

## Pakistan Uzbekistan Relations: An Historical Evolution

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### Abstract

*Pakistan and Uzbekistan are the sister states with many resemblances of cultural, social and religious bonding. Uzbeks always owed Pakistanis as the brotherly figures with much importance to the religious connection. Pakistan has very long history of connection with Central Asian States and throughout the ages it has become a way of foreigner's roadway to trade and business. This paper will attempt to explore the historical analysis of ties in between Pakistan and Uzbekistan and it will also shed light on Pakistan role in the developing ties. Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoy friendly relations with Uzbekistan. The diplomatic relations between the two countries were established on 10<sup>th</sup> May 1992. The two countries share historic, religious, and cultural bonds. Pakistan and Uzbekistan share many international and regional platforms where both the states support each other and now they are cooperating many fields including academia and educational industry.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Silk Road, Central Asia, Diplomacy

### Introduction

Uzbekistan is the geographic and population center of the Central Asia. Pakistan and Uzbekistan enjoy friendly relations with Uzbekistan. The two countries share historic, religious, and cultural bonds. The two countries have established:

- Bilateral Political Consultation
- Joint Ministerial Commission
- Joint Security Commission<sup>i</sup>

Uzbekistan is the largest consumer market and second biggest economy in Central Asia. Uzbekistan is the first Central Asian country Pakistan has signed bilateral Transit Trade Agreement (UPTTA) and bilateral Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) on 17 items. Bilateral trade with Pakistan (Jan-Dec 2021) amounted to US\$126.05 million, with US\$88.18 million exports to Pakistan and US\$ 37.87 million imports from Pakistan.<sup>ii</sup>

The diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, while relatively young compared to other international alliances, has its roots in historical, cultural, and geopolitical connections.<sup>iii</sup> This relationship took on a formal structure following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, when Uzbekistan gained independence.<sup>iv</sup> Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize Uzbekistan as an independent state, and this set the foundation for the development of diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties between the two nations. Uzbekistan's historical role as a key player in Central Asia, particularly its cultural and political significance during the times of the Silk Road, has been a point of convergence between the two nations. Both countries share a common Islamic heritage and a history of cultural exchange dating back to ancient times. These shared historical bonds have played an important role in shaping the diplomatic engagements between Pakistan and Uzbekistan.<sup>v</sup>

It has to be understood that the relationship between Uzbekistan and Pakistan has historically tended to be influenced by the complex power dynamics of the region. Uzbekistan, situated in Central Asia, plays a pivotal role in regional stability and security.<sup>vi</sup> In contrast, Pakistan, located in South Asia, has its own geopolitical significance. Enhancing business-to-business transport links is a crucial element of fostering connectivity between Uzbekistan and Pakistan. The development of efficient transport corridors, including road and rail links, can significantly reduce the time and cost of movement of people and goods between the two countries. Establishing direct transportation routes can serve as a catalyst for greater trade and economic ties. It must also be stressed that education plays a vital role in building bridges between nations and fostering enduring relationships. Within the context of Uzbekistan and Pakistan, education serves as a cornerstone for deeper connections. Cultural exchange programs and scholarships can encourage students from both countries to study in each other's academic institutions, thereby promoting understanding and cross-cultural ties.

### Early Diplomatic Engagements

The early years of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Uzbekistan were marked by a series of high-level visits and meetings aimed at establishing a framework for cooperation. In 1992, both countries signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation,<sup>vii</sup> which served as the bedrock for future engagements in areas such as trade, security, and cultural exchange. These early diplomatic

engagements were driven by mutual political interests, particularly in fostering stability and cooperation in the Central Asian region following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.<sup>viii</sup>

Pakistan and Uzbekistan's relationship has been shaped by several key historical moments, particularly in the realm of regional politics. For instance, the post-9/11 geopolitical landscape and the subsequent U.S.-led war in Afghanistan placed both Pakistan and Uzbekistan in pivotal roles due to their strategic locations.<sup>ix</sup> Uzbekistan's proximity to Afghanistan, combined with Pakistan's critical role in regional counter-terrorism efforts, created opportunities for both countries to collaborate on security and political matters. In this period, both nations worked closely to address common threats, such as extremism and terrorism, while seeking to promote regional stability.<sup>x</sup>

