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## **Turkish Stance in the Indian-Pakistani Conflict: Balancing Economic and Strategic Interests**

***Dr. Selçuk Çolakoğlu***

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The longstanding conflict between India and Pakistan remains one of South Asia's most volatile and complex issues, with terrorism accusations often at the forefront. India has directly blamed Pakistan for incidents like the Pahalgam terror attack in Kashmir, alleging that pro-Pakistan Kashmiri militant groups, defined as terrorist organizations by India, receive logistical support from Islamabad. Conversely, Pakistan accuses New Delhi of orchestrating terror attacks within its borders. These mutual accusations have become a recurring feature of India-Pakistan relations, but proving such claims is challenging. As a result, these allegations often serve as political tools, further complicating Indian-Pakistani bilateral relations (Clary, 2025).

For many countries, the India-Pakistan conflict is viewed through the lens of their broader South Asia policies rather than the specifics of any given crisis. Whether the issue is related to border disputes or other contentious matters, global powers tend to prioritize their strategic interests over the details of the conflict. This pragmatic approach is evident in the policies of the United States, China, Russia, Japan, European countries, and Türkiye. These nations shape their responses to South Asia's crises based on their strategic priorities, often disregarding the claims made by either India or Pakistan.

### ***Türkiye's South Asia Strategy***

Türkiye's South Asia strategy is primarily driven by economic interests, with a focus on fostering close economic ties with the region to support its economic growth. Over the past two decades, Türkiye has significantly deepened its commercial and economic relations with South Asian countries. However, Türkiye's relationship with Pakistan stands as an exception to this general approach.

From the outset, Türkiye's relations with Pakistan have been rooted in political and strategic interests rather than purely economic ones. Pakistan has been a stable and indispensable partner for Türkiye in South Asia, with Islamabad's sovereignty and stability being of utmost importance to Ankara. Consequently, Türkiye has consistently supported Pakistan diplomatically during critical crises. This unwavering support underscores the strategic depth of the Türkiye-Pakistan partnership, which Ankara is unwilling to compromise.

### ***Historical Background of Ankara's South Asian Strategy***

The Türkiye-Pakistan strategic partnership has deep historical roots that date back to the early stages of the Cold War. During this period, both Türkiye and Pakistan aligned themselves with the Western bloc, led by the United States, to counter the influence of the Soviet Union and its allies in the Eastern Bloc. As members of US-led alliances such as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), Türkiye and Pakistan found themselves on the same side of the geopolitical divide.

Türkiye, as a NATO member, and Pakistan, as a key US ally in South Asia, cooperated closely to advance Western interests during the Cold War. India, on the other hand, was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and maintained strong ties with the Soviet Union. This alignment with the Eastern Bloc led to India being viewed with suspicion by the US and its allies, including Türkiye. Within this geopolitical framework, Türkiye naturally gravitated toward Pakistan, which shared its pro-Western stance. This partnership was further strengthened by shared concerns over regional security and mutual support in international forums (Çolakoğlu, 2021).

The Türkiye-Pakistan partnership deepened in the 1960s, particularly during the Cyprus crisis. As the Cyprus issue became a major international dispute, Türkiye found itself isolated within NATO, with many Western allies reluctant to support its claims. At this critical juncture, Pakistan emerged as one of Türkiye's most steadfast supporters, endorsing Ankara's position on Cyprus.

This support was particularly significant because India, as a leader of the NAM, sided with the Republic of Cyprus and opposed Türkiye's stance. This divergence in positions further solidified Türkiye's perception of India as a rival in international diplomacy and strengthened its alignment with Pakistan.

In return for Pakistan's unwavering support on the Cyprus issue, Türkiye adopted a pro-Pakistan stance on the Kashmir conflict. Ankara supported Islamabad's claims in Kashmir, framing it as an issue of self-determination for the Muslim-majority region. This reciprocal relationship became a cornerstone of Türkiye-Pakistan ties, with both countries backing each other on key national and regional issues (Bishku, 2016).

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s brought significant changes to global geopolitics, but the Türkiye-Pakistan partnership remained intact. Despite the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new global power dynamics, Ankara and Islamabad continued to collaborate strategically.

While Türkiye maintained its close ties with Pakistan, it also began exploring economic opportunities with India, recognizing the potential of India's dynamic and growing economy. However, the development of Türkiye-India relations was slow and cautious, largely due to Ankara's longstanding strategic partnership with Islamabad.

Türkiye's cautious approach toward India was shaped by its desire to avoid jeopardizing its relationship with Pakistan. Ankara recognized that any overt alignment with New Delhi could strain its ties with Islamabad, given the deep-rooted hostility between India and Pakistan.

In the post-Cold War era, Türkiye has sought to balance its strategic partnership with Pakistan and its economic aspirations with India. While Ankara has rapidly expanded its trade and investment ties with New Delhi in recent decades, it has remained committed to supporting Pakistan on critical issues such as Kashmir.

Türkiye's strategy has been to deepen its economic engagement with India without compromising its strategic alignment with Pakistan. This balancing act reflects Ankara's broader vision of promoting stability in South Asia while safeguarding its long-term strategic interests (Çolakoğlu, 2025).

In this context, there have been serious setbacks in Turkish-Indian relations since 2019. Since India abrogated Article 370 of its constitution, which gave Jammu and Kashmir a special status, in August 2019, Ankara has been raising the Kashmir issue on various platforms. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan first brought up the issue at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) in September 2019. In response, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held meetings with the president of the Republic of Cyprus and the prime ministers of Armenia and Greece on the sidelines of the UNGA (Marjani, 2022). Due to growing defense ties between Ankara and Islamabad, New Delhi cut its defense exports to Türkiye and signed a \$40 million defense deal with Armenia. India's developing strategic and defense cooperation with Greece, the Republic of Cyprus, and Armenia is aimed at geographically countering Türkiye and responding to Ankara's vocal support of Pakistan's Kashmir policy (Deuskar, 2023).

