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**An infallible bond**

President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan addressing a joint session of parliament in Pakistan put in a nutshell the bonds between Pakistan and Turkey, by saying that the “Pak-Turkey friendship is not based on any interest but purely love and affection. It is an ever-lasting friendship which is an example for the whole world...no precedence in the world”.

He reinforced his contention with the mention of the support that the Muslims of the Subcontinent extended to Turkey during the Khilafat Movement. The Turkish president in fact echoed sentiments that are shared by the people of both nations. The two countries have infallible bonds based on common religion and shared cultural, historical and mystical experiences spanning over centuries.

The visit of the Turkish president to Pakistan in the backdrop of propaganda by certain circles that Pakistan had committed a diplomatic faux pas by not participating in the Kuala Lumpur Summit and angering Turkey, not only nullifies the false impression but also corroborates the tensile nature of relations between the two countries. A similar message emerged from the recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to Malaysia. Relations between nations are not determined on the basis of a single factor.

Erdogan’s visit, besides enhancing multi-faceted cooperation between the two countries, is also significant from the perspective of the regional situation in the backdrop of the Indian action to end the special status of Indian-occupied Kashmir, declaring it part of the Indian union and enacting a complete lockdown in the valley.

President Erdogan minced no words – just like in the UN General Assembly – while supporting the position taken by Pakistan on the issue and how a solution to it could be found. He also reiterated Turkey’s unequivocal support to Pakistan at the FATF meeting. In fact, Turkey all along has been a strong voice against the oppression of the Palestinian people as well as espousing the cause of the people of IOK for settlement of the Kashmir dispute in conformity with UN resolutions. Turkey, along with China and Malaysia, has also saved Pakistan from being pushed into the FATF blacklist so far and remains steadfast in extending similar support to us in the ongoing FATF meeting in Paris.

The two nations have always stood by each other in times of adversity and emerging challenges. Turkey extended unforgettable sympathy and support for the earthquake victims in 2005 and those devastated by the 2010 floods. Similarly, Pakistan also extended all possible help to the Turkish people affected by the 1999 earthquake, a similar misfortune recently and those affected by the avalanche.

The two countries have identical views on issues of regional and international concerns, peace and security besides extending unflinching support for matters of each other’s core interests. Since Pakistan and Turkey are both affected by terrorism, they are also cooperating to deal with this common threat. They also have ever-increasing cooperation in the defence field which surely is contributing immensely to peace in their respective regions. Both countries are ardent advocates of Muslim causes and unity among the Ummah. They have impeccable credentials as torchbearers in the fight against Islamophobia, something that enjoys international recognition. Both are striving for a just and equitable global system and de-politicization of the international entities.

Perhaps it would be pertinent to have a peep into the history of relations between the two countries for the benefit of the readers. Turkey was one of those countries which immediately extended recognition to Pakistan after independence. In April 1954, they signed a treaty of friendship and cooperation. Both joined the Central treaty Organization aimed to bolster military and strategic cooperation and countering the spread of communism and Soviet influence.

Turkey showed solidarity with Pakistan by extending political and military support to Pakistan during its wars with India. Pakistan reciprocated by expressing support for Turkey's policy on Northern Cyprus. Both nations were members of the RCD and are also engaged in economic cooperation under the ECO, a successor of the former. They are also members of the OIC.

Pakistan and Turkey have maintained long-standing military ties, with Turkey also providing training to Pakistani air force officers in upgrading its F-16 fleet. Turkey is also currently a major arms seller to Pakistan. Turkey previously purchased arms from Pakistan and continues to purchase minor aerial weapons and components from Pakistan. The Pakistan Airforce and the Turkish Airforce signed a deal to purchase 52 Super Mushak trainer turbo-props from Pakistan.

In July 2018, the Pakistan Navy signed a contract for the acquisition of four MILGEM-class (MILGEM project) ships from Turkey worth $1.5 billion. Over the last decade, nearly 1,500 Pakistani military officers have received training in Turkey. The two are already collaborating on drone production, while Turkish and Pakistani troops held joint counter-terror exercises with Uzbek forces in Uzbekistan in April 201. Both countries have come even closer militarily owing to the security situation around them as well as due to instability in ties with the US recently. In November 2019, the navies of both countries participated in drills in the Mediterranean and Arabian Sea.

Turkey launched a trilateral summit process between the two states and Afghanistan in February 2007 which saw the three countries pledging to increase coordination between their political, military and intelligence tiers in the fight against militancy and terrorism. Pursuant to this initiative, a number of moots have been held to promote the process reconciliation in Afghanistan.

Pakistan and Turkey also have strong economic ties. There are 17 Turkish firms operating in Pakistan. Turkish investments are mainly focused on energy, finance, infrastructure projects and contracting sectors. Construction is the leading sector for Turkish investors in Pakistan.

The Turkish president’s recent visit to Pakistan was in connection with the sixth session of the Pakistan-Turkish High Level Strategic Cooperation Council. The Turkish delegation comprised cabinet members, senior government officials and leading businessmen. During his visit, the two countries signed 13 memoranda of understanding which – ranging from tourism to security – also include cooperation between Pakistan state-owned PTV, Radio Pakistan and Turkey’s state broadcaster Turkish Radio and Television.

As Pakistan expects more Turkish investments, the mutual desire to boost economic cooperation has the potential to bring a new dimension to geopolitics in Asia. Pakistan and Turkey are surely poised to extend cooperation in all domains to the mutual benefit of the two nations.

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