### **Mutual Political Interests**

Both Pakistan and Uzbekistan have pursued mutual political interests that align with their respective national security and foreign policy objectives. Pakistan has viewed Uzbekistan as a key player in its broader strategy to strengthen ties with Central Asia, particularly through the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and other regional forums.<sup>xi</sup>

Uzbekistan, for its part, has seen Pakistan as an important ally in fostering connectivity with South Asia and accessing broader global markets. One area of mutual political interest has been the promotion of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Both countries share concerns about the potential spillover effects of instability in Afghanistan, particularly the threat of terrorism and drug trafficking. This shared interest has led to cooperative efforts, including diplomatic consultations and multilateral forums aimed at supporting peace efforts in Afghanistan. Pakistan's role as a mediator in regional conflicts, particularly in the context of Afghanistan, has been recognized by Uzbekistan, which has sought to engage in these efforts to ensure regional stability.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Collaborative Initiatives in the Region**

Beyond Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have also pursued collaborative initiatives in various regional forums. One such initiative is their involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a multilateral organization focused on security, economic, and cultural cooperation.<sup>xiii</sup> Uzbekistan's membership in the SCO and Pakistan's subsequent inclusion as a full member have provided a platform for both countries to work together on a range of issues, from counter-terrorism to economic development.

In addition to security cooperation, Pakistan and Uzbekistan have engaged in joint initiatives aimed at enhancing trade and economic connectivity.<sup>xiv</sup> Both countries have expressed interest in

expanding regional trade routes, particularly through infrastructure projects that can facilitate the movement of goods between Central and South Asia. Pakistan's role as a gateway to the Arabian Sea and Uzbekistan's central location in Central Asia make such projects strategically important for both nations.<sup>xv</sup> Initiatives like the development of rail and road connectivity between the two countries are seen as critical to unlocking the economic potential of the region.<sup>xvi</sup>

### **Academic and Historic-graphical Contributions**

The academic study of Pak-Uzbek relations has been somewhat limited, particularly when compared to the vast body of literature on Pakistan's relations with other key players in the region, such as India and China. Nevertheless, there have been significant contributions to the historiography of Pak-Uzbek relations, particularly in the context of regional politics, trade, and security. Several scholars have examined Pak-Uzbek relations from a geopolitical and economic perspective. Much of the existing academic literature focuses on the strategic importance of Central Asia in Pakistan's foreign policy and the role of Uzbekistan in shaping regional security dynamics.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent emergence of the Central Asian republics, including Uzbekistan, created new opportunities for Pakistan to engage with these newly independent states. This period of transition has been a focal point for many historians and political scientists studying the evolution of Pak-Uzbek relations.<sup>xvii</sup> A significant portion of the academic work on Pak-Uzbek relations has explored the role of multilateral organizations, such as the SCO and ECO, in fostering cooperation between the two countries. These studies often emphasize the importance of regional connectivity and economic integration as key drivers of diplomatic engagement. Scholars have highlighted the potential for trade and infrastructure development to strengthen ties between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, particularly through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and its potential extension into Central Asia.<sup>xviii</sup>

Another area of academic focus has been the security dimension of Pak-Uzbek relations, particularly in the context of counter-terrorism efforts and regional stability. Uzbekistan's role as a frontline state in the fight against extremism, coupled with Pakistan's own experiences with terrorism, has created opportunities for collaboration in this field. Several academic works have examined the bilateral and multilateral mechanisms through which both countries have sought to address shared security challenges.

### **Fostering Business and Trade between both the states**

In the pursuit of fostering a new foundation for the younger generation and establishing a contemporary platform for regional re-connectivity, Uzbekistan and Pakistan have taken

noteworthy initiatives. Over the past two years, the two nations have embarked on a journey toward a strategic partnership characterized by growing political confidence, reflecting their deep-seated desire and unwavering commitment to 15 fortify their bilateral bonds.

