipeline project](#) also seem dashed. As Pakistan also aims to increase the share of renewable energy in total power generation to [30% by 2030](#), Turkey's assistance to this country, particularly in exploiting its much neglected geothermal and hydrocarbon energy resources for heating and cooling purposes, can enhance bilateral relations.

Another

common denominator between Turkey and Pakistan is separatism and terrorism, which may complicate refugee and energy issues even further. For its part, Turkey has been fighting against the PKK insurgency for decades and ISIS very recently. At the same time, Pakistan is long threatened by [Baloch separatism, Tehreek-e Taliban Pakistan, and ISIS-Khorasan](#).

Ankara and Islamabad can support each other on international platforms to raise awareness and generate understanding for their counterinsurgency and counter-terrorism efforts while exchanging experiences to handle these threats more effectively.

Turkey

and Pakistan are also very sensitive towards the right-wing Hindutva policy in India and the Palestinian cause, especially after the Abraham Accords of 2020. However, there are divergences of opinion regarding Turkey's support of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and its recent efforts to normalise relations with Israel. The first issue brings together [Pakistan and Egypt](#), which recently have declared their intent to join forces against the MB and enhance military cooperation. Pakistan's diversification of military procurement may not bode well for Turkey's defence exports to this country, particularly at a time when Ankara finds it hard to mend fences with Cairo. Likewise, [Islamabad does not recognise Israel](#) and is particularly irritated by the Indo-Israeli strategic partnership encircling Pakistan in the northern Indian Ocean and the Arabian Gulf.

Against

all odds, Turkey and Pakistan have ample capacity and intention for manoeuvring together. Neither side would allow their respective political sensitivities to harm potentially satisfying projects desperately needed during seismic shifts in political, economic and health terms. Focusing on transboundary challenges, resource scarcities, and related insecurities would bring together Ankara and Islamabad to reconcile their differences.



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