Subsequently, New Delhi canceled Modi's planned visit to Türkiye in October 2019 and scrapped a lucrative \$2.3 billion naval deal with a Turkish defense company. India also condemned Türkiye's military operation in northern Syria in October 2019 (Banakar, 2020). When Erdoğan raised the Kashmir issue again during his address to the Pakistani parliament in February 2020, New Delhi responded by issuing a strong demarche to Türkiye's envoy in India, stating that Ankara should not interfere in India's internal matters. Erdoğan continued to raise the Kashmir issue at the UNGA in his

speeches in 2020, 2021, and 2022 (Marjani, 2022).

As a sign of normalization of relations, Modi and Erdoğan met on September 16, 2022, on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Samarkand. The two countries' foreign ministers, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, met on September 21, 2022, on the margins of the UNGA in New York, despite Erdoğan's remarks on Kashmir at the UNGA. However, this time Erdoğan refrained from condemning India for violence and adopted a tone similar to that of Saudi Arabia and Iran. In response to this softer stance on the Kashmir issue, New Delhi maintained complete silence (Basu, 2022). Modi and Erdoğan also met and discussed ways to strengthen India-Türkiye trade relations and infrastructure connections in September 2023 on the sidelines of the G20 New Delhi Summit (ANI, 2023).

### ***Türkiye's Economic Partnership with India***

While strategic considerations define Türkiye's relationship with Pakistan, its ties with India are largely economic. India, with its dynamic economy and rising global influence, has become an attractive partner for Türkiye, particularly in the 21st century. As members of the G20, Türkiye and India have found opportunities to collaborate on global issues. Over the past two decades, bilateral economic relations have experienced significant growth, making India Türkiye's second-largest trading partner in Asia after China (Çolakoğlu, 2025).

Turkish companies are increasingly drawn to India's economic opportunities, seeking to expand trade and joint investments. Since the end of the Cold War, successive Turkish governments have viewed India as a potential economic partner, a perspective validated by the steady growth of bilateral economic ties.

Despite the promising economic potential of Türkiye-India relations, they are not indispensable for either country. If bilateral trade and economic partnerships were to cease, neither Türkiye nor India would face significant economic repercussions. Furthermore, from India's perspective, Türkiye holds a secondary position in its foreign policy and strategic calculations. India's primary partners include the United States, Japan, Russia, China, and major European countries.

Recognizing this reality, Ankara understands that India is unlikely to prioritize its relationship with Türkiye in times of crisis. Conversely, Pakistan remains a strategic partner of critical importance to Türkiye. This strategic calculus ensures that Türkiye prioritizes its long-term partnership with Pakistan over its economic ties with India, particularly during periods of heightened Indian-Pakistani tensions.

### ***Ankara's Approach to the India-Pakistan Conflict***

Türkiye's pro-Pakistan stance becomes evident during the Indian-Pakistani crises (Pant, 2025). Ankara's long-term strategic interests in South Asia are centered on promoting peace and stability in the region. Military conflict between India and Pakistan, both nuclear-armed states, represents the worst-case scenario for Türkiye. Ankara's policy emphasizes the need to de-escalate tensions and resolve disputes through diplomatic channels, while safeguarding Pakistan's sovereignty and stability.

In this context, Türkiye has used its political influence to encourage Islamabad to engage in dialogue with New Delhi. This balanced approach aligns with the policies of other major powers, such as the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom, which also seek to prevent military escalation in South Asia due to its potential global repercussions (Clary, 2025).

A military conflict between India and Pakistan would have devastating consequences for both countries. For India, one of the world's largest emerging economies, such a conflict would jeopardize its economic potential and disrupt its growth trajectory. For Pakistan, prolonged tensions with India have already strained its economy, as significant resources are diverted to the defense sector at the expense of economic and social development. This fragility undermines Pakistan's long-term stability.

Recognizing these risks, Ankara, along with other global powers, can play a constructive role in fostering confidence-building measures and managing crises between Islamabad and New Delhi. On the other hand, India's recent moves to strengthen strategic partnerships with Greece, Armenia, and the Republic of Cyprus—particularly after 2019—aim to counterbalance Türkiye's pro-Pakistan stance. These developments could lead to new diplomatic tensions between Ankara and New Delhi. In response, Türkiye may seek to deepen its cooperation with China in South Asia or leverage its influence in countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal to counter India's strategic moves. However, such actions risk further complicating Türkiye-India relations.

### **Conclusion**

Türkiye's stance in the India-Pakistan conflict is shaped by a delicate balance of economic and strategic interests. While India offers significant economic opportunities, its partnership with Türkiye is not indispensable for either side. In contrast, Pakistan remains a vital strategic ally for Türkiye, with Ankara prioritizing its long-term partnership with Islamabad even at the expense of economic ties with India.

Ankara's ultimate goal is to ensure peace and stability in South Asia, recognizing that military conflict between India and Pakistan would have far-reaching consequences for the region and beyond. By leveraging its diplomatic influence and fostering dialogue, Türkiye can contribute to de-escalating tensions and promoting a more stable regional environment. However, emerging strategic rivalries and competing alliances pose challenges to Ankara's efforts, requiring careful navigation of its South Asia policy in the years to come.

*Dr. Selçuk Çolakoğlu, Founding Director of the Turkish Centre for Asia-Pacific Studies (APAC), faculty member and the coordinator of the Globalisation and Development Programme at Beijing Normal — Hong Kong Baptist University (BNBU)*

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