This strategic partnership is marked by multifaceted collaboration, spanning diverse sectors such as trade, S&T, education, and culture. Both Uzbekistan and Pakistan have been actively exploring the potential for joint projects, an effort that not only bolsters economic growth but also enhances their industrial and technological cooperation.<sup>xix</sup> A significant highlight in this collaborative endeavor has been the remarkable surge in bilateral trade. The trade volume between the two nations has soared, transitioning from a modest USD 15-20 million over the previous five to six years to more than USD 250 million in 2023.<sup>xx</sup> This promising growth in bilateral trade not only underscores the burgeoning economic cooperation between Uzbekistan and Pakistan but also serves as a testament to the vast potential for further expansion.

### **Further Horizons of Research and Connectivity**

Despite the existing body of academic work on Pak-Uzbek relations, there are notable gaps in the historiography that present opportunities for further research. One such gap is the limited exploration of the cultural and historical ties between the two nations. While there is a strong historical connection between the peoples of Pakistan and Uzbekistan, particularly through the shared Islamic heritage and the legacy of the Silk Road<sup>xxi</sup>, this aspect of the relationship has received relatively little attention in academic studies. A deeper exploration of cultural diplomacy, religious exchanges, and the impact of shared historical experiences could provide a more nuanced understanding of the Pak-Uzbek relationship. Another gap in the historiography is the lack of comprehensive studies on the economic potential of Pak-Uzbek relations. While there have been some analyses of trade and investment opportunities, particularly in the context of regional infrastructure projects, there is room for further exploration of the economic ties between the two countries. Future research could examine the specific sectors in which both nations can collaborate, such as energy, agriculture, and technology.

Additionally, there is a need for more detailed studies on the challenges and obstacles to enhancing economic cooperation, such as logistical issues, trade barriers, and political constraints. The historiography of Pak-Uzbek relations also lacks a thorough examination of the role of civil society and people-to-people exchanges in shaping diplomatic ties. While much of the academic focus has been on state-to-state relations, the role of cultural exchanges, academic collaborations, and diaspora communities in fostering closer ties between the two nations has been underexplored. Future research could investigate the impact of educational partnerships, tourism, and cultural events in strengthening bilateral relations.

In light of these historiographical gaps, there are several key areas where future research on Pak-Uzbek relations could be particularly fruitful. One promising avenue is the exploration of the historical and cultural dimensions of the relationship, particularly through the lens of Islamic history and the shared legacy of the Silk Road. By examining the cultural and religious connections between Pakistan and Uzbekistan, scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how historical ties have influenced contemporary diplomatic and economic engagements. Another important area for future research is the economic dimension of Pak-Uzbek relations.

As both countries seek to enhance regional connectivity and trade, there is a need for detailed studies on the specific economic sectors that hold the most potential for collaboration. Research on the role of infrastructure projects, such as rail and road links, in facilitating economic integration could provide valuable insights into the future trajectory of the bilateral relationship. Finally, future research could also explore the role of multilateral organizations, such as the SCO and ECO, in shaping Pak-Uzbek relations. By analyzing the ways in which these organizations facilitate cooperation on issues such as security, trade, and cultural exchange, scholars can gain a better understanding of how regional dynamics impact bilateral ties.

## Conclusion

The bond between Pakistan and Uzbekistan has much diversified track of historical connection and now the governments of both the states are taking the heights of relationship to new levels of cooperation and support. During the government of Imran Khan, the primer of Uzbekistan visited Pakistan and he applauded the role of Pakistan especially in connection of Central Asian States. The educational institutions especially University of the Punjab, Lahore and Quaid I Azam University, Islamabad signed MoUs with various educational institutions of Uzbekistan and Uzbek embassy encouraged the visits of academics and educational professionals. On the other hand, both the governments supported and encouraged the businessmen and entrepreneurs to establish business links and trade cooperation. Both the government vowed to support the business, educational and cultural ties for better cooperation.

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